



How to Organize a Sidewalk Town Hall Meeting

During Congressional recesses, members of the House and Senate typically return to their home districts for several days or weeks. During that time, they customarily arrange opportunities to hear from their constituents through town hall meetings, lobby visits, or office hours. *Sometimes, representatives will not make themselves available to directly face the people they represent, especially if they expect opposition or dissatisfaction from their constituents.*

A **Sidewalk Town Hall Meeting** is a tactic for drawing public and media attention when your representative refuses to host his or her own. It is simple to organize, but is more successful with some planning. See this excellent write-up of a Sidewalk Town Hall Meeting organized by Kentuckians for Single Payer Healthcare on April 8, 2017 as an example. <http://www.courier-journal.com/story/life/wellness/health/2017/04/08/town-hall-champion-single-payer-health-care/100023284/>

Organize an Effective Sidewalk Town Hall Meeting

- 1. Research a date and location.** Look up any restrictions for public gatherings on your city's website. Typically, small demonstrations are allowed on public sidewalks and in parks, as long as they do not block traffic - but be sure to confirm this ahead of time. A public space near or in front of your representative's office may be ideal. Events held Mondays - Thursdays between 10am - 12pm are typically the best for media coverage, and try to pick a date and time that does not conflict with other newsworthy events (such as holidays or festivals).
- 2. Take care of logistics.** Make a checklist and delegate tasks to members of your group. A sample checklist appears on the next page.
- 3. Organize a compelling program.** Arrange for at least 3-5 speakers, each of whom should bring something unique to the agenda. For example, your program might include a patient who shares a "healthcare horror story," a religious leader, and a physician in a white coat. Be sure at least one person makes a strong call for improved Medicare for all. Someone should be designated as an "emcee" who will make introductions at the beginning and wrap up at the end.
- 4. Invite** your representative. Send a letter or email at least one week in advance of the event. Assume they won't show up, but be prepared in case they do.
- 5. Publicize!** Make a list of media outlets you will invite to the Sidewalk Town Hall, and email them a press release describing the event a few days in advance. Be sure to send a reminder the day before. Create a Facebook event and be sure to invite allied organizations and potential allies (Indivisible and Our Revolution chapters, for example).

Tips for a successful event

Keep the program **brief and lively** - no more than one hour. Each speaker should be allotted 3-5 minutes (or less).

Envision the photos.

Be sure to make plenty of **Improved Medicare for All** signs, including a sign for the podium, if you use one. Maximize the number of people who will show up in pictures taken by media by having attendees stand behind or around the speaker. Designate someone from your group to take photos as well.

Physicians should **wear their white coats**, nurses should wear scrubs, and other attendees should wear buttons or stickers indicating support for Medicare for all.

Try to have at least one **high profile** speaker on the program to attract press. For example, a supportive congressperson or a well-known community leader.

Consider other catchy visuals - a life-sized cardboard cut-out of the absent representative or a "scarecrow" type mannequin, or an empty seat with the representative's name to highlight their absence.

Designate several volunteers to serve as **marshals**. These are people who make sure attendees aren't blocking roads or sidewalks in compliance with local restrictions. They should be easily identifiable either by wearing reflective vests, armbands, or hats. **Notifying local police ahead of your event will ease any worries about violating restrictions.**

Put real effort into turn-out. A general rule of thumb is that about half of those who verbally say they will attend the action will actually show up (expect only 5-10% to attend from those who say "yes" on Facebook).

Have a **call to action**. Ask the representative to support HR 676 or similar legislation in the Senate. Ask attendees to sign a petition or make calls. Have informational leaflets available for passers-by that have the same asks.

Call the PNHP office at **312-781-6006** if you have any questions in the course of planning.

Event Planning Checklist:

Scout location

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Research need for permits

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Confirm speakers for program

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Recruit co-sponsors

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Invite representative

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Write & circulate press release

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Make Facebook event & flyer, circulate

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Rent podium and megaphones

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Make signs & visuals

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Write leaflet & petition

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Identify marshals & crowd control volunteers

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

Identify photographer

Who will complete:

Date completed:

Notes:

