



# 10 Tips for Engaging at Town Hall Meetings

A Practical Guide

2023



American  
Friends  
Service  
Committee



## Go With A Friend

It can be really hard to get up and speak in a crowd, especially a hostile one, so go with friends. Divide up roles if you can. Roles include at least one person to ask the questions and at least one person to record your interaction. Don't forget to fully charge your cell phone or camera!



## Practice Your Questions

It is okay to read from a card/your phone if you need to, but making eye contact and speaking from the heart can be really effective. Keep in mind that your audience is the candidate AND all the people around you.



## Don't Make Assumptions

Assume the candidate has very little background knowledge. Don't lecture them excessively about history, but do try to convey why this issue is meaningful to you and what you want the candidate to do. Getting them on the record saying something like, "I will take a look at the bill and get back to you," gives you an opening to follow up after the town hall.



## Bring a Prop

A town hall is like live theater. Make a lasting impression on the audience and the candidate. Maybe bring a photo to lift up. Or something that is a symbol of what you are talking about (Ex. Lift up a water bottle and say, "This is not getting to people in Gaza due to our government's policies. What are you doing to help my friends and family in Gaza?")



## Sit Strategically

Arrive early and sit close to the candidate or near the public microphones. If you have enough people in your group, spread out across the room. If you have a really large group and you want to show strength in numbers, wear a distinguishing item, like t-shirts that have a political message.



## Ask Strong Questions

Figure out if questions will be taken live at the microphone or written on cards. For cards, take a few and write questions in different colored pens to make it look like they were written by different people. For live, try and relate your questions to topics already raised. Ex. "Like the speaker before me said, I am concerned about how our tax money is used in Washington, D.C. I'm here because I don't want my taxes spent on killing people in Gaza."



## Smile

It might be hard in many circumstances, but throughout the candidate's presentation, stare adoringly, and smile. Candidates pick up on body language and facial expressions and will intentionally pick folks they think are friendly to their positions.



## Be Active

Clap for one another once questions are posed. This way the candidate can hear that what you are saying has broad support. Engage the people around you with a handout so they can learn more about your topic. The handout could list a future event you are planning where people can get more involved.



## Don't Give Up

If you don't get a chance to ask your question, position yourself along the candidate's way out and shake their hand. Don't let go of their hand until you have asked your short question. You could walk them to their car holding their hand. If the candidate has a selfie line, join it with a friend filming.



## Debrief

Evaluate how you think you did and what you might do differently next time. Post your experience on social media. Follow up with the candidate's office after the townhall, whether or not you got the answer you wanted. Remember you are building a relationship with them – even if it isn't always friendly.