

Public Meeting

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Medium
Cost	Low (up to \$1,000) Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000)
When might you use it	To showcase product, plan, policy To communicate an issue
Number of people required to help to organise	One - three people
Time to organise	Short (up to six weeks) Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Venue; Catering; Staffing; Moderator/facilitator; Overhead/data projectors and screen; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.); Children's requirements
Innovation level	Low

Description

A meeting is a coming together of people for a specific purpose. The meeting can involve a large number of people, or a smaller (under 10) number of people who focus on a specific problem or purpose. Meetings generally have a facilitator who encourages two-way communication, and a recorder who records suggestions and issues that are revealed at the meeting. Public meetings provide a good focal point for media interest in an event, and photos can provide a visual indicator of levels of interest and the range of people who attended. Public meetings are often the springboard for a movement or for the establishment of a common-interest group which will continue to act on the issues raised and suggestions made.

Public meetings are familiar, established ways for people to come together to express their opinions, hear a public speaker, or plan a strategy. They can build a feeling of community and attendance levels provide an indicator of the level of interest within a community on a particular issue. Smaller focus group meetings can be made up of people with common concerns who may not feel confident speaking up in a larger public gathering (e.g. women, those who speak English as a second language, Indigenous groups). In a separate venue, these people can speak comfortably together, share common issues and a common purpose. The findings from focus group meetings can be presented to larger group meetings, giving a 'voice' to those in the community who are unable to speak up in a larger meeting (See also Focus Groups).

Objective

- To engage a wide audience in information sharing and discussion

Desired Outcome

- Increase awareness of an issue or proposal, and can be a starting point for, or an ongoing means of engaging, further public involvement.

Uses/Strengths

- Allows the involvement and input of a wide range of people.
- Can develop consensus for action on complex issues that affect the broad community.
- Disseminates detailed information and decisions throughout the community.
- Provides opportunities for exploring alternative strategies and building consensus.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Unless well facilitated, those perceived as having power within the community, or those who are most articulate and domineering in their verbal style can dominate the meeting.
- Participants may not come from a broad enough range to represent the entire community.
- Organisers must be aware of potential conflicts.
- Community members may not be willing to work together.
- May not achieve consensus.
- Can be time and labour intensive.

Step by Step Guide

1. Establish why you need to consult the community; do not hold a public meeting or consult unnecessarily; this wastes people's time, and may create disinterest for the future.
2. Consider the circumstances of the community and the issues.
3. Schedule a series of meetings. A suggested series follows:
 - 3.1. Meeting 1:
 - Introduce project and key personnel
 - Supply project information
 - Allow the community to ask questions and identify issues of concern
 - Provide contact points
 - Identify groups with specific concerns for targeted consultation
 - 3.2. Meeting 2:
 - Break between meetings allows participants to consider views and concerns
 - Reintroduce project
 - Activate good listening skills
 - Clarification and expansion of issues
 - 3.3. Meeting 3:
 - Information and feedback on how issues and concerns are being met
 - Presentation at the conclusion of a project or make recommendations for the community's consideration
 - Discuss ongoing participation in the process
4. Publicise and advertise the meeting; advertise weekly in local media
5. Book a venue and arrange catering with flexibility as to numbers as attendance is difficult to predict:
 - Venue should be neutral territory
 - Provide no alcohol
 - Provide refreshments at the conclusion of the meeting
6. Timing: Conduct the meeting at a time where the largest number of participants can attend.
7. Inform participants of chairperson/facilitator/guest speakers.

8. Determine the conduct of the meeting:

- Work closely with the chair
- General format is presentation followed by question time
- Present agenda
- Field questions
- Record comments

9. Considerations:

- Widely advise the ways feedback from the community is being incorporated into the project. Avoid allowing the meeting to be taken over by more vocal community members
- Be prepared to change tack during the meeting
- Cater for people with disabilities or from non-English speaking backgrounds
- Never lose your temper
- Set up early