

STEP 7: PLAN THE AGENDA

A well-organized agenda is essential for conducting an effective forum or hearing. The agenda establishes the structure for discussion and impacts decisions about appropriate techniques for encouraging participation and achieving results. It may be useful to organize a focus group to brainstorm issues before finalizing the agenda. This may help the forum organizers develop ideas on how to approach certain issues and assist them in developing a list of names of experts to contact about participating in the forum.

Answering the following questions will help you devise an effective agenda:

- **Purpose:** What is the purpose of the forum or hearing?
- **Introduction:** What background information do participants need about the purpose of the forum? How will the forum proceed? What are the forum's specific goals, tasks and intended outcomes?
- **Topics for discussion:** What are the important topics for this forum? What new information needs to be presented or solicited? What previously discussed information needs to be reviewed? How much time should be devoted to each topic?
- **Forum roles:** Who is the best person to present information on each topic? Who will be the forum's chairperson, discussion leaders and recorders?
- **Facilitating the discussions:** How should the discussion be structured? What participation techniques might be appropriate? What specific questions can be asked to stimulate and guide the discussion?
- **Summary:** What information or decision should be highlighted in the summary?
- **Follow-up:** What follow-up activities will likely result from the forum? Who should be responsible for each activity? What is a reasonable schedule for accomplishing each follow-up activity?
- **Closing the Forum:** Who should deliver the closing remarks? (Usually the chair). How can every participant's contribution be acknowledged?

Sample agendas:

| <u>AGENDA</u> | |
|----------------------|---|
| 5:00pm | Chairperson's opening remarks |
| 5:05pm | Mr. Abid Khan speaks (He/she is a speaker from the panel) |
| 5:20pm | Questions on content of Mr. Khan's address |
| 5:25pm | Mr. Murad Ali speaks |
| 5:40pm | Questions on content of Mr. Murad Ali's address |
| 5:45pm | <i>Next Speaker (and so on through the speakers)</i> |
| 6:30pm | Panel and audience general discussion |
| 7:20pm | Chairperson's closing remarks should include a summary of the discussion. |
| 7:30pm | Close of Meeting |

| <u>AGENDA</u> | |
|----------------------|--|
| 5:00pm | Chairperson's opening remarks |
| 5:10pm | First Panelist |
| 5:25pm | Second Panelist |
| 5:40pm | Third Panelist |
| 5:55pm | Fourth Panelist |
| 6:10pm | Fifth Panelist |
| 6:25pm | Panel and audience – general discussion |
| 7:20pm | Chairperson's closing remarks should include a summary of the discussion |
| 7.30pm | Close of meeting |

STEP 8: CONDUCT THE FORUM

Tips for Conducting a Successful Public Forum or Hearing

Rehearsal

It is always a good idea for the chairperson, moderator and all presenters to review the forum plan and rehearse their presentations. Doing so ensures that everyone understands the agenda and will be working together. A rehearsal also helps the presenters relax and provides the logistics coordinator an opportunity to address presenters' needs.



Welcoming Attendees

The chairperson and other guest speakers should create a friendly environment for the forum by acting as gracious hosts, greeting people with a smile and a handshake as they arrive.

The Media

Introduce the chair to the media before the forum begins. A time can be arranged for interviews or statements after the event. However, such contacts should not be allowed to delay or disrupt the event. If necessary, the chairperson should quietly excuse him or herself at some point after the forum has already started, as long as there is a moderator who can lead the discussion in the chairperson's absence.

Begin on Time!

The beginning of the forum will establish the tone for the entire event. A punctual start demonstrates respect for the citizens who have taken the time to attend the forum. Do not delay the opening of the forum.



Introductions

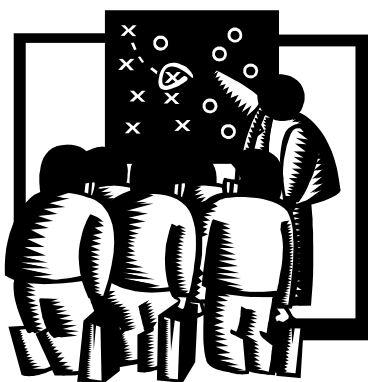
In addition to greeting the audience, the chairperson should introduce members of the panels and other important public officials who are present at the event. He or she should then explain the purpose of the forum, review the agenda, and describe the ground rules for conducting the forum. It is helpful to have someone distribute copies of the agenda to people as they enter the hall. The chairperson can also convey important information to the audience, such as where the microphones are located, where and how people should register to speak, where information packets or refreshments are located. He or she should conclude his or her remarks by thanking everybody for attending. It is important that the chairperson does not take up too much time with his or her remarks as people have come to hear the panelists and to participate in the forum.

