



TELEPHONE TOWN HALLS

AFT Planning Guide



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**If you have questions or need assistance, please contact
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WHAT IS A TELEPHONE TOWN HALL?



What is a telephone town hall?

A telephone town hall is an interactive telephone forum that is akin to a radio show—you can reach a large number of people in a cost-effective manner. The more interactive the telephone town hall, the more successful it is: Participants stay on the call longer, and engagement is increased through more commitments to volunteer or take additional actions.

How is it different from a conference call?

Telephone town halls allow a more controlled interaction among the participants and include additional features not permitted through traditional conference calls.

For example, telephone town halls support:

1. Back-end question screening to control direction of program and prioritize subjects for a limited time frame.
2. Asking poll questions to gauge further interests and measure activity for follow-up efforts.
For example:
 - *“If you are willing to circulate a petition, press 1. If you are willing to sign a petition, press 2.”*
 - *“Press 1 if you are coming to the rally on Saturday. Press 2 if you can give someone else a ride.”*
 - *“If you are going to the Madison rally, press 1. If you are going to the Milwaukee rally, press 2.”*
3. Encouraging participants to stay on the line and leave a voicemail after the event is finished. This recording can be forwarded as a kind of patch-through call.

PLANNING & EXECUTING YOUR EVENT



Determining Features Needed to Meet Your Objectives

First, you will need to determine the goal of the telephone town hall. Is the intention to include remarks with a question/answer portion? Is the purpose to recruit volunteers of which you can include poll questions to track responses? Such interactive features will need to be predetermined so appropriate programming on the vendor’s end can be done prior to launching the call.

If you are unsure of the different features you have available to meet your goals, be sure to discuss the service options offered by your selected vendor as well as costs. The general cost of a project depends on the size of the audience as well as the interactive features you use.

Team Members

Different types of team members are needed for each telephone town hall. Each member will have a defined role in ensuring the success of the call:

MODERATOR: This is usually a staff member (Executive Director, State Affiliate Political Organizer or a National Representative, for example) whose role is to keep the discussion focused. Moderators will prompt participants to ask questions, ask the poll question, and decide which questions to take. The moderator can either read the questions aloud or take the call live. (“We have a question from John in New York. John, you’re live to ask your question.”) Moderators must use a landline with speakerphone and have internet access in order to operate a web-based interface. Each vendor has a web-based user interface with login and password for the moderator (and screeners); the interface includes a live count of participants, summarized questions for selection, and a private chat function for team members.

SPEAKERS: Speakers are invited prior to the telephone town hall and typically address a particular issue. These individuals could include but are not limited to state-fed or local presidents, elected officials, endorsed candidates, or community or thought leaders. Depending on the topic, speakers are allocated a set amount of time for their remarks but are also available for any question-and-answer segment. Prepared talking points may be requested for some presenters. It is helpful both to have speakers interspersed throughout the overall conversation to keep participants engaged and to have leaders queued up to ask questions of the speakers to help guide the conversation.

SCREENERS: Screeners act as telephone operators to individuals asking questions during the town halls. They will be trained prior to the call on how to use the web-based interface, screen questions and comments, and rate the questions and comments for relevance and importance for the moderator’s selection. The screeners must have internet access (Chrome or Firefox) to sign into the web-based interface. Screeners can use their cellphones. The number of screeners needed depends on the number of expected participants.

Program/Agenda

It is important to draft a quick outline of a speaking program prior to the telephone town hall—a rough sketch of the lineup of speakers, the order in which they will speak and their time allotment—as well as a script that would account for any poll questions. This ensures not only an orderly call, but also allows all speakers the opportunity to know which other speakers and what other content will be included. If there are particular issues up for discussion, setting a program also allows you to line up the speakers in the strategic order in which you want the issues discussed.

Prompts & Recordings

There are several prompts that will need to be recorded and submitted to the vendor at least 48 hours in advance of the call. Your vendor will provide guidance on how to submit each recording:

1. Robocall invite—This should be sent a few days before the telephone town hall to let invited participants know about the event and/or how to register.
2. Robocall for the event itself—“Please stay on the line for an important telephone town hall with "[Name of person].”
3. Answering machine message for people who missed the call—You could leave them an inbound number, direct them to a relevant website and/or let them know about any upcoming events.

