



ORGANIZING A TOWN HALL MEETING

Using the Media Samples in This Package

The traditional media, such as local newspapers and radio and television stations, are excellent channels for sharing information with large audiences. An important part of a media organization's mandate is to be of public service. Thus, the media should welcome an opportunity to address the problem of underage drinking. Your goal in reaching parents, caregivers, and others through the media should be to encourage conversations in families, schools, and communities about preventing underage drinking.

Create or use a list of media contacts who cover stories about health, substance abuse, and education. Don't overlook community newspapers as potential outlets for raising awareness about your Town Hall Meeting and its message. In addition, local faith-based organizations and youth-related groups may publish their own newsletters and be eager to support your Town Hall Meeting objectives.

NOTE: In working with reporters, remember that they are frequently on deadline and may not return messages quickly. Be sensitive to their time constraints. Be patient but persistent. Your Town Hall Meeting is an important opportunity for the community to discuss the problem of underage drinking and to share ideas for preventing young people from using alcohol.

How To Use a Media Advisory

Media members are more responsive to requests for space or airtime when they receive information about a local issue in a ready-to-use format and style. A media advisory alerts the media to your upcoming Town Hall Meeting. It provides just enough information to encourage reporters to attend and cover the event.

An advisory includes only the highlights of your event in outline form: who, what, where, when, why, contact information, and interview opportunities. When selecting a contact person, remember that this individual must be available to take calls in advance and on the day of the event. Include a short paragraph with helpful background information. Lead off your media advisory, as well as other information you submit to the media, with an informative and catchy title. The purpose is to draw attention to your message and get the reporter to cover your Town Hall Meeting. For television reporters, be sure to mention any great visuals they will be able to capture at the event.

Send the advisory a week in advance of your Town Hall Meeting so reporters can schedule coverage.

How To Use a Pitch Letter

A personal approach can make all the difference in getting media coverage for your Town Hall Meeting. A pitch letter is an effective way to garner media coverage. More informal than a news release and more substantial than a media advisory, the pitch letter gives a reporter both a story idea and information needed to get started. Your pitch letter should contain a brief description of your Town Hall Meeting and key facts underlining its importance to your community and to children's health. Include a contact name and telephone number to make it easy for the reporter to get more information.

Send pitch letters a week in advance of your event. Make follow-up calls to be sure the reporters received your information and to encourage coverage.

How To Use a News Release

A news release, one to two pages in length, provides complete information the media can use to write a story on your event. The general format for a news release includes an introductory paragraph providing the "who, what, when, where, and why" of an event—in other words, all of the essential information. The next one or two paragraphs contain supporting information. Quotes by key local leaders or individuals involved in the Town Hall Meeting can make the release more lively and interesting. The final paragraph generally describes the sponsoring organizations. When issuing your news release, use printed letterhead. Mark the end of each page with "-more-" and the end of the final page with "-30-" or "###."

News releases are delivered personally or by fax or email to the media the day of your Town Hall Meeting.

How To Use a Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are messages the media broadcasts or prints free of charge to serve the public good. Most media outlets have public service directors who handle requests for PSA placement.

The print PSAs are part of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Start Talking Before They Start Drinking Ad Council public service advertising campaign. Details about this campaign and its downloadable materials, which also include radio and TV PSAs and a community kit, can be found at <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov>.