

A Guide to Organizing Public Forums

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National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)
and the
Center for Civic Education Pakistan (CCE)*

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EMPOWERING THE INDIVIDUAL

Introduction:

Center for Civic Education-Pakistan (CCE) is a nonprofit organization that functions as an independent research, civic education, training and advocacy body. The CCE provokes creative ways of thinking and promotes tolerance for dissenting viewpoints to tackle the problems emanating from the transformation in the Pakistani society and its changing norms and values.

The main aim of the CCE is to cultivate and nurture civic culture, civic courage and values of freedom, tolerance, peace, rule of law and democracy to strengthen civil society. For this the CCE conducts civic education, facilitates democratic dialogue, arranges trainings, and runs advocacy campaigns besides undertaking research on issues that shape our social, political and economic future. The CCE critically examines existing socio-economic policies and suggests alternatives besides monitoring democratic developments to make Pakistani democracy inclusive and meaningful.

In its work the CCE targets a cross section of society particularly the politicians, the parliamentarians, lawyers, doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, industrialists, businessmen, agriculturists, academia, intellectuals, journalists, youth, women, minorities and civic activists to promote active citizenship with realization of civic and economic rights.

Programs:

- The CCE runs trainings, diploma courses, workshops and seminars on Politics, Political Party Development, Good Governance, Media and Market Economy for Pakistani citizens.
- The CCE campaigns for increased civic engagement aimed at the promotion of a free, tolerant, democratic and peaceful society.
- The CCE conducts research on vital political and economic issues.

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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

Democracy depends on legislatures that represent citizens and oversee the executive, independent judiciaries that safeguard the rule of law, political parties that are open and accountable, and elections in which voters freely choose their representatives in government. Acting as a catalyst for democratic development, NDI bolsters the institutions and processes that allow democracy to flourish.

Build Political and Civic Organizations: NDI helps build the stable, broad-based and well-organized institutions that form the foundation of a strong civic culture. Democracy depends on these mediating institutions—the voice of an informed citizenry, which link citizens to their government and to one another by providing avenues for participation in public policy.

Safeguard Elections: NDI promotes open and democratic elections. Political parties and governments have asked NDI to study electoral codes and to recommend improvements. The Institute also provides technical assistance for political parties and civic groups to conduct voter education campaigns and to organize election monitoring programs. NDI is a world leader in election monitoring, having organized international delegations to monitor elections in dozens of countries, helping to ensure that polling results reflect the will of the people.

Promote Openness and Accountability: NDI responds to requests from leaders of government, parliament, political parties and civic groups seeking advice on matters from legislative procedures to constituent service to the balance of civil-military relations in a democracy. NDI works to build legislatures and local governments that are professional, accountable, open and responsive to their citizens.

International cooperation is key to promoting democracy effectively and efficiently. It also conveys a deeper message to new and emerging democracies that while autocracies are inherently isolated and fearful of the outside world, democracies can count on international allies and an active support system. Headquartered in Washington D.C., with field offices in every region of the world, NDI complements the skills of its staff by enlisting volunteer experts from around the world, many of whom are veterans of democratic struggles in their own countries and share valuable perspectives on democratic development.

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ORGANIZING A PUBLIC FORUM

What is a public forum?

A public forum is meeting held for the general public where people can exchange opinions and ideas on a particular issue.

Citizens are discovering that a **public forum** can be an effective venue for raising awareness about local issues. Public forums are the most common way for government officials, elected representatives and citizens to come together to discuss matters of public concern. They typically address a specific problem or issue and are often organized by a local organization or government agency. Public forums and meetings also provide an opportunity for citizens to build coalitions and networks.

A formal version of the public forum is the public hearing, a gathering which is usually held by a senior local official or city council before adopting important policies. Public hearings are typically open to the general public, whereas other types of public meetings, depending on their purpose, are often organized for smaller audiences who are specially invited to attend. Such initiatives are designed to be temporary, in that the meeting or group will disband once its purpose has been accomplished. They are particularly useful for stimulating discussion, helping define problems, and developing solutions to them.

