



Confront polluters. Seed solutions.



photo by dan p wood

WORKSHOP
PUBLIC HEARINGS

PUBLIC HEARINGS WORKSHOP

WORKSHOP GOAL

To develop a plan to build power in your campaign through a public hearing.

AGENDA

Welcome, Agenda Check, Introductions

Principles of Public Hearings

Steps to Planning a Public Hearing

Step 1: Campaign Strategy

Step 2: Public Hearing Process: Logistics and Community Care

Step 3: Public Hearing Goals

Step 4: Priority Audience(s) of the Hearing and Influences

Step 5: Message and Testimony

Step 6: Tactics and Plan

Evaluation and Next Workshops

PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Get Clear on Your Goals and Your Plan

Public hearings are often held by polluting companies or broken government agencies. The process is often rigged—where you know a polluter’s permit is going to get rubber stamped—and testifying alone won’t solve the problem. That being said, testifying at public hearings is important to get your message on the record, and you can use a rigged process to build your people power, influence decision-makers, get media coverage, recruit for your group, and educate the public. Get clear on your goals and make a plan to get there.

2. Know the Process and Consider Bending the Rules

Public hearings are set up to discourage meaningful public involvement. By knowing the rules of the game ahead of time, you can plan effectively—including whether you want to follow the rules. Will you ask for the agenda to be changed beforehand? Will you clap for each other even if it’s not allowed? Will you stop testifying when they ask you to?

3. Use Public Hearings to Build Your Group and Your People Power

To make the change you want for your community, you need a group with people power. That can be getting people involved in your group and your campaign with each meeting or action, in large and small ways, and bringing them into the fight. Always have a sign-in sheet!

4. Lead with a Message that is Compelling, Concise, Consistent, and Controls the Issue

To win, you need people power, and you can get people involved by sharing your message and telling your story. We are told to believe that numbers, statistics, and reports alone are enough—and they’re not. The best messages are short enough for a grocery line conversation, repeated throughout your campaign, share your values and emotional connection to the work, and frame the conversation on your terms (not your opposition’s). Make sure everyone who testifies uses the same message.

Learn more in the Messaging workshop.

5. Make a Media Plan

Whether it’s having a press conference before the hearing, inviting reporters to attend, or having a social media plan to share your own story, make a plan to get media coverage of the event.

Consider Holding Your Own “People’s Public Hearing”

There are times when holding your own “public hearing” will help you reach your campaign goal. Invite the public, invite decision-makers, invite media, make a social media plan, and set your own rules.

STEPS TO PLANNING A PUBLIC HEARING

STEP 1: START WITH YOUR CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Your strategy for the public hearing flows from your overall campaign strategy, your theory for how you're going to win.

_____ has the power to _____
PRIORITY DECISION-MAKER NAME[S] GOAL

by _____
PROCESS

We believe we can get _____
DECISION-MAKER NAME[S]

to do the right thing if we show support from _____
INFLUENCES AND TACTICS

We will build people power by organizing in _____
OTHER PROCESSES

STEP 2: PUBLIC HEARING PROCESS: LOGISTICS AND COMMUNITY CARE

Logistics Report-Back

Date and time: _____

Location: _____

Size of room: _____

Agenda/order of presentation: _____

Will they take questions? _____

Who is the moderator? _____

Who sets the agenda? _____

Do you need to sign up to talk? _____

How much time do you have to talk? _____

Will speakers use microphones? _____

Circle the logistics of the public hearing you want to change.

Who can change it? _____

Who will work on the change? _____

Community Care Discussion

What do people need to be able to attend the meeting?

Community care checklist: Things you always need

- Hearing is in a building that people feel comfortable going to or are familiar with
- Building has a ramp or elevator for folks who need them
- In-person meeting has a Zoom link for participants to speak
- Meeting is planned for a time when people can come

Community care checklist: Things you might need

- Free childcare
- Interpretation for: _____
- Closed captioning or ASL interpretation
- Transportation support:
 - Public transportation, rides, carpools, vouchers/free parking
 - Food

What other needs are there? _____

What other needs are there? _____

STEP 3: PUBLIC HEARING GOALS

Get clear on your goals for your hearing. Testifying alone won't solve the problem. That being said, even if the process is rigged, you can use it to build your people power, influence decision-makers, get media coverage, recruit for your group, and educate the public.

