

# Module 2



## **Mobilization:** Organize a Town Meeting

This project requires someone with organizational skills, an eye for detail, and a considerable amount of free time during the day. This project will also require a group of at least 2 or 3 like-minded citizens to assist.

Gather a group of 50 to 300 people, make them aware of the need, and start some of them taking action. Your town meeting will be a way to raise awareness and build an own army of citizens working together to reclaim elections.

### **Guide for Town Meeting Organizers**

#### **Goals for the Town Meeting:**

The purpose of your town meeting will be to create an assembly of people and mobilize them. This involves education/motivation and a commitment to action.

#### **Before the Town Meeting:**

- Allow yourself 2-3 months to organize, locate and schedule speakers and obtain sufficient media coverage for the town hall meeting.
- Ascertain whether or not your local election officials and/or state representatives have a history of advocating real election integrity measures and are receptive to citizen concerns on this issue. If you are fortunate to have well informed local state representatives advocating meaningful election reform, extend them an invitation to speak and/or attend. This will guide you in deciding how to structure your town hall meeting.
- The meeting should be for about 2-1/2 hours on a Thursday evening beginning at 7 and ending around 9:30 p.m. This gives people time to get home, eat dinner, attend the meeting and get home early enough for work the next day.

- Locate an appropriate location that will be easily accessible and widely known by citizens in your city's greater metropolitan area.
- Assess the costs, if any, of reserving a space for the meeting and make certain you have the necessary funding available for covering any cost of the space and/or any expenses for the speakers, *i.e.*, travel, meals, and hotel (it is preferable to first seek local representatives and election officials in order to offset some such expenses, before going to officials from other cities in your state).
- If you don't have the necessary funding, approach local businesses and/or citizen action groups, election reform groups and organizations to sponsor the event.
- Prepare a 1-page flyer describing event, location, date and time, featured speakers.

### **Publicize the Town Meeting:**

- Write a news release before contacting anyone in the media, because they will always ask you to send one to them. Always make sure that there is the name and phone number of at least one (preferably two or three) easily accessible contact person(s) who will be able to reply to media inquiries before, during and after the town hall meeting.
- Most print and broadcast media these days can be found with a "google" search on the web. If you prefer, there is a set of reference books in just about every public library called "Standard Rate & Data," which usually has a pretty up-to-date listing of every publication and broadcast outlet in every U.S. city -- along with the names and phone numbers of editors, news directors, etc.
- Some libraries have another good set of reference books called "Bacon's."
- After sending the news release (via email, snail-mail or fax), call the person to whom you sent the news release (or ask for the assignment editor or managing editor if you only were able to send the release to a generic news room number).
- Usually you can find out from a google search which radio stations in an area have local newscasts and locally produced talk and public affairs programs. Offer to be a guest on one of their shows and/or offer to schedule a local voting integrity activist, area politician, etc. Sometimes they will allow phone interviews, but usually they far prefer in-studio interviews.
- You might have to call a radio or TV station to find out who the public affairs director and talk show producers are. Quite often there will be at least one locally produced public affairs program on a National Public Radio outlet.
- No matter what type of broadcast outlet it is, always provide a concise fact sheet (about when and where the town hall meeting will be) to both the producer and the interviewer as much in advance as possible – and always bring a fresh fact sheet on the day of the interview just in case they claim to have never gotten or misplaced it (or whatever). Usually that information will be placed on a TV station's screen toward the end of the interview, but unless you can actually see the info on the screen (or unless the interview brings it up himself or herself), make sure you mention the event.

Interviews sometimes seem to be over in the blink of an eye, so make sure you mention the town hall meeting if the interviewer hasn't already mentioned the topic.