Advantages of holding public forums:

- They are relatively easy to organize and inexpensive to operate.
- They promote two-way communication between citizens, elected representatives, and government officials, which can help people understand competing perspectives on an issue.
- They raise awareness of particular issues and call on a wide range of experts to participate in addressing those issues.
- They can operate out of a variety of locations, including a town hall, neighborhood schools and other types of meeting places.
- They allow local organizations to come together to help formulate an agenda and co-organize the public event.

Disadvantages of holding public forums:

- They tend to favor people who are especially articulate and have the time to participate.
- An open forum provides a platform for opponents to attack or criticize the organizer, and can be easily disrupted by a dedicated minority.
- If attendance at a forum is low, the implication is that the cause does not enjoy much support.

While holding a public forum, it is very important to keep in mind the cultural sensitivities of the local area. Successful forums will focus on meeting the needs and interests of the community.

TEN STEPS FOR ORGANIZING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC FORUM

- 1) Put together a management team**
- 2) Conduct pre-event planning**
- 3) Hire the hall**
- 4) Prepare the hall**
- 5) Generate publicity using the local media**
- 6) Advertise locally**
- 7) Plan an agenda**
- 8) Conduct the forum**
- 9) Follow-up immediately after the forum**
- 10) Debrief on accomplishments and lessons learned**

STEP 1: PUT TOGETHER A MANAGEMENT TEAM

The key to a successful public forum is planning and preparation. Essential steps are outlined below, which, if followed correctly, will help in organizing a successful public forum.

It is important that the right people are involved in organizing the meeting. A management team should consist of the following people: a **decision maker (chair)**, a **moderator or facilitator**, a **presenter**, a **note-taker**, a **media liaison** and a **logistics coordinator**.

The **decision maker** chairs the forum. The decision maker should be a person of high enough authority to enjoy public respect and attention, ideally someone who is responsible for the project, program or policy that is the subject of the forum. This person will also prepare follow-up plans.

The **moderator or facilitator** of the forum is often, but not necessarily, the same person as the chair. His or her job is to make sure that the forum is conducted in a civil and orderly fashion. This includes making sure that everyone has a chance to ask questions, that all questions are answered and that the discussion stays on subject. Most importantly, he or she should help the participants reach a consensus.

The moderator/facilitator should:

- Create an environment that is open and invites people to express their views.
- Clarify comments made at the meeting so that everybody understands what is being said.
- Be neutral, helping to solicit different opinions and motivating participants to find consensus where possible.

The moderator/facilitator is not responsible for making decisions. In fact, decisions are usually not made at such forums. The purpose of a public forum is to present and discuss information that will help in making a decision; on occasion, a resolution may be passed at such a forum.

There are several advantages to having a separate chair and facilitator at the forum. The chair sets the tone of the forum and can provide political legitimacy. The chair welcomes the people who have come to the forum, introduces the presenters and notable individuals in attendance, and explains the purpose and procedures of the forum.

It is advisable to have another person facilitate the forum, especially if the subject is controversial and the chair has taken a position on the issue. An impartial facilitator is in a better position to act as a moderator between opposing factions

and help them move toward consensus or compromise. A moderator/facilitator can take firm control of the forum's process, limiting speakers to their allotted time and place in the speaking order.

The **logistics coordinator** is the forum's "producer." He or she is responsible for finding a location for the forum, distributing necessary notices and advertisements in advance of the forum, overseeing the production of hand-outs or other written materials to be distributed, coordinating the delivery and operation of audio-visual or other equipment that may be necessary for the presentations or discussions, and managing the registration of speakers, among other tasks.

The **media liaison** is someone who can write and distribute press releases and field questions from reporters both before and after the meeting.

Panelists and presenters should be individuals who thoroughly understand the issue or have a stake in the matter being discussed. He or she should be able to present information in a clear and interesting way so that people easily understand what is at stake and how the issue impacts their lives.

