

What to Expect at a Town Hall

What are town hall meetings?

Sometimes, politicians or other government workers will hold town hall meetings. Town halls are public meetings that are open to everyone. People are invited to ask questions, and say what they think about specific problems or policies. Going to a town hall is a great way to let the government know in-person about the problems that matter to you. If you have questions that you want to ask your elected officials or people who work in government, a town hall is a good chance to get answers.

Who holds town hall meetings?

There are many different members of government who might hold town hall meetings:

- ▶ Your elected officials (on a national, state, and local level)
- ▶ People who want to get elected to the government
- ▶ Government agencies who want feedback about a specific policy

Sometimes, you will get to speak directly to a member of government at the town hall meeting. Other times, you will speak to one of their staff. The staff will report back to your member of government about what was discussed at the town hall meeting.

How can I find out when town halls are happening?

Elected officials and government agencies will list upcoming town hall meetings on their websites. You can check their websites to find out when the meeting will happen.

If you want to go to meetings about disability issues, your state Developmental Disability Council and Protection & Advocacy Agency might list upcoming meetings. You can also get information from local advocacy groups. You can join their mailings lists, or follow them on social media. They may post about upcoming town hall meetings.

Another great place to look is <http://townhallproject.com/>. This website posts upcoming town hall meetings for elected officials across the United States. You can sign up for their mailing list at <https://actionnetwork.org/forms/stay-up-to-date-on-our-work>. They will send you updates about elected officials where you live.

What happens at a town hall meeting?

There are usually 2 types of town hall meetings:

- ▶ General meetings, where people can ask an elected official or government agency about anything.
- ▶ Specific meetings, that focus on one issue.

Be sure to check beforehand so you know what kind of meeting it is.

A lot of people usually come to these meetings. They can be loud and crowded. They are usually in a big room.

If you want to say something to your member of the government at the meeting, you might need to sign up on a sheet before or during the meeting. Or, you might need to line up in front of a microphone. There will probably be a sign or staff person to tell you what to do. Or, you can try to copy what the people around you are doing.

You will probably only get a couple of minutes to share your story and ask questions. Be sure to plan ahead about the most important things you want to say.

Having an elevator speech prepared for the town hall can help. An elevator speech is a short speech that you memorize in case you get a moment with a member of government (like riding the elevator with them). Elevator speeches help you remember your most important points.

Here is what you should include in an elevator speech:

- ▶ Your first and last name
- ▶ Where you live
- ▶ Your school, workplace, or some other part of the community you belong to
- ▶ Bring up the problem you care about. Talk about how the problem affects you or others you care about.
- ▶ Tell your member of government WHY you and others need the problem to get fixed.
- ▶ Ask a question about what your elected official will do to fix the problem.
- ▶ Thank your member of government for listening to you

Try to keep your speech under 1 minute long, and be sure to practice beforehand.

You can bring a written document with more information about the problems you care about. You can give the document to your member of government or their staff so they can read it and learn more later. That way, you can give a short speech but still cover all the important information.