

# Organising a public meeting

Holding a public meeting can be a really good way of building a campaign or getting more people involved in your group.

Here are a few ideas to help your community group to organise a meeting that is interesting, accessible and run smoothly.

## Keep it simple

Running a discussion with members of the public, particularly if a lot of people show up, can be a bit daunting. Don't try to cram in too much.

A public meeting is not the place to have complicated discussions about the structure of your group or the nitty gritty of your everyday organising. Instead, use it as a way to share basic information about your group or campaign, encourage others to share their opinions and ideas, and gain contact details of people who may wish to be involved in the future.

## Publicise it well

The design of your publicity material is important.

Think about who you are hoping to attract to the meeting, and make sure your poster or leaflet will catch their eye and give them a reason to come along to your meeting.

Make sure the date, time and place of the meeting are clearly shown on the leaflet, and that it's clear what the meeting is about. Just as the plan for your meeting should be simple, the topic that you publicise should be simple and clear too.

If your meeting is going to be a large one, with as many people involved as possible, you will need to do as much publicity as you can. You could use:

- ♦ flyers through letterboxes
- ♦ posters in shop windows or on community noticeboards
- ♦ leaflets in places where the people you want to reach are likely to go (e.g. Doctor's surgeries)
- ♦ a letter or advert in a community newsletter
- ♦ a piece in the local paper
- ♦ an announcement on the local radio
- ♦ a Facebook event
- ♦ regular Twitter announcements, especially in the day or two before the event

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If you are aiming the meeting at quite a small group of people (for example residents of a single block of flats or street), it is worth speaking to people directly by knocking on doors or running a street stall.

You can design and print your publicity at the Resource Centre. We also have information sheets on *Writing a News Release*, *Radio and TV interviews* and *Facebook for community groups*.

## Offer an incentive

Not many people enjoy meetings, and for some it is a big effort to arrange childcare or transport, so it's a good idea to offer an extra attraction. This could simply be free refreshments, or perhaps a video or speaker about something to do with the group's aims or activity.

## Think about the venue and facilities

Make your event as accessible as possible. Try your best to make sure it is accessible to wheelchair users, and that people who have a hearing impairment will be able to take part by using a PA system or induction loop. If you think your event will be inaccessible to some people, you should say this on your publicity.

Think about any other equipment or resources you'll need on the day. Will you need to organise a crèche? If you have a speaker, will they need a data projector? Should you put up signs directing people to the right room when they arrive?

You can hire PA systems, data projectors and induction loops from the Resource Centre. We also have an information sheet on *Running a crèche*.

## Think about the agenda

If people take the time to come along to a public meeting, it is because they really care about the topic being discussed. Although it is important to give people a chance to have their say, it is also your job to make sure that the meeting sticks to the topic.

A good way of doing this is to prepare an agenda in advance. What you include in this will depend on the purpose and expected size of the meeting, but here are some ideas you could use:

- ♦ Welcome and introductions
  - Introduce the chair, explain who called the meeting and why.
- ♦ Aims of the meeting
  - Outline why the meeting has been called, e.g. to build a campaign.
- ♦ Speakers
  - You may choose to have a couple of people who know a lot about the topic to begin the meeting by sharing some information and their opinions.
  - Make sure you introduce them so that everyone knows who they are.
- ♦ Opportunity for people to share information and opinions.
  - It is important to give people an opportunity to share their thoughts about the topic.

- If there are too many people wishing to speak than there is time for, make sure you choose a range of people, including people who are not members of your group or who have not been involved in your campaign before.
- ♦ Planning
  - Public meetings can be good opportunities to come up with initial ideas about action that could be taken on the issue in future.
  - Allow some opportunity for people to share their ideas, but don't allow the meeting to get bogged down in nitty gritty details. Make a note of people's ideas.
- ♦ What will happen next
  - Summarise the ideas that have been raised.
  - If the meeting is quite small, this might be an opportunity to reach decisions about what action is actually going to be taken. Be sure to include discussion of what practical tasks need to be done, and who is going to do them.
  - If the meeting is large, this won't be possible. Instead, make sure people's ideas have been noted down, and that you have a plan about when the next meeting will be so that people can come and get involved with the detailed planning stage later.

You may find our information sheet *The Agenda* useful. It goes into more detail about planning an agenda for a meeting.

## Chairing the meeting

If your group has called the meeting, people will be expecting someone from your group to act as chair. Agree beforehand who will do this.

It is the chair's job to:

- Keep the meeting on topic
- Make sure people get a chance to have their say
- Let people know that their contribution is needed and valuable (so don't close off discussion too quickly)

Make sure the atmosphere of the meeting is as welcoming and open as possible.

Don't let the discussion go off at a tangent or get bogged down in little details, so do stop people once they have had a say. Don't let one or two people dominate.

Our information sheet *Chairing meetings* has some useful tips.

## Take minutes

Decide who will be taking minutes before the meeting. It is hard to take minutes and chair, so these roles should be done by different people. The minutes of your meeting don't have to be very detailed, but they should include a clear note of any decisions made at the meeting, and in particular who has agreed to take on which jobs.

We have an information sheet on *Taking Minutes* with some useful pointers.

## Gather names and addresses

Make sure you take contact details from everyone who wants to be kept in touch with the group – prepare a sheet in advance which you can pass round the meeting or have on a table at the door.

## Have a plan for your next meeting

Make sure you have already fixed a date and venue for your group's next meeting, and that you advertise this so that people can come along if they want to. It is useful to print some fliers with these details on, and your contact details, for people to take away.

## More information

You may find it useful to look at our information sheets on:

- ♦ *Organising a petition*
- ♦ *Organising a letter-writing campaign*
- ♦ *The Agenda*
- ♦ *Chairing a meeting*
- ♦ *Running a crèche*