

# COVID-19 Vaccination Town Hall

Updated February 23, 2021

## INTRODUCTION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A town hall is an effective way to broadly disseminate information and directly address questions and concerns about COVID-19 vaccination. It is a tool to bridge communication gaps, foster open discussion, and provide a platform for the community to be heard. The primary goal of a town hall is not to persuade participants to get the vaccine, but rather to provide them with the information they need to make an informed decision. Guiding principles for a town hall include:

**Transparency and honesty.** Open-ended, ongoing conversation is the best way to engage with a community. Be as forthcoming as possible with the information you have and are able to share, while acknowledging candidly that there are still many unknowns around the vaccination rollout. Being transparent about what you do and do not know fosters trust among participants.

**Local ownership and context.** Engaging respected community leaders and experts to deliver the message is another way to build trust. Whenever possible, ensure that facilitators and presenters are part of the local community and/or have a similar lived experience as participants.<sup>1</sup> Tailor the meeting to the community or organization, as appropriate.

**Science and data.** Information shared in the meeting should be grounded in evidence-based, factual data. Information should be as up-to-date as possible.

**Positive stories.** Where feasible, invite community members who received the vaccine to share their personal stories on their experience.

**Clarity and brevity.** Do not overload participants with too many details. Keep the information-sharing part of the meeting brief; participants can get more detail about specific topics in the Q&A. Avoid overly technical language or unclear abbreviations.

**Empathy and non-judgment.** Be cognizant of the different backgrounds, belief systems, and existing information (accurate or otherwise) that people have, and treat all questions as valid. Many people—especially historically marginalized groups—may be rightfully suspicious of public health initiatives due to past and ongoing injustices. A successful community conversation entails listening with interest, an open mind, and kindness. Be empathetic and polite while correcting factually inaccurate information, acknowledging and showing respect for people's concerns.

## ORGANIZING THE TOWN HALL

### Who should be involved in a town hall?

- **Host(s):** Any organization can host a town hall. Multiple organizations can also co-host an event to increase its reach.
- **Audience:** Each town hall should be specifically tailored to meet the needs of its unique audience. This includes attention to language, medical and scientific fluency, potential past experiences with the medical system, and other relevant community characteristics. Facilitators and presenters should be chosen with the audience in mind to foster an authentic connection, with presentation content adapted to address concerns specific to the represented community. Additionally, local jurisdictions should work with community-based organizations to identify audiences that may be interested in or benefit from a vaccination town hall.

- **Facilitator:** The hosts should select one representative, ideally a trusted community leader, to facilitate the town hall. Their role is to manage the flow of the discussion and set its overall tone, fostering thoughtful, meaningful, and transparent discussion. The facilitator will also be responsible for moderating the Q&A.
- **Presenter:** The presenter shares the informational presentation. This person should be a health practitioner from and/or working in the local community. Ideally, the presenter should also reflect the demographics of the community of focus.

### Where should it be held?

A virtual meeting platform like Zoom, in “webinar” (versus meeting) mode, is ideal. Provide a call-in number for participants joining by phone. Test the platform in advance of the meeting, including the various tools (like the chat and Q&A features) you may use. You may also choose to leverage ongoing in-person meetings, (convened by faith-based groups, school boards, etc.) provided they are hosted in accordance with [CDC guidelines](#) for community mitigation. See [USPHAU Community Protection Overview](#) for more information.

### What happens afterwards?

During and after the event, track participation metrics (who and how many people attended, what questions were raised), which can help with planning future town halls and refining their content and target audiences. After the event, share the slide deck and any takeaways with all participants by email. Request feedback and recommendations of other groups who may want a town hall. Follow up on specific questions that were raised, as needed.

### SAMPLE AGENDA

A recommended structure for a 1-hour town hall is below. Keep the first three sections brief; leave plenty of time for Q&A.

1. **Introduction (5-7 minutes):** Facilitator shares meeting goals, agenda, and presenters’ and panelists’ names and titles. Facilitator should also emphasize that this is a judgment-free environment where questions are welcome.
2. **Vaccination presentation (10 minutes):** Presenter makes a brief presentation (content outline provided below); option to feature stories from community members
3. **Q&A (35-40 minutes):** Facilitator gathers questions and relays them to presenter and panelists. It’s best to solicit questions in advance of the meeting, and/or in the chat window, so facilitator is able to screen and collate them for presenter and panelist(s). When information is not readily accessible, offer to follow up at a later time.
4. **Conclusion and next steps (5 minutes):** Facilitator thanks presenter, panelist(s), and participants, notifies them how takeaways will be shared, and provides contact details for questions or suggestions for future town halls.

### SAMPLE CONTENT AND FAQs

A general vaccination presentation (step 2 in the agenda above) can be structured as follows. If the town hall is focused on a specific topic or subset of the vaccination plan, adjust the presentation accordingly.

1. Opening slide with meeting goals, agenda, and facilitators’ and presenters’ names and titles.
2. Allocation and distribution update, using the most up-to-date figures available. Reiterate that the vaccine will be available to everyone free of charge and regardless of documentation status.
3. Information about vaccine science, the development process, and vaccine safety. Address vaccine side effects in detail, plus racial/ethnic representation in the studies.
4. Emphasize the reasons for vaccination: reducing personal risk, community protection, and prioritization for the communities most impacted by the pandemic. Feature stories from community members where relevant.
5. Review next steps and set expectations:
  - a. Include eligibility criteria for who can get the vaccine and when
  - b. Include logistical information (where vaccinations are being done, how to schedule an appointment, etc.)
  - c. Provide a reminder of the importance of continued community mitigation strategies (masks, social distancing) even after receiving the vaccine
6. Conclusion and transition to Q&A.

Please visit the [COVID-19 Resource Library](#) for samples of town hall presentation slides and additional FAQs for facilitators.