

## Conducting Town Meeting Checklist

- Arrange facility. The facility where the meeting is held should be large enough to accommodate all attendees comfortably, yet small enough to maintain a sense of unity. It also should be a place that is neutral, conveniently located, and non-intimidating. Avoid government buildings. Instead, choose a school, place of worship, or community center. If your community has suffered widespread damage that affects a number of different neighborhoods, consider holding several small-group meetings; one in each neighborhood.  
  
Once you have determined the location of the meeting, determine how best to set up the room. For large groups, you might have no choice but to use an auditorium-style arrangement. For small groups, consider a circular or U-shaped arrangement. Work with the manager of the facility to determine what arrangements are feasible and who is responsible for setting up the room. Also, ask if any equipment you might need (e.g., overhead projector, easels and pads, etc.) is available to you.
- Publicize meeting. Use radio and television, newspapers, and posted notices to announce the date, time, location, and purpose of the meeting. Post notices in houses of worship, schools, community and shopping centers, and other places where people tend to gather. If possible, use direct mailings. For communities where foreign languages might be spoken, be sure to use both English and the community's language in announcements and notices. If necessary, provide a translator at the meeting itself.
- Identify facilitator. The facilitator conducts the meeting. He or she might also be a speaker. In any case, the facilitator:
  - Ensures the meeting room is properly set up, and all equipment and materials are available
  - Ensures the meeting begins on time and adheres to the agenda
  - Introduces speakers
  - Maintains order
  - Facilitates question-and-answer sessions and open discussions
- Identify speakers. Choose speakers who are credible messengers of a given topic. For example, for the first town meeting, ask your SHMO to explain hazard mitigation, property acquisition, and other fundamentals. When identifying both facilitators and speakers, include individuals who appeal to the audience, such as neighborhood, property association, and religious leaders.
- Establish protocol. Protocol simply means the rules of conduct that govern the meeting. Establish expectations for people's behavior and discuss those expectations near the beginning of the meeting. Examples include—
  - Everyone should demonstrate tolerance for differing opinions.

## Tool I-5, Conducting Town Meeting

- Everyone should allow speakers to speak without interruption.
  - Everyone who wants to will be given an opportunity to speak.
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- Develop agenda and presentation notes. Develop a meeting agenda and make enough photocopies for all speakers and potential attendees. As you develop your agenda, estimate how much time should be allowed for each agenda item so you can estimate the length of the entire meeting. For meetings over 90 minutes, schedule a short break (10 to 15 minutes) between two agenda items about halfway through the meeting. Using the agenda, develop presentation notes with “talking points” that the facilitator and speakers can use to ensure they cover all necessary topics. Make enough photocopies for the facilitator and all speakers.
  - Prepare briefing materials. Develop handouts, transparencies, and other presentation aids. The Toolkit contains such materials, as appropriate, for each town meeting mentioned in this handbook that you may use as is, or customize. Whenever you distribute questionnaires or other handouts that you want the attendees to return to you, be sure to distribute self-addressed, stamped envelopes as well. You will have a better chance of receiving them back in a timely manner.
  - Gather equipment and supplies. The facility might have equipment and supplies, such as an overhead projector, easels and pads, etc. that you might need. If not, you will need to take equipment and supplies to the facility, and set them up before the meeting begins.
  - Prepare to record minutes. Designate a team member to record proceedings, identify concerns and issues, document action items, and then compile minutes of the meeting. For large meetings or meetings with breakout sessions, you might need two or more recorders. Use easels and pads to capture property owners’ concerns during open discussions so they are visible to all. Maintain a copy of the minutes in the project files. The minutes help prove that you are meeting the public notice requirements.
  - Invite your local congressional representative. Write and mail or fax a letter on official community letterhead to your congressman or congresswoman formally inviting him or her to attend your meeting. Your representative is interested in what happens in his or her district and might prove to be a valuable ally. A sample letter of invitation follows on the next page.
  - Invite state officials. Consult with your SHMO, and follow his or her directions for inviting state officials. Also, ask about inviting FEMA representatives.

## Tool I-5, Conducting Town Meeting

[Print on community's official letterhead]

[Insert date]

The Honorable [Insert name]  
Representative in Congress  
[Insert first line of local address]  
[Insert second line of local address]

Dear Representative [Insert last name]:

As you know, on [Insert date], the President declared [Insert State's name] a federal disaster area due to damage caused by [Insert disaster event; e.g., the recent flooding of the Ohio River]. Our community is now eligible to apply for federal funds under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).

On [Insert date] at [Insert time], we are holding a town meeting at [Insert specific location to include name of building, street address, room number, etc.]. The purpose of this town meeting is to explain some of the basic concepts of the HMGP and property acquisition, one of the mitigation alternatives funded by the program. We also hope to determine if the property owners within our community are interested in participating in a property acquisition project. If they are and we receive a grant under the HMGP, we will use FEMA funds to purchase properties that have been substantially damaged or suffered repetitive loss.

We request the honor of your presence at this meeting. We are confident that your presence will be a source of comfort to our citizens during this stressful and disrupting time. We also invite you to say a few words at the beginning of the meeting. Please inform my office whether or not you will attend our meeting and any special requirements that you might have.

If you require any additional information or if I can be of any assistance, please call me at [Insert telephone number]. Thank you.

Respectfully,

[Insert Official's Name]  
[Insert Official's Title]

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