

CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE TOWN HALL MEETING FOR WOMEN & GIRLS

By Kate Kain- MWC Commissioner District 4

Goal

To conduct an effective town hall meeting that is attended by a diverse group of women and girls from your community. To ensure that you meet your goal, be inclusive rather than exclusive in your approach to outreach. “Come one, come all” is at the heart of your outreach. Remember: it’s tough to get people to come out for meetings. The greater the cross section of women and girls you invite, the greater the chances one or more groups will attend. Reach out to all ethnicities, cultures, religions, economic backgrounds, professions, **ages**, sexualities and abilities. Reach out using translated materials in whatever languages represent the underserved in your area. Reach out to mothers working in the home as well as those working professionally. Reach out to girls through their middle and high schools.

Invite everyone you know, and **tell them you need their attendance and input.** Include those you have met through various networks: athletics (coaches included), school functions, medical, therapeutic, support groups, business networks, social services, fundraisers. **Personal invitations make a big difference.** To each woman I invited personally, I encouraged her to come and bring her unique perspective. I asked the owner of the local herb shop to come and speak about the medicinal and herbal trends/needs of women and girls. I asked the girls basketball team coach to bring her input on girls and athletics. I asked the high school counselors to survey teens and bring their input. I asked public health nurses and midwives for the same. I asked the mothers I knew who were homeschooling their kids to come and talk about the education/school system and the changes needed to improve the education for women and girls. I asked the girls involved in 4-H and junior firefighters to talk about the opportunities as well as challenges of growing up in a rural area. I asked the Latino network to speak about the challenges facing women and girls from their perspective, and in their language. I asked small business owners to come and talk about the economic needs. I asked environmental activists to come and talk about environmental concerns relevant to women and girls, including pesticides!

You can get free publicity by asking the local nonprofits, schools, provider networks and churches to email your outreach flier to their members. **In person meetings will help facilitate this.**

Diversity is really key.

If you are worried about too many different issues coming up, **plan your agenda to focus the group, rather than screening out participants.** Get women and girls to the meeting first, and then focus the meeting. Ask for “thoughtful input geared towards improving the lives of women and girls growing up and growing old in _____(West Marin)”. Limit each person to less than 2 minutes. Be prepared for participants who will not follow your guidelines, and have helpers to usher them out if needed.

Plan to have a focused agenda, and stick to it, rather than trying to screen out participants in your outreach!

STEP ONE: PLAN THE EVENT

Before you get into the details, plan the BIG PICTURE.

1) **Form a committee** and divide responsibilities for materials, shopping, facilitation (chairperson), outreach.

- 2) **Select a Chairperson** (also emcee/facilitator) for the event. This should be local Commissioner doing primary job of outreach.
- 3) **Develop a timeline.**
- 4) **Secure location.** Consider parking, neutrality, comfort, child care.
- 5) **Develop agenda:** who will speak? **All presentations kept to minimum** (5 minutes max). Main agenda will be gathering input from those who attend. Will you serve food? The time of the event (2 hours max). Do you need an interpreter? Any special things you can add to the flier, like special guests/entertainers/appearances/art show/ etc. **You'll need this worked out before you make your flier.** They will want the publicity!
- 6) **Who will you invite?** Make a list of key community members to invite. This will help you finalize your agenda. ***This will remind of you who's who in your area, and what they are interested in so you can tailor your event to connect to them.*** Don't forget: child care directors, school principals and counselors and advocates, social services, senior services, teen groups, media contacts, health care directors, church leaders, corporate, business, and community based organization directors, key community members, women's groups that meet in your area (writing/socializing/other), local women running businesses, homes, farms, 4-H – rural, suburban, or city. Leaders of underserved/underrepresented communities (Latino, for example) and their networks. Go through your personal networks as well as look on line at businesses listed by googling your town. Many businesses have emails right there....just click to contact them and attach your THM flier and invite them personally.
- 7) **Invite special guests:** Imagine and find special guests but KEEP IT SHORT (15 minutes max) --local girls groups, art classes to bring art work, photography class to document for high school/college project or paper/local college students to be scribes/recorders/videographers. Any girls/womens group to come and display themselves (for example, a local girls group that meets to talk about menstruation wanted to come and read their poetry!) Contact theatre classes/groups/individuals to do short theatre piece.

