



# PRIMER 10

## TOWN HALL MEETINGS

### SUMMARY:

Public forums play an important role in connecting elected officials with the needs of their constituents. Use this guide to prepare you for attending a town hall meeting, asking the right question, and following up effectively.

## PRIMER ISSUE

10

## TOWN HALL MEETINGS



### WHY PUBLIC ADVOCACY MATTERS

Dating back to the foundation of our nation, elected officials have relied on public events like town hall meetings to connect with their constituents, share updates on their priorities, and respond to questions and concerns.

These public forums are a great way to make the issues you care about more visible to your members of Congress and your neighbors. World Vision often hears from representatives that they could take greater action on global poverty issues if more constituents spoke up with support.



### BY RAISING AN ISSUE PUBLICLY IN A TOWN HALL, YOU CAN:



- » Make an initial connection or deepen your existing relationship by building familiarity with local staff and your representative. They'll appreciate you cared enough to show up!
- » Ask a question to gain perspective into your representative's stance on an issue (especially if they have limited or no information on their website). Their responses to other constituents' questions will also help you in future engagement with their office.
- » Educate your neighbors about the importance of global issues, so public support can grow.

This primer will help you prepare for and follow up after attending a town hall meeting.



## HOW DO I FIND OUT ABOUT TOWN HALL MEETINGS OR OTHER PUBLIC EVENTS?



Sign up for your representatives' email newsletter on their website. You can also follow them on social media like Facebook and Twitter. They'll share when local or virtual events are scheduled and how to participate.  



## WHAT HAPPENS AT A TOWN HALL

» **In-person town hall meetings** are usually held in a local public space—school gymnasiums, community centers, the library, or even a church sanctuary. There is no standardized format for a town hall meeting—some focus on specific topics and others are more open-ended. Members of Congress often begin by sharing updates on legislative priorities or comments on current events. Then, there is typically an open period where constituents are encouraged to use a microphone to ask a question. If you plan on asking a question, we recommend showing up early to ensure you get a seat near the aisle, so you can access the microphone. When the question period opens, don't wait—get in the queue early!

» **Virtual town hall meetings** have gained popularity. Legislators may host their meeting on a video conferencing platform like Zoom or Google Meets, a social media platform like Facebook Live, or a simple phone conference line. With virtual meetings, it is common for legislators to only answer questions that are submitted ahead of time. Pay attention to your representative's newsletter or social media to make sure you don't miss this opportunity!





## ENSURE YOUR QUESTION CONTAINS THESE THREE COMPONENTS:

- 1 Introduce yourself.** Avoid long introductory statements. Simply share your name, the city you live in (to prove you are a constituent), and your connection to World Vision or global poverty issues.

**Example:** “My name is [NAME] and I live in [CITY]. I am a [OCCUPATION] and am also a Volunteer Advocate with World Vision, a Christian humanitarian relief and development organization.”

- 2 Provide background.** Your member of Congress will get questions on everything from healthcare to national security to education! You can help them respond more thoroughly to your question by providing some brief context. Bonus: You’ll likely educate your representative AND their constituents about your issue in the process.

**Example:** “U.S. foreign assistance helps build stable economies and infrastructure while giving communities a path out of poverty through access to basics like health facilities, schools, and clean water. It accounts for less than 1% of the total federal budget, and yet the President has proposed to cut these crucial programs by 30%.”

- 3 Ask their opinion.** Ask a direct question that you want your member of Congress to answer. We encourage a kind approach—the priority is simply to make them aware of your concerns in a public forum and learn more about their views. If you disagree with their answer, that’s okay! It will help you plan how to approach them in a future conversation. If they avoid your question or don’t answer it fully, you’re allowed to ask a follow up question to clarify. Just be careful not to burn bridges or back them into a corner—you want them to welcome your next meeting request!

**Example:** “What is your opinion of U.S. foreign assistance?”

## MAKE IT COUNT: ASK A QUESTION

While observing a town hall meeting can provide insight into the motivations and priorities of your representative and fellow community members, asking a question is key to elevate global poverty concerns and to build your relationship with the office.

Come prepared with a couple questions. A good question is brief (no more than 30 seconds!), polite, and asks your member of Congress to share their opinion or position on a topic. You can ask about a broad issue, like their opinion on the foreign assistance budget, or a very specific issue, like how they will vote on a bill.





## STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Remember, you can reach out to us for help wordsmithing a question! Here are other sample questions to consider:

- » This past year, I have been advocating for the U.S. to do more to address gender-based violence for women and girls in humanitarian emergencies around the globe, like the Syrian refugee crisis. I've been pleased to learn that the U.S. has been a leader in these efforts through Safe from the Start, a State Department and USAID program. Are you familiar with this work, and what do you see as the U.S. role in protecting women and girls from violence around the world?
- » World Vision, a global humanitarian organization, predicts that millions more children will be exposed to violence globally because of increased vulnerabilities caused by COVID-19. Do you feel the U.S. has a role to play in protecting children and other vulnerable populations in the wake of the pandemic? If not, why? If so, what should it look like?
- » How supportive are you of U.S. foreign assistance, and how do you see faith-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and the U.S. government working together to help fight global poverty?



*Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. —Proverbs 31:9 (NIV)*



## IN ACTION



## AFTER THE TOWN HALL

- » **If the response was positive:** Thank them! Gratitude goes a long way. You can thank them publicly on social media by sharing what they said, and you can also email the representative or your staff contact to thank them for their support.
- » **If the response was negative:** Take some time to learn more about their concerns and perspective on the issue. Use what you've learned to influence your approach in a future conversation on the topic. Pray that God will work through you to change their heart!
- » **In your next meeting:** Mention that you attended the town hall meeting, demonstrating that you're an engaged constituent, and dialogue more about their response. You can offer additional data or stories to back up your opinion and offer to be a resource to the office on similar issues in the future.

Volunteer Advocate Emily Smith attended her congressman's town hall meeting at the invitation of her staff contact. She made sure to wear her World Vision orange for recognition and recruited a friend to join her for moral support. She took notes on some of her representative's statements that gave her insight into his perspective and priorities. After the town hall, she stayed for a meet-and-greet with the congressman. Emily was able to introduce herself and thank him personally for voting in favor of a bill for which she had advocated!

In her next meeting with the office, she reminded them of the town hall and thanked them again.