Stick to the Agenda

Keep the agenda moving, making sure the discussion stays focused and that the forum ends on time. Before closing the forum, the chairperson should announce follow-up activities and how results of the forum will be incorporated into the government's decisions on the issue in question. The chairperson should conclude his or her short closing remarks by thanking every one again for attending the forum.

Participation Techniques

There are many ways to facilitate an open and participatory discussion. Three of these include:



Brainstorming: this is a good technique for collecting and creating new ideas. It is essential that all participants in the process are encouraged to take part and that no idea is unfairly criticized.

- Encourage all participants to provide ideas.
- Record all ideas without evaluation.
- Conduct a discussion of all the ideas.
- Rank items by priority.
- Record the results of the forum.

Consensus Building: citizens in a given community often have different ideas about what the community's priorities are and how things should be done. Finding common ground among these different interests and ideas is one of the most important tasks of local government. It is the first step toward making decisions that everyone can support.

All participants should commit to voicing their disagreements honestly and openly at the forum. All participants must permit other people in attendance to have their say. If appropriate, all participants should agree to continue discussing the subject until a consensus is reached, which is accomplished by working toward a proposal that makes at least some accommodation to all the points of view represented at the forum.

Multimedia: If possible and appropriate, show a brief film or slides to demonstrate and highlight the issue. This should not exceed 5-7 minutes.

The Role of the Chairperson

The chairperson plays a critical role in ensuring that the forum proceeds according to the agenda and that individuals can participate without prejudice. The following tips offer some strategies to assist the chairperson:



- **Print the Agenda**

It is useful to hand out printed agendas to people as they enter the hall, or to be placed on their seats. The printing of this agenda is the responsibility of the chairperson who can then delegate the task as he or she sees fit.

This will...

- **Ensure the audience knows when they will get a chance to speak.** Explaining the agenda to the audience when introducing the forum will ensure that they know exactly when they will have a chance to ask their questions.
- **Allow time for both questions and comments.** The contributions from the audience are just as important as the contributions from the platform. It is important to structure the forum so that audience members will have an opportunity to ask questions *and* make comments.

By reviewing the agenda at the outset, everyone will know when there will be time for **questions**. When everybody on the platform has spoken, the forum will be **opened up to comments and discussion** from the audience. Alternatively, it may be decided that written questions should be submitted (especially if it is a large forum) while allowing some time for questions from the floor.

An alternative would be to allow the panel to present their view points and request that the participants write down their specific questions; after the presentations,

DEALING WITH HECKLERS

There might be attempts from members of the audience to disrupt the forum or destabilize the proceedings. These disruptions could come from individuals or part of a coordinated group. Experienced speakers are used to dealing with hecklers - they ignore them, or have an armory of rejoinders to undermine the interruption and win over the audience. If the speaker is interrupted or loses his or her flow, the chairperson might have to intervene and request that the heckler be quiet. The audience usually sides with the chairperson in such situations.

If the heckler continues, security in charge of the forum should step in and request that the heckler be quiet and sit down. It is important that the organizers retain control of the microphone and do not hand it over to speakers in the audience. If a group of opponents is determined to disrupt a forum and coordinate their tactics, they will usually succeed. All that can be done is for the chairperson to make it clear to the audience who is to blame for the disruption, and close the meeting.

citizens can have time to ask the questions they have written down. At the end, the panel can be given an opportunity to respond with brief statements before concluding or adopting a resolution.

If the forum is not rigorously chaired in this manner, it risks descending into chaos, with speakers sidelined or not heard at all, the audience clamoring for a say, and everyone growing frustrated and angry.

Introduce the Speakers Properly. For the chairperson to properly introduce the panelists, each should prepare a short biographical account of themselves.



Keep the Panelists Exactly to Their Allotted Time. Some panelists have the tendency to speak without regard to their allotted time. 15-20 minutes is usually quite adequate for most people, and some speakers may only wish to speak for 10 minutes or less. The main speaker may need up to 30 minutes, but none should exceed 45 minutes. If a speaker has not finished in the allotted time, he or she can be reminded that the question and answer period can be used to elaborate further. It may be useful to ring a bell to warn the speaker that they must finish their speech.