Ask local performer to lead short singing break for the group.

Other ideas for special guests: appearances by local entertainers/VIP's/writers.....be open to any women/girls interest areas as these guests make the evening more entertaining and interesting! Local chefs? Moms?

Find a short dvd/video to show (15 minutes max) that could help publicize the event.
- 8) **Make a flier** -- 8 1/2 x 11 for posting, 3x5 for handing out at meetings and leaving on counters of clinics, community centers, stores. After you have confirmed your guests, your interpreter, your agenda, your location, time, any other special offerings (food, video) make a flier in English and any other languages needed to be emailed, posted and left on counters. Get translated and copied back to back as well.
- 9) **Get approval from Needs Assessment committee.**
- 10) **Get partners/cosponsors (optional)** While this may be unnecessary, it could bring more people to the event.
- 11) **Prepare now for an adhoc committee to be formed at the meeting for follow up and sustaining effort.**

STEP TWO: OUTREACH

- 1) E Mail "save the date" announcement and flier 6 weeks in advance
- 2) Email personal letters of invitation to everyone you know, attach flier – 4-6 weeks advance.
- 3) Get flier copied -- 6 weeks in advance
- 4) Make the agenda in English & other language– 4 weeks advance
- 5) Make a list of places to do outreach – on websites, tv channels, bulletin boards, post offices, laundromats.
- 6) Post fliers in post offices, bulletin boards, laundry, fast food (for teenagers!) –4 weeks in advance
- 7) Post announcement on relevant websites and tv channel for local activities...
- 8) Hire an interpreter for the event and get equipment reserved – 4 weeks advance. Letter of invitation to public officials – 4 weeks advance
- 9) Ask local elementary and high schools to send your flier home in weekly packets or post on their websites
- 10) Ask colleges to post on their websites.
- 11) Post flier on Craigs List – 4 weeks advance
- 12) First press releases out 4 weeks advance, then again 2 weeks advance. Make personal calls one week before to confirm they are coming to cover the event. Get Board of Supervisors to write/MWC to send in addition to sending your own as commissioners.
- 13) Submit letter to the editor for local papers and IJ from the local commissioners – 4 weeks before event.
- 14) Submit Guest Column from local Commissioner to local newspapers – 4 weeks before,
- 15) Write PSA's for local radio station 3 weeks advance. Confirm 2 weeks ahead.
- 16) Ask local radio to tape record the event 3 weeks advance.
- 17) Post event on local web sites (for instance, west marin alliance web page)
- 18) Ask someone to video tape the event/take group photo minimum.
- 19) Arrange and conduct face to face meetings with selected community groups to invite them to help us with outreach as well as to invite them and their participants to join us (churches/Mass on Sunday in English & Spanish, community based organizations, health clinics, senior center, teen programs, middle and high schools, latino networking group, other underserved networking groups. Present the agenda to them and look for joint activities that could be incorporated in the meeting, like letting them set up a table with their information. Get on their staff meeting calendars 4 weeks in advance. Many only meet monthly. These will be really important meetings...Plan to take time off that week to go to the most relevant staff meetings at local social services, senior services, underserved networking groups, high school, middle school, and community based orgs, as well as church groups.

Step Three: Materials and Set Up

- 1) Prepare handouts for the meeting – whatever is in English, also in whatever languages being provided. (Spanish translator: laura e. asturias [laura@lacuerda.org] is who I work with. Charges \$10 for 100 words. Is in another country....gets paid by emailing you an invoice, and having check put into her Wells Fargo account.)
- 2) Plan for set up and clean up. Get help reserved 2 weeks advance
- 3) Arrange for treats and drinks – 1 week advance
- 4) Prepare thank you letters to send out after the event...or even to hand out at the event!

