

Tips for Speaking at a Town or Public Meeting

Another method for sharing your expertise and communicating your interests and concerns with your policy-makers is to take part in a public meeting. Such events generally take place in your community or district and provide an opportunity for policy-makers to hear from constituents on a wide range of concerns.

An event like this is a real grassroots effort. It is an occasion where all of the parties participating are local. Citizens who understand the needs of the community, and the ramifications of policy decisions on the health and well-being of your community.

Participating in public meetings, or town meetings, as they are sometimes known, assists and supports your individual or organizational advocacy efforts by:

- Better informing and educating your policy-maker and members of your community;
- Attracting additional attention to an issue and your position;
- Gaining press coverage of the issue; and
- Positioning yourself or your organization as experts and advocates on the issue.

Keep the following helpful hints in mind to make the most of speaking at a public meeting:

- **Determine the purpose and tone of the event.** Contact your policy-maker's district office to determine who else is expected to participate or make a presentation. Gaining a better sense of what the overall agenda of the public meeting is to be focused on, and anticipating the general "tone" of the meeting will help you to prepare your remarks and your delivery style.
- **Be prepared with accurate, timely, and relevant information.** Be as strategic as possible. Work to present your position or statement as early in the meeting as you are able, as the press is more likely to attend and cover the first part of the event.
- **Use your network.** Share information about the meeting with other advocates and partner organizations. Try to get as many other public health advocates to attend the town meeting as possible. This will lend support to your efforts and demonstrate to your policy-maker the extent of community support for a particular initiative.
- **Keep your presentation brief.** Limiting your statement to a small number of clear, concise points and providing persuasive facts allows those attending the public meeting to understand and remember your points.
- **Practice makes perfect.** Practicing your position and statement on colleagues and other public health advocates will ensure that you are comfortable and convincing when sharing your concerns with a larger audience.
- **Provide paper.** Leave written copies of your position or statement with the policy-maker, his/her staff, press, and the public attending the meeting.