Panel:

- A group of specialists or stakeholders who give their advice or opinion about an issue
- A group of people who discuss topics of interest at any forum, TV or radio program

Panelist:

- A person who is a member of a panel giving opinions and answering questions during a forum or meeting

Panelists and presenters should be very familiar with their topics and comfortable making public presentations. Presentations are usually made by someone other than the forum's chair or moderator/facilitator. This approach reinforces the chair and facilitator's appearance of objectivity. If the topic is complex and requires a long presentation (more than 15 to 20 minutes) it makes sense to divide the topic into subtopics and assign each to a different presenter.

The **recorder** or **note-taker** makes certain that public comments and statements are accurately and properly documented. He or she is also responsible for drafting a report of the forum afterwards and distributing it to the participants and anyone else who is interested in the forum. Producing a detailed and accurate **record** of the forum is very important (and in the case of a public hearing is usually required by law), and allows any suggestions or comments to be followed up and considered in the actual decision-making process. Often, tape recorders are used to make sure that all comments are captured precisely. If the forum is not being recorded it may be useful to have two people act as note-takers.

STEP 2: CONDUCT PRE-EVENT PLANNING

The management team should assemble at least three weeks before the forum to determine how the forum should be organized and assign responsibilities to members of the team. There should be as many meetings of the team as are needed to accomplish the following:

- ✓ **Research and discuss any legal requirements**, such as groups or individuals that must, by law, be notified of the forum, any procedures that have to be followed, or any requirements concerning the content of notices announcing the forum that must be followed.
- ✓ **Send an invitation to panelists.** The letter of invitation to panelists should be sent as early as possible in order to allow time to find alternative panelists if people refuse to participate. The letter should be very clear about what is expected of the panelist and should include information about the date, time, venue, audience and issue to be discussed. It should also include details about approximate speaking time and explain that there will be a question and answer session.
 - The letter must be followed up by a **phone call** or **meeting** to go over the ground rules and confirm whether or not the panelist will participate. It should be made clear to the panelist that once he or she agrees to participate that his or her name will be advertised on all leaflets, press releases and other publications. It should also be made clear to the panelist that if he or she cannot attend the forum due to unforeseen circumstances, he or she must provide an alternative speaker to serve as a replacement. A follow up phone call must be made to all panelists a few hours before the forum to remind them about their commitment.
 - There should be a back-up list of alternative speakers in case a panelist neither turns up to the forum nor sends a replacement. In this case, try to ensure the back up list of names will be at the forum. Should this situation arise, the organizers must give a proper briefing to the back-up speaker before he or she addresses the forum.
- ✓ **Develop a notification** (handbill, leaflet, pamphlet, invitation card or poster) and a **publicity plan** and assign someone responsibility for carrying out the plan during the first planning meeting. The notification plan should identify potential supporters and opponents of the proposed program or issue to be discussed, including any community organizations that are interested in or affected by the topic; these individuals and organizations should be invited to the forum. The plan should also determine how to advertise the forum in the media.

- Notices should be informative and easily understandable. In addition to stating where and when the forum will be held, notices should list the topics to be discussed and advise the public of their role at the forum, explain the purpose or intended result of the forum, and outline how people can participate in the forum. The notice should also tell people who they could call with questions.

- ✓ **Chose the most appropriate format for the forum.** Is the forum's purpose to provide information to the public, or will public comment and discussion about a proposal or issue be its principal objective? The answer to this question will help determine the forum's format.

- ✓ **Establish the agenda.** Who will make presentation(s)? How long should they be? How much time will be allowed for comments or questions from the audience? How long should the forum last? (Two hours is often the most appropriate length of time.)

- ✓ **Establish ground rules** at the planning meeting that determine how the discussion will be conducted. For example, will people have to register beforehand if they want to speak at the forum? In general, the rules should be flexible enough to accommodate the concerns and needs of the people attending the forum, but they should also be rigid enough to maintain order and timeliness. One or two citizens, a group of citizens, or a city official should not be permitted to dominate the discussion; the rules should allow for a fair distribution of the limited time available.

- ✓ **Prepare a follow-up plan**, one that outlines the necessary steps to ensure follow up activities.