- 5) Create communication system/adhoc committee for follow up....ask someone to volunteer to handle this. Set up a chat room online/web page/or simply have a participant give their email address as the address to stay informed on follow up. Set follow up meeting date.

STEP FOUR: Count Down and Get Ready!

- 1) Make 100 copies agenda front to back, English & other language, 2 days before
- 2) Prepare evaluation sheet and community written – input form front to back both languages
- 3) Copy 100 Spanish/English MWC history of accomplishments 2 days before
- 4) Pick up all copies day before
- 5) Bring pencils & a basket day of
- 6) Prepare and bring sign in sheets (include name, phone, email, address, affiliation)
- 7) Shop and bring treats for 50 – OPTIONAL
- 8) Bring napkins for 50 Thursday–OPTIONAL
- 9) Bring serving trays for treats Thursday – OPTIONAL
- 10) Bring equipment and interpreter -
- 11) Email directions to commissioners & tell them to wear MWC pins Wed -
- 12) Buy and bring 100 name tags day before -

STEP FIVE: DAY OF

- 1) Arrive 2 hours prior -- Chairperson and anyone putting up displays. Receives site orientation, keys, etc. Helps with putting up any displays.
- 2) Arrive one hour prior – all commissioners assisting - set up food, chairs in oval/circle if possible, arrange microphones, put agenda, MWC handouts, evals on chairs with pencils.
- 3) 30 – 45 minutes prior -- radio/media arrives and sets up recording
- 4) 30 minutes prior to start time - set up complete
- 5) 30 minutes prior to start time - orient greeters (don't forget tips for controlling input)
- 6) 10 minutes prior to start time – Greeters Ready to Go!

Meeting Tips

- 1) Start on time with welcome & introductions of greeters, facilitators. Introduce all Commissioners attending.
- 2) Facilitator should be chairperson for the event and should explain their role as moderator (review agenda and materials on chairs for participants, explain town hall meeting process, control the input session, introduce guests)
- 3) Acknowledge special guests/dignitaries/VIP's/entertainers/teens. Participants will introduce themselves when they speak (optional).
- 4) Review mechanics (water fountain, restrooms, evals/written input, handouts, other agency handouts all on chairs.)
- 5) Explain who MWC is, and what MWC will do with the information gathered. Explains any follow up meetings planned. Explains this is public meeting, is being taped, ok to be anonymous. OK to provide input in writing. Use form on your chair.

- 6) Control the Input Sessions: Explain first: Time for each person -- less than 2 minutes for each to speak; **those being interpreted will have more time**. Encourage everyone to participate. Remind the group MWC needs thoughtful input for improving the lives of women and girls in _____ (your area). This meeting is not to resolve issues, but to identify them. Issues of gender bias, discrimination, challenge, as well as opportunities. Provide statistic to focus the group: women still not making equal pay for equal work. Violence against women is number one crime in Marin County. **This will focus the group.**
- 7) Explain that a report will be submitted to Marin County officials and will be available for participants as well.
- 8) Open the input session by identifying someone who wishes to speak. **Have 2 people pre-arranged to be the starters if group is hesitant.**
- 9) Tips for controlling input: Redirect attention from those who monopolize the input session by directing a question to a Commissioner; gently but firmly reminding participants of time limits; encouraging those that wish to engage in continuing discussion to delay until after input session; and refraining (yourself!) from entering into a discussion with a presenter.
- 10) Include a stretch break half way through. 15 minute entertainment half way through as well.
- 11) End on time. Have those who didn't speak provide their input in writing using eval sheet on their chair.
- 12) Greeters collect all written evals and input. Thank people for coming.

