

Student Exercise: Setting Up a Town Hall Meeting

Town Hall Objective

Students will participate in a decision-making exercise that emphasizes team work, problem solving, and critical thinking. Students will research water resource issues and existing water policies, working in teams to present a variety of perspectives on a specific water issue. Based on discussions during your "Town Hall meeting," the group will draft a new policy.

Welcome to the Town Hall!

This activity is designed for high school natural or political science classes. It will take three to four class periods to complete, plus homework time for research. This web site contains lists of issues, research, photographs, and perspectives that will help develop an understanding of water management policy and decision-making. Teachers, the steps below will assist you in the creation of a Town Hall for your classroom.

Step 1 - Establish Perspectives and Roles

To begin, choose one Moderator who will preside over the Town Hall activity and keep order. This student will also research and select the problem for discussion and should have previously demonstrated strong leadership abilities.

Have the Moderator research the [issues](#) and choose a topic from the [list of problems](#), as well as at least five corresponding perspectives to be role-played.

Choose a panel of students who will each role-play a different [perspective](#). You could also assign teams of two or three students to represent each perspective.

The remaining students in the class will be on the Town Board and will help draft policy. Select a Committee Chair (to lead the Board and help organize their discussions) and Secretary (to draft the final policy, based on an agreement among the Board members).

Step 2 - State the Problem and Set a Town Hall Meeting Date

Have the Moderator explain the problem to the class. Consider also showing the slide show at the beginning of this section to introduce the activity.

Choose dates for your Town Hall meetings (two 45-minute sessions). The dates should be set enough in advance to allow the students time to research the problem and prepare statements from their perspectives.

Step 3 - Research and Prepare

All students should broadly research water-related issues. The [research](#) section of the web site provides a starting point. It is important that the Moderator and Town Hall Board members have a strong underlying knowledge of water issues and policy before the first meeting begins.

The students who will be role-playing perspectives should also research and prepare their cases. At the first Town Hall meeting, each will have five to ten minutes (depending on how many perspectives you choose and on the length of your class period) to introduce themselves and state their position, relative to the issue at hand. They should have research or information that backs up their opinion.

The Moderator should consider also how he or she will preside over the meeting, how the discussion will be organized, how the seating should be arranged, if rules should be set, where verbal and emotional boundaries should be drawn, etc.

Step 4 - Enter the Town Hall

On the day of the first Town Hall meeting, the Moderator will explain to the class how the meeting will be conducted. During the first session, the teacher can back up the Moderator if students are not acting cooperatively. The teacher may also provide written prompts throughout the activity to any participating student.

During the first session, the problem should be re-stated. Each panel member (or group) will have the opportunity to explain to the class why their perspective is valuable. Either following each presentation or at the end of the first session, give the Board a specified length of time to ask questions.

Between the first and second sessions, the class should gather with the teacher for a debriefing (led by the teacher) about what has worked/not worked thus far in the activity. The teacher and students can develop a communication strategy to make the second session run more smoothly.

The second session should focus on giving the Board time to develop a management strategy for the problem. During this brainstorming session, Board members will develop several possible solutions. They can discuss these ideas with the students representing different perspectives, in order to weigh the implications of various solutions.

Step 5 - Draft Policy

The day after the final session concludes, the Board will draft a final policy that addresses the issue and proposes a management strategy. The Board Chair will make a final decision if the group cannot come to consensus and the Secretary will draft the policy. Afterwards, preferably on the following day, the Board Chair will present the policy to the students who were role-playing the perspectives.

Step 6 - Final Debriefing

Following the presentation of the policy, hold a final debriefing, led by the teacher. Students should not only voice any concerns, but also explain what worked well during the Town Hall meeting.

Consider these questions:

1. What could have made the meeting flow better?
2. Who had the most difficult role?
3. Which perspective seemingly had the least just or fair outcome?
4. Could a more just or fair policy have been written?

Source:

http://www.nps.gov/grsa/resources/curriculum/high/town_hall.htm