

get it right on... **Planning Public Meetings**

Public meetings can make a big difference to your campaign. They can help to get more people involved and they provide feedback from the community.

1. Organising a meeting

Make sure you have a clear purpose for your meeting. Tell people what it is about and what you hope to achieve from it. Have a clear agenda set out and tell people how long the meeting will take.

Try to find someone well-known who is willing to speak at your meeting, to help encourage other people to come along and may even get the press interested. Once you have decided on a date and place for your meeting, advertise it in the community, for example on noticeboards, in the local press and in shop windows. Your aim is to get maximum attendance, so you can really get a proper feel as to what the community at large thinks.

2. Choosing a venue

The place where you hold your meeting is very important. The venue must be easy to reach, with adequate parking. Local community halls should let you use one of their rooms, and your local council may have a list of rooms for hire.

The room should be a comfortable size but not too big, as an oversized room can suck the energy out of a meeting. Make sure that the room has good acoustics too. Try not to use a theatre-style room with fixed seating. Chairs that can be easily moved around will create a more informal atmosphere and encourage people to participate.

3. Chairing the meeting

Someone from your campaign will have to chair the meeting. This means they will be in charge of making sure that everything runs smoothly. Their responsibilities include:

- Opening the meeting

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- Keeping the meeting focused on the agenda
- Making sure that everyone who wants to speak gets a chance, and that no-one speaks for too long
- Stopping personal attacks
- Drawing the meeting to a close at the appropriate time

The role of chairman or chairwoman can be rotated between all members, or between just a few. You could choose the chairperson for the next meeting at the end each event either by lottery, by a vote or by an individual's desire to do the job. Or perhaps you could draw up a schedule and assign the chair by rotation. This will stop the responsibility falling onto the shoulders of just one person.

4. Keeping a record

You will also need someone to act as secretary. Their main role is to keep an accurate record of what happens at the meeting. Most importantly, they should take down any decisions or resolutions that are made and, if there are further actions necessary, who is responsible for them.

5. Meeting format

The chairman or chairwoman and the campaign's officers should introduce themselves and set out the agenda and how the meeting will be run. Then make any announcements or campaign reports before moving on to the main topics for discussion.

If there are latecomers, make them feel welcome and stop to update them. Have everyone introduce themselves and ask how everyone is feeling before the meeting officially starts. This will encourage people to start talking and not to feel embarrassed about speaking up later on.

For each agenda item you need to make clear:

- What is being discussed
- How the discussion should proceed, for example by brainstorming, questions and answers, or a presentation

- Whether a decision is needed or just a discussion. If a decision is necessary, define what kind of decision will be made, for example by consensus or voting

If the meeting makes a resolution to do something, you must be completely clear about what action needs to be taken, who is responsible, and the date by which they have to accomplish the action.

6. Concluding the meeting

When the meeting time is up, summarise the main points of the discussion and make sure everyone agrees on what has happened. If you already have another meeting planned, let everyone know about it and ask for contributions for the agenda.

End the meeting on a positive thought or fact that will help encourage people to get involved before the next meeting takes place.

If there is time after the meeting, try to talk to some of the people who have attended. If you make them feel wanted, they're more likely to come back.

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