STEP Six: Follow Up

- 1) Thanking all who came and helped, including a guest column in the local paper that recognizes and thanks those who attended, and lists out the issues identified and recommended next steps (very important for validation that this was **for real**)
- 2) Plan for follow up meeting. Set date, confirm guests,
- 3) Do outreach – 4 weeks advance. Use all steps above – AND invite those who attended!
- 4) Complete thoughtful sorting and documenting of the input gathered – 2 weeks ahead
- 5) Utilize the MWC leadership to facilitate community empowerment/community determination for creation of solutions locally. Use strategic action planning at follow up meeting.
- 6) Utilize the MWC authority to provide recommendations to county officials (the Needs Assessment),
- 7) At a minimum: copies of the Needs Assessment brought back, in person, to the community members that attended the meetings.

STEP SEVEN: ENSURE LONG TERM FOLLOW UP and COMMUNICATION WITH PARTICIPANTS

MWC needs a process for this. VERY IMPORTANT or the above work will stall.

EVENT PLANNING FORM

Event: Marin Women's Commission **Date:**
Town Hall Meeting
Coordinator: District Commissioners

Planned outcomes:

List of issues affecting women and girls in the County with potential solutions to address them

Increased awareness in the community about the Women's Commission and the importance of women leadership

Indicators (to measure the success):

List of issues

At least 70 multi-ethnic participants in the town hall meeting

Strategy (activities):

Town Hall meeting

Survey

Facilitated discussion about women needs in the community

Staff involved (with specific time allocation):

All commissioners

Volunteers involved (with specific time allocation):

To be developed

EVENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

*How to Develop an Event/ Community Education/ Forum/ Meeting
(Timeline based on attendance of approximately 50 people)*

What	Who	When	Status
<u>6 weeks in advance –</u>			
Getting off the ground			
• Choose a date			
• Mark it on the calendar			
• Determine the topic			
<u>5 weeks in advance</u>			
Arrange for Location of the Event			
• Call for local agencies/Org to get free space			
• Make sure there are Tables and Chairs available			
• Invite organizations to have informational tables at the event			
Arrange for Guest Speakers /Presenters/Facilitator			
• Call targeted organization/ agency/individual and ask for speaker			
• Send confirmation letters to orgs/speakers with directions and details			
<u>4 weeks in advance–</u>			
Community Organizing			
• Most important is personal contact with individuals and organizations			
• Enlist others to join and promote your event			
• Create and distribute Flier With translation			
• Distribute Fliers/Letters (at least 700 to community members organizations,			

business)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call people you know and organizations to invite people 			
<p><u>3 weeks in advance-</u></p> <p>Let the World Know about the event</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write up a press Release and Send it to media (check deadlines i.e., publications, TV, radio, Newspaper etc 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make up follow up calls to Media 			
<p><u>2 weeks in advance-</u></p> <p>Prepare for the day</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff schedule for and around the event (i.e. responsibilities, set up take down 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up, call people who you have previously contacted 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare materials for our informational table 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get refreshments 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring camera 			
<p><u>1 week in advance-</u></p> <p>Prepare for the day</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind staff about schedule for and around the event (i.e. responsibilities, set up take down • Call/remind guests that confirmed attendance 			

EVENT CHECKLIST

Event: Main Women's Commission –Town Hall Meeting

Date:

WHAT	WHO	WHEN	STATUS
1. Facility			
2. Facilitator			
3. Pick up key			
4. Speaker			
5. Trainer/Consultant			
6. Agenda			
7. Evaluation Forms			
8. Brochures			
9. Newsletter			
10. Written materials			
11. Sign-in Sheets			
12. Food			
13. Beverages			
14. Cups, plates, napkins			
15. Knives, Forks, Spoons			
16. Serving utensils			
17. Easel, Easel Pad			
18. Easel Pad Markers			
19. Pens			
20. Note taker			
21. Set up			
22. Clean up			
23. Tables/Chairs			
24. Translators			
25. Translation equipment			
26. Spanish/Vietnamese materials			
27. Return Key			
28. Digital Camera			
29. Photographer			
30. Announcements Board			
31. Other:			
32. Other:			
33. Other:			

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