STEP 3: HIRE THE HALL

In hiring the hall, the first priority is to choose a **date**, a **venue**, and a **time**.

WHAT TO DO	
DATE	<p>Fix the date. How much time is there before the forum? What day does the local press come out? Is there time to place a report and/or an advertisement in the next issue in time for the forum? Are there any other meetings at the same time, or any national events likely to coincide with the forum?</p>
VENUE	<p>Delegate a local activist to hire a hall. Local activists will know the best places in their area for holding the forum. Be sure to reconfirm the venue two days before the forum.</p>
TIME	<p>Determine the time and length of the forum. The timing of a public forum can vary according to local customs. In some areas 5:00pm to 7:30pm may be a good time whereas in other areas a forum on Friday afternoon (3:30pm to 5:30pm) may be appropriate. This is a decision that local organizers will be best positioned to make. The length of the forum will depend upon the number of speakers and their allotted time. Always book the room at least an hour after the official end of the forum, to ensure plenty of time for networking and mingling. Always start and finish on time.</p>

STEP 4: PREPARE THE HALL



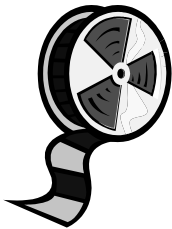
Amplification System

Even if speakers can project their voices well, it is almost always a good idea to have a microphone on the platform that the moderator can control, if the technology is available. It is important to check if the hall will provide an amplification system. If not, it may be possible that someone involved with the event will have access to an amplification system. However, microphones that constantly malfunction can make the forum look unprofessional, so it is important to verify that they work beforehand! A portable microphone to take questions from the audience is a bonus.



The Platform

The speaker's platform should be on or about the same level as the audience. A table lectern is a useful tool for this purpose. Where possible, try to have a banner across the front of the platform with a slogan, the name of the organization prominently displayed, and the organization's website address, if appropriate. This provides press photographers an opportunity to capture the event, often generating more publicity for the cause.



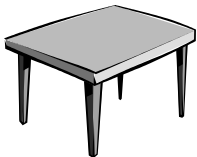
Video the Proceedings

Try to have the proceedings video-taped. This way, videos of the forum can circulate and be seen by many more people than attended the event itself. Some speakers may not want to be videoed and their permission should be sought before the forum begins.



Refreshments

It is helpful if tea and coffee can be provided on a separate table in the corner of the hall or in a corridor. Provide glasses and jugs of water for the speakers. However, refreshments should not disrupt the proceedings.



Spare Tables

Extra tables are useful for displaying literature, petition signing, and merchandise. Organizers can display their publications and products for fundraising. A table for a collection basket may be necessary to meet the expenses incurred by organizing the forum.



Stationery

If questions or recommendations are to be submitted, ensure there are enough pens and notepads for participants to write on.

STEP 5: GENERATE PUBLICITY USING LOCAL MEDIA

Gaining publicity in the media is one of the main aims of a public forum. Using the local media is the primary means of having both the forum and its goals widely publicized. Whenever possible, involve local radio or cable TV networks in the event to expand the forum's reach.

The amount of publicity raised may depend upon local journalists: their time, their interests, and how well they are connected to the organization sponsoring the forum. Generally speaking, local media is more likely to be interested in reporting the activity if it concerns a topical **and local** issue. For example, a public forum on the environment may not necessarily stir the local media, whereas a public forum on the construction of a school or a hospital is likely to be of more interest.

To publicize the forum, first:

- ✓ **Design a slogan:** The slogan should be short, catchy and must easily convey both the topic and the purpose of the forum.
- ✓ **Create a database of local media contact numbers:** seek advice from local activists. It is important to know:
 - the names, addresses, telephone numbers, and, especially, the **fax numbers** for all the local and regional journalists and newspapers, and their **day of publication**
 - the local radio stations
 - the local television stationsInformation about the forum should also be provided to any related publications that are concerned with the issue being discussed.
- ✓ **Contact the local media at least twice:** create a database and at least twice in the 10 days leading up to the forum, fax each of them a one-page press release. Email is still a problematic way to deliver a press release. **A one-page fax is tangible and can be placed in someone's hand;** an email, however, always risks being lost inside the computer.