Repeat the Question for the Benefit of the Audience. If an audience member asks a question, repeat the question to ensure that everyone has heard the inquiry. This is necessary because often the people at the front of the hall are the only ones who can hear the initial question. If the chairperson does not do this, the speaker should repeat the question before answering it.

The chairperson should also **draw the attention of the audience to the literature and merchandise available**, and encourage them to take action by **signing a petition, leaving their names and contact details on a special list**, or attending the next event.

STEP 9: FOLLOW-UP IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FORUM



Sign a Petition

Ensure that the petition is placed in a prominent location where attendees can easily locate and sign the petition; also make sure that there are ample pens and petition papers for people to sign.

Collect Names, Addresses, Telephone Numbers and Emails of Participants. This is vital in ensuring that such events can be replicated and facilitates further follow-up.

Promote Literature and Merchandise

An enthused audience will be eager for more information. Therefore, have handouts which summarize the content of the forum and provide contact information for further inquiries. It is advisable to prepare a one page summary on the issue with factual details, problems and possible solutions. Situate the literature and merchandise tables near the exit so that everyone passes them on their way out.

Network

It is important to **book the hall for at least an hour after the official close of the forum.** People who have made the effort to attend are likely to be more highly politically motivated than most. Have plenty of business cards to give out.



Finally...

Follow-up with the Contacts

Capitalize on the enthusiasm from the forum and contact those who appeared most interested in participating in further activity beyond the event.

STEP 10: DEBRIEF ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The management team and any government officials who participated in the forum or whose work may be affected by it should assemble within a week after the event to review the forum and evaluate its results.

Some typical review questions include:

- Did the forum accomplish its goals?
- What did the government officials learn that will help them manage a program or resolve an issue?
- Are additional forums necessary?
- What can local officials learn from this forum to improve future forums?

Produce a summary report of the forum and distribute copies to all relevant decision makers, the management team, all news media and as many of the forum's participants as possible. The report should identify the time, place and sponsor of the forum. It should also provide a summary of the forum's agenda. Furthermore, the report should mention:

- Who attended and participated
- What ideas were discussed
- What decisions were made
- What follow-up activities are planned
- When and where any future events or meetings on this topic will be held

REPORT WRITING

Headings that may be useful:

- Introduction
- Summary of Forum (including summary of panelists speeches)
- Citizen's questions and answers
- Resolution passed (if any)
- Outcomes
- Media coverage
- Conclusion

The forum can be understood as the first steps of citizen participation. The crucial next steps are the **follow-up activities** planned after the event. All efforts should be made to ensure that the promises that were made at the forum, such as providing the public with further information on an issue, are kept. Doing so demonstrates to citizens that organization officials listened to what they had to say and took their suggestions seriously. Such impressions encourage continued participation and increase public confidence in the institution of local government.

If you can identify prominent supporters who did not come to the forum, **send them a summary** of what happened, and make sure they are invited to the next event.

| Checklist for Organizing a Public Forum | |
|--|---|
| Before the Forum | Have you booked the forum venue and obtained the key to get in? |
| | Is the room prepared with seats, tables, a backdrop and catering? |
| | Has publicity been sent to all interested parties? |
| | Do the speakers know where to go, what they are expected to say, how long they are expected to speak, and what time they will be able to leave? |
| | Do the speakers need transportation to and from the forum, or expenses for a hotel? |
| | Have the speakers been offered food and drink? |
| | Do the microphones work? |
| | Is there a sign-in desk? |
| | Is there a need to hire a photographer? |
| | Is the banner properly displayed? |
| During the Forum | Make sure the chairperson is firm but fair. |
| | Begin and finish on time. |
| | Ensure that the chairperson establishes the purpose of the forum and introduces the speakers. |
| | Make announcements about future activities. |
| | Take questions but avoid speeches from the audience. |
| | Deal firmly with hecklers. |
| After the Forum | Thank your guest speakers and volunteers in writing. |
| | Write to attendees and non-attendees. |
| | Phone target journalists and tell them about the forum. |
| | Ensure that all speakers' expenses have been covered and that the cost of hiring the hall and the catering have been settled. |
| | Follow up on what action needs to be taken as a result of the forum. |
| | Arrange for a small group of supporters to evaluate the success of the forum and plan for the next one. |