- If you know about the town hall meeting long enough in advance, you can write and send brief public service announcements (PSAs) and send them to local radio and cable TV stations. It doesn't matter whether they have a news/talk format.
- Make follow-up calls to the news media at least two days prior to the town hall meeting. Then call the day before and day of the event (unless the media outlet's editor, etc. tells you not to) and schedule on-site interviews with keynote speakers, panelists, etc.
- Bring extra news releases (along with any other important literature) to give to media folks who come to the event. Don't overwhelm them with too many items, though, because they will have news deadlines to meet.
- If possible, write post-event news releases and accompany them with digital photos

### **Set up the facility before the Town Meeting:**

- Arrange for the necessary equipment, *i.e.*, microphones, podium (large enough to accommodate speakers), projector, a videographer (preferably someone local who might be willing to do it for free).
- Make enough copies of the Citizen's Tool Kit to place on each chair before the meeting. It will save time to have the Tool Kits on the chairs ahead of time, and will give attendees something to do if there are any slow points.
- Make copies of a Commitment to Action card and place it on each chair with the Citizen's Tool Kit. Use your creativity. The cards can ask for name, contact information, and which actions in the Tool Kit are of most interest to the individual. You might want to add a question as to whether the individual tends to mentor, lead or organize others, and a question about whether they would like to commit to form and lead a small group (5-12 people) to take action.
- Prepare large timer cards: "2 minutes" "1 minute" "10 seconds" "TIME UP!"

### **Part I of Town Meeting – Education/Motivation component**

- Provide each speaker with a specific time limit. Assign an assistant to time the speeches and hold up the time prompt cards. When the time is down to 10 seconds, go stand at the podium next to the speaker.
- Monitor the speaker's time allotments carefully. If you have several speakers, just five minutes added to each speaker's time can add too much time to the event, making attendees fidgety. You don't want attendees to leave before the mobilization portion.
- (Optional) "Pass the Hat" after the most dynamic speaker for any donations to supplement expenses incurred, if you were not able to get necessary funding beforehand.

- Ask attendees to fill out the Action Cards about two-thirds of the way through the meeting.

## **Part II of Town Meeting – Mobilization component**

### **Introduction actions to take back elections:**

- Direct attendees to the Citizen's Tool Kits. Tell them that the object is for each to choose an action – any action – and commit to doing it, either individually or as a group project.
- One of the best ways to exercise oversight is to go get more evidence. If you have an election coming up, you may want to focus on the "Hard Core Evidence" modules (Modules 8-16). Each involves adopting a portion of the election. Don't try to take them all on. Just select what you can reasonably achieve.
- Mention that it's up to the citizenry to make the case for election reform. Get the kinds of evidence that can't be explained away or spun: Video, Audio recordings, Photographs, (see Module 4, Be the Media); Public records (See Module 8, Public Records and Freedom of Information Documents) and Laws/Regulations (See Module 7, Find out if Officials are Following the Rules).
- Encourage attendees to sign up for the National Hand Count Registry (See Module 17: Count the Votes Yourself.) You can sign up for the National Hand Count Registry on the home page at [BlackBoxVoting.org](http://BlackBoxVoting.org)
- Question and answer: To save time and avoid delays during the question and answer period, have 3 x 5 cards and pencils available to hand out to audience to write down their questions for any of the speakers; pick them up from audience (depending on the number of speakers and the time allotment for them to speak, try to allow 30 minutes for questions); go through the questions and pick those most relevant to the issue first and pose these questions to whichever speaker the question is addressing. If there is time, you can ask the other questions.
- Try to keep the focus on the next step: Actions citizens can take.

### **Wrap-Up**

- Thank everyone for coming. Encourage them to take the first step – just one action, no matter how small. Encourage those who like to lead, mentor and organize to do a house party or assemble a small group to take more concerted actions. Provide contact information for those who want to follow up after the meeting.

**Collaboration and appreciation:** Black Box Voting wishes to thank **Doreen Lazarus** of **H/L Communications** (Cleveland OH) for media contact tips for town meetings.

# Your Own Additions to the Town Meeting Module

You can share your ideas by sending to [crew@blackboxvoting.org](mailto:crew@blackboxvoting.org)



What worked well?

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What new ideas did you come up with?

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Was there anything that didn't work very well?

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