The first release should announce the forum and its aims, with quotable statements and contact numbers. **This should be sent in time for a possible report to appear in the local papers before the forum.** For example, if the newspaper is published on the Friday morning, it is usually finalized on the Thursday afternoon prior. Therefore, a press release must be sent to the media by Thursday morning, allowing the newspaper enough time to include it in Friday's edition. Another press release should be sent on the morning of the forum, as a reminder, and should include the full agenda for the forum.

Local radio is often interested in local news and such activities, and should also be sent press releases prior to the event. If an important issue is to be discussed, hold on to it until the last 48 hours in order to ensure maximum publicity on the eve, or day, of the forum.

Utilize personal media contacts. If the organizers know any journalists personally, ensure they are contacted and told about the event.

- ✓ **Give written material to the media.** Have copies of speeches or any relevant statements to distribute to members of the audience and the media present at the forum.
- ✓ **After the forum, follow up with another press release:** Relevant national and **all local** media should be provided with full reports of the forum, whether or not they send a reporter. Send another one-page press release **in time for the very next edition of the local paper** that explains what was achieved and what will follow.

Write this report in a journalistic style which can be lifted exactly as is and reported verbatim. Emphasize the elements that make it newsworthy. This will ensure that every local media contact, whether or not it had a journalist present, will have a report of the forum, and can provide another week's publicity.

STEP 6: ADVERTISE LOCALLY

In addition to working with local media, here are more ways of getting the forum publicized:

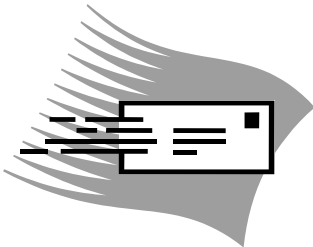
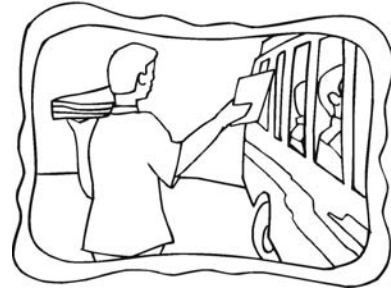


Choose Good Speakers

Let people do what they are good at and comfortable with. There are likely to be a few activists in your group who are articulate and enjoy speaking to crowds.

Distribute Leaflets and Put up Notices

A local leaflet campaign may be possible depending upon the funds available and the length of time in advance of the forum. The flyer should include the slogan you have chosen, the day, time, place, full contact details and a map if necessary. Keep accessible a bundle of fliers and a box of drawing pins or tacks and put up a sign wherever possible. Banners placed in prominent positions may also be useful.



Email Your Contacts

Email every contact that is likely to be interested in the forum, regardless of where they live, and encourage them to forward on the message. Activists will often travel great distances to get to a forum and will certainly tell others whom they know in the area.



Local Newspaper Advertisements

Ideally, the press release has already appeared as a report in the local papers. This report should carry enough information to enable people to know where and when it is being held and who is organizing it. However, a specific paid advertisement in the local paper and on cable television is also a possibility. The advertisement should include the title of forum, place, day, time, contact name, telephone and email. Some newspapers often have a "What's On" column where such an entry can be placed free of charge.

STEP 7: PLAN THE AGENDA

A well-organized agenda is essential for conducting an effective forum or hearing. The agenda establishes the structure for discussion and impacts decisions about appropriate techniques for encouraging participation and achieving results. It may be useful to organize a focus group to brainstorm issues before finalizing the agenda. This may help the forum organizers develop ideas on how to approach certain issues and assist them in developing a list of names of experts to contact about participating in the forum.

