

Citizens Trade Campaign

working together for social and environmental justice in trade policy

C4 Action Item Series: How to Hold a Town Hall on Trade

[How to Host a Town Hall Meeting on Trade](#)

A *Town Hall Meeting* is a great way to educate the public, engage coalition partners, generate media attention, mobilize voters into action, and pressure elected officials, all in one event! You can host a gathering of any size, from a small *roundtable* at the local diner, to a *House Party* with friends and neighbors, to a 300-person public event. This document is geared towards a large event, but you can scale it down to fit capacity.

[What Does A “Town Hall” Look Like?](#)

It can go by many names, including a roundtable, activist meeting, house party or economic summit. It essentially involves gathering a panel of local leaders and community activists, and sometimes state and local elected officials, to educate the public and the press on trade.

A diverse array of speakers briefly address the policies that matter, such as the Colombia FTA and the TRADE Act, and the impact of trade on the local community. They discuss specific issues (such as the environment) and specific policy vehicles (such as NAFTA and the Korea FTA). At the end of the program, you ask all participants to sign a postcard, call members of congress, or take another action step on promoting fair trade policy.

[General Planning](#)

Go through the “Town Hall Checklist” while assessing your budget and organizational resources. Identify your main goals, according to the political makeup of your area, and the constituents you’ll be mobilizing. Are they going to care more about the environmental angle, local job loss or government sovereignty? Will this affect where you hold the event or whom you invite to speak? Assess realistic turnout capacity as far as numbers and timeline.

[Choosing a date](#)

Consider if the Member of Congress (MOC) is in the district, and how long you need to pull the event together. Check to make sure you aren’t competing with any partner events.

[Venue](#)

Nail down a venue as soon as you can. To promote the event, you need to be able to tell people when and where the event is occurring. Consider how participants will view the locale, such as a union hall, a church or a high school. Consider location, accessibility, suitability for viewing TV and speakers, and parking. Think about video equipment.

[Other Equipment/Supplies](#)

Don’t forget chairs, materials/sign-in tables, refreshments, TV, microphones- make sure you test them and know how they work, banner or posters (media like visuals).

Inviting Speakers

Find an “anchor” guest to build the event around, and then work out around that person. Focus on a speaker for each sector, and offer brief talking points on trade impact in that local area. Be sure to brief each person on how long you want each to speak, the focus of that short speech, and the goal of their involvement in the evening. Ask them to help put out the word.

Building A Crowd

Assign crowd-building captains among your coalition partners and get a realistic estimate of how many folks each can turnout. Find out who has access to mailing lists, email lists, phone lists. Place announcements in community bulletin boards, newsletters, public radio, and newspapers. Assign volunteers to make announcements at PTA meetings, during church, and at other community events. The week before the event, contact local media to see if they have calendars of events that are either internal or public. Many local papers run local community calendars and will be willing to list your showing.

Very concrete turnout-boosting steps you can take immediately after securing the venue for a particular date are to: 1) Ask local coalition partners to co-sponsor the event. This adds legitimacy and interest to the event and it also helps to draw in more allies and membership lists that you can promote the event to; and 2) Create promotional materials that you can provide coalition partners to make outreach easy for them. Create an emailable promotion piece, create a flyer (a faded image of the statue of liberty works nicely behind the flyer text), create a postcard template and then, as different coalition partners commit to do mailings, work with them to adapt the text to their constituency. The easier you make it, the more promotion will happen.

Generating Media

Make sure you have a press list, or get one from a coalition partner. Draft a media advisory for the event and follow up with individual calls. Make sure you mention local speakers, the diverse groups they represent, and if a MOC or congressional staff person will attend.

Highlight any visuals or good photo opportunities you might have. Also let the press know that speakers will be available to media for 15 minutes immediately following the event. Have press packets ready. These should include the advisory, names and titles of speakers, a statement about sponsoring organizations and their position on the TRADE Act, and extra fact sheets or articles on The TRADE Act and Colombia FTA. If the media doesn't show up, put out your own stories to newspapers and newsletters in the form of a news release or op-ed.

Materials

You can use factsheets, articles, postcards, sample letters to the editor, and letters to your MOC. Make sure you have a sign-in list with a check-off if people are willing to volunteer to phonebank or help with an upcoming event.

Post-Town Hall Follow-Up

Depending on the response you got from the MOC, send a thank you letter reiterating your concerns and demands on trade policy. Follow up with the press, whether they came or not. In addition, follow up with any new folks who turned out or new coalition partners you made to keep them activated. And don't forget to let us know what an amazing event you had!