



ORGANIZING A TOWN HALL MEETING

Planning the Town Hall Meeting

Planning committee members play an important role in ensuring that the meeting runs smoothly. They will need to decide where and when the meeting is held, who will present, how many panel members will be invited, what the key points will be, and what type of media coverage will be most effective. (Sample [panelist invitation letter](#).)

Before the Town Hall Meeting

Be sure to stay on top of the various tasks well before the event. As you plan the event, consider the items in the checklist below. Each of these steps will help you keep the focus of the Town Hall Meeting on preventing underage drinking.

Logistics:

- Find a rent-free office location to prepare mailings and make telephone calls.
- Select a date, time, and duration for the Town Hall Meeting.
- Decide how many people will be invited to the event.
- Reserve a rent-free hall with seating for the desired number of people. Keep in mind your location will determine the type of audience you will attract.
- Reserve an area for media members and determine whether they will have any equipment needs, such as risers or a mola box (a type of amplifier) for camera crews.
- Determine how to handle any necessary post-meeting cleanup.

Participants:

- Identify a list of invitees (parents; youth; educators; substance abuse prevention specialists; elected officials; and representatives of nonprofit organizations, businesses, health organizations, justice/law enforcement, highway safety, alcohol control, and other State and local government agencies).
- Choose a moderator to explain the purpose of the meeting; identify sponsors; introduce VIPs, speakers, and panel members; and serve as timekeeper.
- Identify and invite VIPs and people to serve on the panel.
- Determine the amount of time for each speaker's presentation.
- Contact VIPs, speakers, and sponsors to make sure they know the schedule and how long they may speak.

Promotion:

- Plan and implement a marketing strategy.
- Prepare a [news release](#).
- Send out a [media advisory](#). Make follow-up calls to ensure that the event is on their calendars and that they will attend.

Materials:

- Prepare a sample pitch letter and letter of invitation.
- Decide how much of your budget to allocate for flyers, mailings, and other materials. (See a sample poster/flyer for providing details on the Town Hall Meeting.)
- Provide content to the moderator and prepare talking points for panel members. Use SAMHSA's Start Talking Before They Start Drinking materials on <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov> as a resource. The downloadable Start Talking Before They Start Drinking brochure also would be a useful handout for parents.
- Prepare a program handout, including an agenda, for the Town Hall Meeting.
- Prepare a fact sheet with statistics on underage drinking or a flyer to mail or hand out at the Town Hall Meeting. Use information available in Key Facts and on <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov>.
- Decide if there are other relevant materials that could be made available as handouts to participants. If so, order them in advance.
- Have registration sheets for attendees, speakers, and media.
- Have an agenda that includes the names of the VIPs and sponsors.
- Obtain signed releases if a photo, audiotape, videotape, or report is used.
- Consider showing a video or film clip on underage drinking to generate discussion.
- Review the talking points for the slide presentation available on <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov>.
- Decide whether a report, summary, or other product will come out of the meeting.

Additional meeting details:

- Decide whether questions to or from the panel members will be allowed.
- Plan a follow-up meeting to discuss lessons learned and results.
- Determine if videotaping or audiotaping will be done and how these methods will be used to extend the reach of the event.
- Decide on snacks and light refreshments.
- Organize a post-meeting reception.