Answering the following questions will help you devise an effective agenda:

- **Purpose:** What is the purpose of the forum or hearing?
- **Introduction:** What background information do participants need about the purpose of the forum? How will the forum proceed? What are the forum's specific goals, tasks and intended outcomes?
- **Topics for discussion:** What are the important topics for this forum? What new information needs to be presented or solicited? What previously discussed information needs to be reviewed? How much time should be devoted to each topic?
- **Forum roles:** Who is the best person to present information on each topic? Who will be the forum's chairperson, discussion leaders and recorders?
- **Facilitating the discussions:** How should the discussion be structured? What participation techniques might be appropriate? What specific questions can be asked to stimulate and guide the discussion?
- **Summary:** What information or decision should be highlighted in the summary?
- **Follow-up:** What follow-up activities will likely result from the forum? Who should be responsible for each activity? What is a reasonable schedule for accomplishing each follow-up activity?
- **Closing the Forum:** Who should deliver the closing remarks? (Usually the chair). How can every participant's contribution be acknowledged?

Sample agendas:

<u>AGENDA</u>	
5:00pm	Chairperson's opening remarks
5:05pm	Mr. Abid Khan speaks (He/she is a speaker from the panel)
5:20pm	Questions on content of Mr. Khan's address
5:25pm	Mr. Murad Ali speaks
5:40pm	Questions on content of Mr. Murad Ali's address
5:45pm	<i>Next Speaker (and so on through the speakers)</i>
6:30pm	Panel and audience general discussion
7:20pm	Chairperson's closing remarks should include a summary of the discussion.
7:30pm	Close of Meeting

<u>AGENDA</u>	
5:00pm	Chairperson's opening remarks
5:10pm	First Panelist
5:25pm	Second Panelist
5:40pm	Third Panelist
5:55pm	Fourth Panelist
6:10pm	Fifth Panelist
6:25pm	Panel and audience – general discussion
7:20pm	Chairperson's closing remarks should include a summary of the discussion
7.30pm	Close of meeting

STEP 8: CONDUCT THE FORUM

Tips for Conducting a Successful Public Forum or Hearing

Rehearsal

It is always a good idea for the chairperson, moderator and all presenters to review the forum plan and rehearse their presentations. Doing so ensures that everyone understands the agenda and will be working together. A rehearsal also helps the presenters relax and provides the logistics coordinator an opportunity to address presenters' needs.



Welcoming Attendees

The chairperson and other guest speakers should create a friendly environment for the forum by acting as gracious hosts, greeting people with a smile and a handshake as they arrive.

The Media

Introduce the chair to the media before the forum begins. A time can be arranged for interviews or statements after the event. However, such contacts should not be allowed to delay or disrupt the event. If necessary, the chairperson should quietly excuse him or herself at some point after the forum has already started, as long as there is a moderator who can lead the discussion in the chairperson's absence.

Begin on Time!

The beginning of the forum will establish the tone for the entire event. A punctual start demonstrates respect for the citizens who have taken the time to attend the forum. Do not delay the opening of the forum.



Introductions

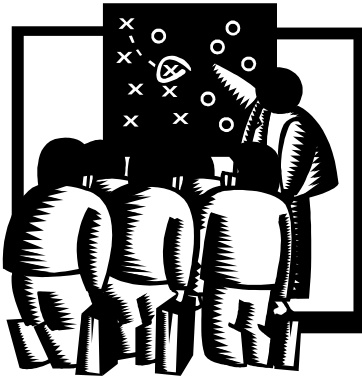
In addition to greeting the audience, the chairperson should introduce members of the panels and other important public officials who are present at the event. He or she should then explain the purpose of the forum, review the agenda, and describe the ground rules for conducting the forum. It is helpful to have someone distribute copies of the agenda to people as they enter the hall. The chairperson can also convey important information to the audience, such as where the microphones are located, where and how people should register to speak, where information packets or refreshments are located. He or she should conclude his or her remarks by thanking everybody for attending. It is important that the chairperson does not take up too much time with his or her remarks as people have come to hear the panelists and to participate in the forum.

Stick to the Agenda

Keep the agenda moving, making sure the discussion stays focused and that the forum ends on time. Before closing the forum, the chairperson should announce follow-up activities and how results of the forum will be incorporated into the government's decisions on the issue in question. The chairperson should conclude his or her short closing remarks by thanking every one again for attending the forum.

