

Preparing for a City Council or Board Presentation: A Checklist

Presenting at a city council hearing or a board of supervisors meeting is an important part of your policy campaign. This is your chance to demonstrate strong community support for the ordinance, provide testimony that addresses the concerns of elected officials, and showcase your political savvy. To accomplish these goals, you will need to plan the event carefully and strategically. The checklist below will help you prepare.



KNOW THE DETAILS OF THE MEETING

(The city or board clerk is a good source of information for these questions and it will also help to attend a council/board meeting ahead of time to watch the process & protocols.)

- Clarify the specific action the council/board is taking. Is it a vote to draft an ordinance, a first reading to approve the ordinance with a vote, or simply a discussion about the issue?
- Make sure you know the time and location for the meeting, where your people should park, when the item will come up on the agenda, and any other important details.
- Determine whether public comments will be allowed and when. If you are working with youth, be mindful of how late they are able to stay. If the ordinance is scheduled late in the evening, let your champion on the council/board know to see if they can bring up your item earlier.
- Know how much time is permitted for each speaker and if there is a light or buzzer that indicates when your time is up.
- Learn the process for signing up speakers and whether you can submit your speaker cards in the order you want.

KNOW YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Know who is for or against the ordinance and who is undecided and needs convincing.
- Know which council/board member will introduce the ordinance and champion its passage.
- Meet with each elected official individually beforehand to learn any concerns they may have about the ordinance.
- Collect and assess the information you have about all of the officials but focus specifically on those who have not yet decided how to vote. What are their concerns? Who might influence them?

WORK CLOSELY WITH YOUR ALLIES INSIDE GOVERNMENT

- Prepare your champion on the council or board with arguments and facts.
- Understand the concerns of staff such as county counsel, city attorney, city manager and relevant department heads, and address their concerns before the meeting.
- Keep all your allies inside government in the loop and aware of what's happening as best you know it.

DETERMINE YOUR MESSAGE

- Select 2-4 key messages which all your speakers will emphasize.
- Formulate your coalition's position on the ordinance or resolution under consideration so that everyone is on the same page. Do you support it fully? Are you recommending some changes? Or are you opposing due to some concerns?
- Understand where the elected officials stand on different aspects of a complex ordinance and target your messaging where the ordinance needs support. For example, in a potential comprehensive outdoor smoking ban, support among the council members may be weakest for outdoor dining.

SELECT YOUR SPEAKERS CAREFULLY

- Find people with personal stories related to the issue; these are the most compelling to an elected official. These should be people who live in the community.
- Find people who are known personally and respected by the various decision makers; these are very persuasive speakers.
- Find people who represent well-respected organizations and are authorities on the subject; these lend credibility to your argument. Ideally these are people from your community, but can be regional organizations.
- Find people who might be expected to oppose you, but support your position instead (for example a restaurant owner who supports smoke-free outdoor dining).

PREPARE THE SPEAKERS

- Work together with your speakers to develop talking points (provide complete talking points for those who need it).
- Go over the talking points with the speakers, and if possible practice your speeches with each other. This can be done either over the phone, in person or during a rehearsal at a coalition meeting.
- Give speakers the materials they should reference in their speech.
- Let each speaker know the order of speakers and where they fit in it.
- Check in with every speaker before the meeting to address any last minute concerns and make sure they will attend.
- Make sure speakers know the details of the event (where is the meeting taking place, what time should they get there, where to park, etc.).

PREPARE MATERIALS

- Even though all of your supporters may not speak, have stickers, t-shirts or other visible items to show elected officials how many people in the audience support the issue.
- Have petitions, letters, survey data, packets of news articles and other supportive information available to distribute to the council or board members during appropriate testimony.
- Bring visuals such as cigarette butts you picked up off the beach, cigarettes the youth purchased during the youth purchase survey, or photos of smokers huddled outside a restaurant or bar.

ASSEMBLE A LARGE TURNOUT OF PEOPLE

- Send an action alert to your coalition and follow up with phone calls to determine those who are interested.
- Follow up with a reminder phone call a day or two before the hearing to those who indicated they were interested.
- Call anyone else you've worked with and talked to throughout the campaign.
- Identify those who need assistance to attend (a ride, child care, bus fare) and do your best to help.
- Put an announcement of the event in local newspaper calendars and other media.
- Put an announcement on Twitter, Facebook or other social networking sites as well as your coalition web site to help you organize your coalition, recruit additional interested parties, and communicate event details.

ALERT MEDIA

- If you want media attention for the council/board meeting, send a press release to your local media several days beforehand.
- Have a press release ready to send out after the meeting concludes with quotes from your coalition members and partners. This can be adjusted depending on the exact results of the meeting.

HOLD A POST MEETING DEBRIEF GATHERING

- Meet with your key coalition members to debrief and plan next steps.
- Determine if there was a key piece of information/data needed by a decision maker or staff and be sure to follow up and send that information.
- Thank council/board members who supported your ordinance, especially your champion.