



Ten Strategies for Using Congressional Town Hall Meetings to Advance our Innovation Agenda

- 1. Be prepared.** Most people don't present their Member of Congress with a well-researched, well-rehearsed pitch. They just say what they think – which has value. But those who come to town hall meetings with thoughtful arguments, good data, and persuasive stories always get remembered.
- 2. Tell a personal story.** This is why Members of Congress hold town hall meetings – to get first-hand accounts of the impact of policies on their constituents. Think about how a policy might affect you, your family or your community. Whether the official supports you or not, they want to hear your story.
- 3. Use numbers if you have them.** Politicians live for one thing: 50% plus 1. This keeps them re-elected and in a job. Nearly every person to come before a Member of Congress represents more constituents either by a class or as a spokesperson. Use these numbers. "I have 50 employees," "There are 500 people in my community that think just like me." The legislator is trying to do the political math the minute you stand up – make it easy for him.
- 4. Be respectful.** You'd be surprised how many people start a conversation with "I pay your salary so you better listen to me." It doesn't matter if you're talking to your grocer or a public official - starting any conversation with another person in a rude manner is no way to persuade them. Members of Congress want to hear your views, you don't need to badger them to get your message through.
- 5. Go in groups.** Nothing says "listen to me" to a public official like a mob. This is not to say that you should bring pitch forks and torches to the next town hall. But a chorus is better than a solo performance.
- 6. Talk to staff.** Every congressman brings staff to town hall meetings. They may seem to blend into the woodwork, but a sharp citizen seeks them out. Talk to them before the meeting, get their business card, and tell them your story (as well as asking a public question at the meeting).
- 7. Leave paper.** Town hall meetings are usually staffed by district-office staff who do not deal with legislative issues on a daily basis. If you leave background memos or talking points, they'll likely be faxed to Washington to the legislative assistant who covers your issue.
- 8. Follow-up politely.** Politely persistent people persuade politicians. Congressional offices are harried, so they often respond to the squeaky wheel - the one who just follows up with a phone call after attending a town hall meeting.
- 9. Get people to multiple meetings.** This is a sure bet to get noticed. Hearing the same thing in different places signals to a politician there may be a deeper problem afoot.
- 10. Demonstrate you're not going away.** If you continue to show your presence at town halls, the legislator must deal with you... if only to avoid an uncomfortable encounter at a future meeting.

Sample Questions You Can Ask at Town Hall Meetings

1. In the past, the pharmaceutical industry on a whole, including companies like the one I work for, has spent about twice as much each year on R&D as the entire NIH operating budget. Considering the close relationship between NIH-funded research and our company research, what does this say about the potential for the NIH to keep pace with the work that we do?
2. Studies have shown that about 70% of pharmaceutical company investment in R&D is spent inside the U.S. each year. But foreign governments have programs in place, like tax credits and economic incentives, to try to woo pharmaceutical companies away from the U.S., taking away jobs like mine. What do you think the government could do to counteract that?
3. Some of my colleagues lost their jobs in recent years. What steps should the government take to make sure that companies like mine, which have to spend a lot of money on research and development, so are especially challenged during a recession, don't suffer the same fate again?
4. When I tell people where I work, I often end up hearing one of two complaints: either that medicines aren't regulated enough, because people have heard of recalls or safety issues; or that it takes too long for new medicines to come to the market. Both of these things are a direct comment about the FDA, but they seem to be opposed to each other. What can be done so that the FDA is able to ensure strong review and oversight but still get medicines to patients who need them?
5. I've seen my children's school system budget get cut year after year after year, and it seems as though important subjects, like science and math, often are the victims. But these are the subjects that students need to learn in order to provide the next generation of researchers and other biosciences workers. Is this a trend that exists all over the country, and what can the federal government do to change things?