Participation Techniques

There are many ways to facilitate an open and participatory discussion. Three of these include:



Brainstorming: this is a good technique for collecting and creating new ideas. It is essential that all participants in the process are encouraged to take part and that no idea is unfairly criticized.

- Encourage all participants to provide ideas.
- Record all ideas without evaluation.
- Conduct a discussion of all the ideas.
- Rank items by priority.
- Record the results of the forum.

Consensus Building: citizens in a given community often have different ideas about what the community's priorities are and how things should be done. Finding common ground among these different interests and ideas is one of the most important tasks of local government. It is the first step toward making decisions that everyone can support.

All participants should commit to voicing their disagreements honestly and openly at the forum. All participants must permit other people in attendance to have their say. If appropriate, all participants should agree to continue discussing the subject until a consensus is reached, which is accomplished by working toward a proposal that makes at least some accommodation to all the points of view represented at the forum.

Multimedia: If possible and appropriate, show a brief film or slides to demonstrate and highlight the issue. This should not exceed 5-7 minutes.

The Role of the Chairperson

The chairperson plays a critical role in ensuring that the forum proceeds according to the agenda and that individuals can participate without prejudice. The following tips offer some strategies to assist the chairperson:



- **Print the Agenda**

It is useful to hand out printed agendas to people as they enter the hall, or to be placed on their seats. The printing of this agenda is the responsibility of the chairperson who can then delegate the task as he or she sees fit.

This will...

- **Ensure the audience knows when they will get a chance to speak.** Explaining the agenda to the audience when introducing the forum will ensure that they know exactly when they will have a chance to ask their questions.
- **Allow time for both questions and comments.** The contributions from the audience are just as important as the contributions from the platform. It is important to structure the forum so that audience members will have an opportunity to ask questions *and* make comments.

By reviewing the agenda at the outset, everyone will know when there will be time for **questions**. When everybody on the platform has spoken, the forum will be **opened up to comments and discussion** from the audience. Alternatively, it may be decided that written questions should be submitted (especially if it is a large forum) while allowing some time for questions from the floor.

An alternative would be to allow the panel to present their view points and request that the participants write down their specific questions; after the presentations,

DEALING WITH HECKLERS

There might be attempts from members of the audience to disrupt the forum or destabilize the proceedings. These disruptions could come from individuals or part of a coordinated group. Experienced speakers are used to dealing with hecklers - they ignore them, or have an armory of rejoinders to undermine the interruption and win over the audience. If the speaker is interrupted or loses his or her flow, the chairperson might have to intervene and request that the heckler be quiet. The audience usually sides with the chairperson in such situations.

If the heckler continues, security in charge of the forum should step in and request that the heckler be quiet and sit down. It is important that the organizers retain control of the microphone and do not hand it over to speakers in the audience. If a group of opponents is determined to disrupt a forum and coordinate their tactics, they will usually succeed. All that can be done is for the chairperson to make it clear to the audience who is to blame for the disruption, and close the meeting.

citizens can have time to ask the questions they have written down. At the end, the panel can be given an opportunity to respond with brief statements before concluding or adopting a resolution.

If the forum is not rigorously chaired in this manner, it risks descending into chaos, with speakers sidelined or not heard at all, the audience clamoring for a say, and everyone growing frustrated and angry.

Introduce the Speakers Properly. For the chairperson to properly introduce the panelists, each should prepare a short biographical account of themselves.



Keep the Panelists Exactly to Their Allotted Time. Some panelists have the tendency to speak without regard to their allotted time. 15-20 minutes is usually quite adequate for most people, and some speakers may only wish to speak for 10 minutes or less. The main speaker may need up to 30 minutes, but none should exceed 45 minutes. If a speaker has not finished in the allotted time, he or she can be reminded that the question and answer period can be used to elaborate further. It may be useful to ring a bell to warn the speaker that they must finish their speech.

