



## American Resilience Project Educational Toolkit

### **Mock Town Hall Guide**

Mock Town Hall lesson plans promote active, participatory learning and research, critical thinking, debate, and speech skills. Additionally, educators can use Mock Town Hall lesson plans as a vehicle to encourage civic participation by providing an experience similar to an actual Town Hall meeting. To supplement this activity, teachers can provide information on local Town Hall or city council meetings and encourage students to attend (option for extra credit).

For a truly successful Mock Town Hall lesson, students need adequate time to do research and prepare their speeches and questions in advance. This Nation in Transition Educational Toolkit provides curated sources where students can learn about issues that might be a topic for a town hall, including published articles, news reports, and blogs and podcasts from prominent NGOs and government sources. Additional readings specific to the topic of the town hall will be necessary. Below are examples of potential topics for a town hall.

### **Policy Topic Suggestions:**

- A small town on the Navajo Nation is debating the potential closure of a local coal fired power plant which provides 350 jobs to the local community and is one of the highest wage opportunities in the area with the rest of the local economy depending heavily on lower paying retail and service jobs. A group of citizens argue for the closure of the plant citing environmental and health needs while recognizing the harsh impacts to the local community. Those opposed point to the current lack of opportunity outside of the coal plant and the devastating impact the closure would have on the community.
- A city in New Mexico is looking into installing three rooftop solar arrays on the local public libraries with the goals of off-setting energy costs and lowering their carbon footprint. The city received a small grant from the Department of Energy and must match the amount to fully fund the three solar arrays. A town hall is being held to debate the construction and implementation of these arrays. Some parties are concerned with the cost to the city funded by their taxes to pay for the arrays.
- A city in Montana is debating a proposal by the board of investments to make a loan to an owner of a coal-fired power plant from the Permanent Coal Tax Trust Fund for operation and maintenance of a coal-fired generating unit. Proponents in favor point to the continued economic value of those jobs and tax revenue to the community. Those opposed to the loan argue that this policy would prop up a business that harms the environment and public health. They also question whether loans to the coal industry is a good use of public funds since the coal industry is in such a steep decline worldwide.

- *Feel free to use policies actively being debated in your state and community or others not listed above.*

### **Format and Agenda**

1. Presentation
  - a. The City Manager of the Town Council will present the proposal. They will explain the reasons for the proposal and benefits of its passage. [10 minute max]
2. Question and Answer
  - a. Attendees then have the opportunity to ask the presenter questions about the proposal and any issues that were not addressed in the original presentation. [15 minute max]
3. Audience Participation
  - a. After Q&A, attendees then have the opportunity to voice their opinions about the proposal. Each attendant may object to and critique points made from other speakers as well as those made in the original presentation. Each speaker will have three minutes to quickly make their points. [25 minute max]
4. Voting and Results
  - a. Town council members vote on whether or not to pass the proposal based solely on the quality of the arguments on both sides of the issue and present their findings to the audience. [5 minute max]

### **Roles and Participation Suggestions**

*These roles depend entirely on the proposal chosen and can be modified as needed according to the topic and size of class.*

- Town council members
- Local union representation
- Local activists and activist groups
- Student groups
- Utility representatives
- Finance Director of city
- Public works or planning director
- Economic development director
- Etc...

### **Suggestions for Mock Town Hall Operation**

- For all participants:
  - All participants should create a 'character card' that describes their character's role in the proceedings, stance on the policy, and could also include a few notes to be used during the Q&A and audience participation section.
- For Presenter
  - Clearly present the need for the proposal with reasons and evidence as well as a description for how the proposal will be carried out.
  - The opening speech may touch on topics to support the proposal from the economic benefit, social benefit, or any other way to make the argument in favor of the proposal at hand.

- The opening presentation should be between five and ten minutes and create a strong base for the town hall and debate on the proposal.
- For community members
  - Have 'character card' ready with all arguments prepared from the perspective of the character
  - Listen and take notes during the presentation and listen to the arguments of other stakeholders
  - When speaking, state character's role and perspective of the proposal before starting the argument. Conclude by thanking the council for holding the town hall on this topic.
- For the Board Members
  - Take notes during all arguments and presentations.
  - Final decision must be made using evidence brought forward during the presentation and audience participation.
  - Prepare a list of reasons why one side is more persuasive than the other.
  - Present your vote on whether to adopt or reject the proposal.

### **Town Hall Meeting Rules**

- One voice at a time
- State character's role and interest in proposal when speaking
- Respect everyone's opinion and time