

How to organise a public meeting

A public meeting is normally held to push ideas, issues and campaigns into the public domain, and secure support from individuals and organisations. People who attend generally either support or oppose the issue and will expect to be able to voice their opinion whilst at the meeting.

Step 1 Know the focus of your meeting and who you want to attract

Be sure of why you are having the meeting, what you want to get out of it, and what the benefit is to the public who attend. Ensure the issue you are discussing is timely and will appeal to the target audience.

Step 2 Get your meeting in diaries early on

Decide who you want as speakers and confirm their availability as early as possible. These could include your local MP, community groups, councillors and industry representatives. Invite them by email or letter and ask them to RSVP and ask them to arrive at the meeting at least 15 minutes before the start time.

Step 3 Organise the Chairperson

An assertive and impartial Chairperson is very important to keep the meeting on track and on time. Ensure your Chairperson is well briefed on speakers and potential issues that may come up.

Step 4 Book your venue

Find somewhere to hold your meeting that is accessible and easy to get to by public transport. Ensure it has any equipment you may need, including PA system, microphones, laptop and projector, as well as catering facilities. Otherwise organise to bring these to the meeting yourself.

Step 5 Promote your meeting

Posters and flyers can be sent to your target audience and put in places where they will see them. E-mail invites are also useful ways to invite people who you already have contact details for, as is social media. You can send out a press release to relevant media, and even book ads in local papers/magazines. Use local community groups and influential people to spread the word as wide as possible.

Step 7 Hold meeting

Enlist some helpers (if you've not done so already) and arrive early to make sure that you have all equipment set up, any handouts and display materials organised and refreshments

available. If you haven't asked people to register their attendance beforehand, collect their contact details so that you can get in touch after the meeting. Let the chair know of any scheduled fire alarms and other logistical issues.

Step 8 Follow up

Get in touch with speakers and those who attended. Thank them for attending and let them know that you will be following up with next steps soon after.

Do's and don't's

Do

Use an online system like EventBrite to encourage your guests to register beforehand so you know how many people to expect.

Record the meeting as it may be useful for future reference but let the audience know you are doing this.

Think about how the meeting met your objectives and plan your next steps quickly afterwards to keep momentum going

Don't

Be afraid to confirm attendance of your key speakers a week before the event. Sometimes diary's get double booked and it's better to know of any issues in advance

Expect to have everyone to be on their best behaviour at the meeting. Public meetings turn into lively debates, with sometimes aggressive comments and actions. This is where your Chairperson comes to the fore.