Potential Hearing Goals	This is very important	This is somewhat important	This is less important
Influence Priority Decision-Makers			
Build Your Group			
Educate the Public			
Media Coverage			
Enter Testimony/ Facts Into Record			

STEP 4: PRIORITY AUDIENCE(S) OF THE HEARING & INFLUENCES

Now that you know your public hearing goals, name your priority audience for the public hearing. Who must be moved into action in order to attain your goals? Always keep the decision-maker of your campaign and your strategy (hero, cover, pressure) in mind.

Priority Audience: _____

Influences on Priority Audience

Influence Category	Who: Who has the most influence and is likely to be on your side? Brainstorm.	How: What tactic will you use to show support?
The Public		
Other Organizations		
Media		
Elected Officials		
Personal Contacts/ Friends and Family		
Influential People/ Financial Influences		
Experts/Information		

STEP 5: MESSAGE AND TESTIMONY

Brainstorm words that help and hurt your cause. From that brainstorm, create the campaign message.

Words that help your cause

(words to use)

Words that hurt your cause

(words to avoid)

The key parts of any good campaign message are: problem, solution, and action.

Problem

Paint a picture of the threat.

Solution

Name your goals, your demands, or the ideal outcome.

Action

Call on the decision-maker to use their power to do the right thing. Remember your strategy to hit the right tone.

STEP 5: MESSAGE AND TESTIMONY CONTINUED

Message

Bring all the pieces together. Using the **compelling** words that **control** your message, create a **concise** version you can **consistently** say to the public, elected officials, and the media. This is the short response you would give to the basic question: "What is your campaign about?" This includes your demand for the hearing.

Slogan

Create a short, memorable slogan that you can use for stickers, fact sheets, a social media hashtag, and other materials. What do you want people to remember? What's your chant? Does this include your demand?

Visuals that Complement Your Message

What do you want to come to someone's mind when they think about this campaign? What visuals will motivate them to take action?

Testimony

Put together your own personal testimony. If your group has multiple points you want to make, make sure you have someone in your group to cover each point. Your message always goes at the beginning and the end.

Personal Testimony Sandwich

1. Message
2. Name/Group/Address
3. Personal Story/Testimony
4. Message

What points do you want to make through your testimony?

If you decided that you need experts, who are the experts you want to recruit to testify?

STEP 6: TACTICS AND PLAN

Realms	Tactics	Who	Date
Hearing Logistics			
Public Turnout & Recruitment			
Media			
Testimony			
Community Care Checklist			

Date	Date	Date	Goals

EVALUATION AND NEXT WORKSHOPS

What went well about this workshop?

What can change about this workshop?

Do you need workshops for things like:

- Campaign Planning
- Messaging
- Media Events
- Group Building
- Fundraising
- Winning a Community Vote
- Re-evaluating and Updating Your Campaign Plan

Do you need training on other campaign skills:

- Knocking on doors
- Starting an online petition
- Holding your own meetings
- Pitching reporters
- Using social media
- Recruiting supporters online
- Public speaking
- Other: _____

Next Workshop: _____

At Community Action Works, we believe that environmental threats are big, but the power of well-organized community groups is bigger.

That's why we work side by side with everyday people to confront those who are polluting and harming the health of our communities. We partner with the people who are most impacted by environmental problems—which are Black, Indigenous, People of Color and poor communities—training them with the know-how anyone would need to make change in their own backyard.

Because when you and your neighbors know how to make change, you can build the power to transform our world.

WORKSHOPS WE OFFER

Campaign Planning

Group Building

Fundraising

Community Votes

Public Hearings

Messaging

Media Events

Community Action Works

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Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island