Repeat the Question for the Benefit of the Audience. If an audience member asks a question, repeat the question to ensure that everyone has heard the inquiry. This is necessary because often the people at the front of the hall are the only ones who can hear the initial question. If the chairperson does not do this, the speaker should repeat the question before answering it.

The chairperson should also **draw the attention of the audience to the literature and merchandise available**, and encourage them to take action by **signing a petition, leaving their names and contact details on a special list**, or attending the next event.

STEP 9: FOLLOW-UP IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FORUM



Sign a Petition

Ensure that the petition is placed in a prominent location where attendees can easily locate and sign the petition; also make sure that there are ample pens and petition papers for people to sign.

Collect Names, Addresses, Telephone Numbers and Emails of Participants. This is vital in ensuring that such events can be replicated and facilitates further follow-up.

Promote Literature and Merchandise

An enthused audience will be eager for more information. Therefore, have handouts which summarize the content of the forum and provide contact information for further inquiries. It is advisable to prepare a one page summary on the issue with factual details, problems and possible solutions. Situate the literature and merchandise tables near the exit so that everyone passes them on their way out.

Network

It is important to **book the hall for at least an hour after the official close of the forum.** People who have made the effort to attend are likely to be more highly politically motivated than most. Have plenty of business cards to give out.



Finally...

Follow-up with the Contacts

Capitalize on the enthusiasm from the forum and contact those who appeared most interested in participating in further activity beyond the event.

STEP 10: DEBRIEF ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The management team and any government officials who participated in the forum or whose work may be affected by it should assemble within a week after the event to review the forum and evaluate its results.

Some typical review questions include:

- Did the forum accomplish its goals?
- What did the government officials learn that will help them manage a program or resolve an issue?
- Are additional forums necessary?
- What can local officials learn from this forum to improve future forums?

Produce a summary report of the forum and distribute copies to all relevant decision makers, the management team, all news media and as many of the forum's participants as possible. The report should identify the time, place and sponsor of the forum. It should also provide a summary of the forum's agenda. Furthermore, the report should mention:

- Who attended and participated
- What ideas were discussed
- What decisions were made
- What follow-up activities are planned
- When and where any future events or meetings on this topic will be held

REPORT WRITING

Headings that may be useful:

- Introduction
- Summary of Forum (including summary of panelists speeches)
- Citizen's questions and answers
- Resolution passed (if any)
- Outcomes
- Media coverage
- Conclusion

The forum can be understood as the first steps of citizen participation. The crucial next steps are the **follow-up activities** planned after the event. All efforts should be made to ensure that the promises that were made at the forum, such as providing the public with further information on an issue, are kept. Doing so demonstrates to citizens that organization officials listened to what they had to say and took their suggestions seriously. Such impressions encourage continued participation and increase public confidence in the institution of local government.

If you can identify prominent supporters who did not come to the forum, **send them a summary** of what happened, and make sure they are invited to the next event.

Checklist for Organizing a Public Forum	
Before the Forum	Have you booked the forum venue and obtained the key to get in?
	Is the room prepared with seats, tables, a backdrop and catering?
	Has publicity been sent to all interested parties?
	Do the speakers know where to go, what they are expected to say, how long they are expected to speak, and what time they will be able to leave?
	Do the speakers need transportation to and from the forum, or expenses for a hotel?
	Have the speakers been offered food and drink?
	Do the microphones work?
	Is there a sign-in desk?
	Is there a need to hire a photographer?
	Is the banner properly displayed?
During the Forum	Make sure the chairperson is firm but fair.
	Begin and finish on time.
	Ensure that the chairperson establishes the purpose of the forum and introduces the speakers.
	Make announcements about future activities.
	Take questions but avoid speeches from the audience.
	Deal firmly with hecklers.
After the Forum	Thank your guest speakers and volunteers in writing.
	Write to attendees and non-attendees.
	Phone target journalists and tell them about the forum.
	Ensure that all speakers' expenses have been covered and that the cost of hiring the hall and the catering have been settled.
	Follow up on what action needs to be taken as a result of the forum.
	Arrange for a small group of supporters to evaluate the success of the forum and plan for the next one.