

Organize a Town Hall

Introduction:

It is important, especially as youth, to ask questions to our elected officials. Because youth under 18 are not eligible to vote, communicating concerns directly to elected officials is a great way to convince elected officials to support climate change policies. Learning how to organize a Town Hall from a policy and strategy perspective will help Ambassadors understand how the government plays a major role in fostering climate change solutions.

Checklist:

- **Choose a policy topic:** It will be difficult for everyone involved if your town hall is not specific. Asking broad questions like, “do you oppose climate change?” will neither show the elected officials that you prepared, nor will it get you direct actionable answers. Pick a topic you are passionate about or that is most significant to you and your community. Some climate change policies include: renewable energy expansion, sustainable agriculture, and electrification of vehicles.
- **Do research!** Now that you have picked a policy, the next step is to learn as much as possible about it! You might start by researching how your government and other states and towns are implementing or can implement this policy. Knowing the quantity of towns or states that passed your policy could be convincing, too. You should also research your elected officials. Find out which elected officials represent the district you are in, and which are most likely to or least likely to support your policy. Most states, towns and counties have all legislation on an online database, so you can directly read bills and ordinances to learn more about policy. News articles can teach you a lot about a policy, too!
- **Create a structure for your town hall:** There are several town hall structures. One is where a moderator asks prepared questions to a panel and opens the floor to the audience for further questions. This format, which we’ll call a moderated town hall, helps you learn more about the specific views of the panelists. Another format is where the audience delivers speeches and testimony to the panel about the issue and the panelists can comment after testimony has concluded. This format, which we’ll call a persuasive town hall, allows the panel to listen to constituent concerns directly. The structure you choose decides how you prepare, so choose what will work best for you.
- **Plan Logistics:** Secure a time, date and venue for your town hall that is convenient for many to attend. If your town hall will be virtual, choose a platform that is easily accessible by your community. Create program booklets for the town halls with impactful data supporting your policy and bios of the panelists and decide whether it will be a digital or paper program. Recruit volunteers and assign them roles. You may need people to welcome guests, set up the venue, monitor the audio and video equipment, and moderate the town hall. Reach out to other organizations in your area to see if they would like to provide support.
- **Invite Elected Officials:** Use the research you compiled on elected leaders to select who you want to invite. This can be the hardest part because not only do they tend to be so busy, but they also are usually very selective of what events to attend. However, it never hurts to try, so invite leaders you might not expect to show up! It may be a good idea to have your town hall before an election. This gives the elected official a free platform to campaign, and informs your community before it is time to vote. The great part about organizing as youth is that supporting youth tends to be a universal promise of elected officials. Leveraging that you are youth organizers could convince them to attend. Be sure to contact elected officials at least a month before the event and be persistent with contacting them. Send an email and follow up via phone calls to their office.
- **Spread the Word:** You want to ensure that there will be a large audience attending the town hall. This shows the elected officials that a large amount of people in your community care about the topic of the town hall. Do this by spreading the word as much as possible before the town hall. Posted flyers or attentive social media posts can help create buzz. Contact local schools and see if teachers will provide extra credit for attending your town hall. Reach out to your local newspaper or radio station to include it in their community calendars. And lastly, talk about the town hall to anyone and everyone!
- **Have the Town Hall:** Make sure all your logistics are secured, all your questions are prepared, all your panelists have confirmed attendance and just do it!
- **Have Conversations Afterwards:** Because youth under 18 cannot vote, it is important to share what you learned from the town hall with people who can. Telling voters what elected officials said and what you think will impact how voters think when it's time to vote. Talking with your parents, your relatives, and the adults around you about why this issue is important starts more conversations that will lead to better policies for our communities.
- **Contact KCI:** If you have any questions, please contact us at policy@theclimateinitiative.org. We can help with contacts, logistics, and much more. Please share your experience with us at programs@theclimateinitiative.org!