Participant Invites

Even if your time frame is tight, there are several ways to increase participation in your event. Cost-effective and time-efficient examples of outreach include:

1. An email inviting people to respond with an opt-in feature that requests their preferred phone number for the event.
2. A robocall a few days before the event with an opt-in feature.
3. Digital and social media messaging (Facebook/Twitter/Text message) with redirect to sign up (if public).

Data

At least 48 hours in advance of the telephone town hall, send your vendor a file of the final participants, and include whether they were recruited via email, robocalls or online. Touch base with your vendor to confirm their preferred file format and what fields to include for the structure of your town hall. In most cases, the file will include name, phone and the unique ID number—with any notes: For example, exclude a particular local; do not call retirees.

The vendor will send you a file with the results and participant responses from the telephone town hall to allow you to update your database.

Caller ID

You will need to determine which telephone number will be used for caller ID listing purposes; in most cases, this will be the affiliate's main line.

Follow-Up

Be sure to follow up with speakers and participants accordingly:

1. Send thank-you emails or a note to speakers within 48 hours.
2. Follow up with participants who expressed interest in future engagement.
3. Upload the final vendor's file to your database.

Preferred Vendors

IV BROADCAST

Contact: Rashid Mathus, rashidmathus@ivbroadcast.com

THE TYSON ORGANIZATION

Contact: Gerry Tyson, GSTyson@tyson.org

If you need additional recommendations on vendors or have questions on costs, please let us know.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Sample Prompts

The following sample scripts provide suggested structure and information to be included in your prompt recordings. Each recording should be limited to 30 seconds.

Invite

This is (caller's name) from the American Federation of Teachers. I'd like to invite you to participate in a telephone town hall with President Randi Weingarten and our special guest, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts.

Join us (day), (date) at (time and time zone) as they discuss (topic). Do not miss this important opportunity. They will also discuss (additional topic).

Please join us on (day), (date). We will call you at this number then.

(Press 2 if you would like this information repeated.)

For Dial-In or Direct Dial

Please stay on the line for an important telephone town hall with AFT President Randi Weingarten and our special guest, Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Answering Machine

This is (caller's name) from the American Federation of Teachers.

Sorry we missed you for the AFT telephone town hall with President Randi Weingarten and Senator Elizabeth Warren.

This will not be the last time we hold a telephone town hall meeting and will keep you updated about future conversations. In the meantime, be sure to check out (web) for updated resources in our Fight Forward campaign.

Thank you, and I hope you have a great evening.

Sample Project Planning Worksheet

Date & Time		
Audience		
Topic/Goal		
Headliners		
PREP	RESPONSIBILITY	DEADLINE
Program/Agenda		
Talking Points for [Speaker No. 1]		
Talking Points for [Speaker No. 2]		
Talking Points for [Speaker No. 3]		
Send Call Instruction to Speakers		
ACTION		
Survey Question 1		
Survey Question 2		
Call/Shout Outs		
ROLES		
Speaker/Screenener Dial-in <i>Be sure to use Firefox or Google Chrome</i>		
Moderator:	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin/Location:</i>
Speaker No. 1	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin/Location:</i>
Speaker No. 2	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin/Location:</i>
Speaker No. 3	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin/Location:</i>
Question Screener/Resource	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin/Location:</i>
Tech Moderator	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin/Location:</i>
Resource	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin/Location:</i>
Other Speakers • Will dial in 10 minutes early	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Cell:</i>
	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Cell:</i>
	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Cell:</i>
	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Cell:</i>
Screeners • Will dial in 15 minutes early • Will have own pin	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin:</i>
	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin:</i>
	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin:</i>
	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin:</i>
	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Pin:</i>
Follow up	<i>Name:</i>	<i>Due:</i>

Sample Program/Agenda

(Call time: 7 p.m. Eastern time)

- 7:00 p.m. Welcome and Introduction: [Name of person] (3 minutes)**
- Welcomes participants
 - Overviews the agenda
 - Shares instructions on how to ask questions and how to get more information
 - Introduces first speaker
- 7:04 p.m. Remarks: [Name of person] (10 minutes)**
- Thanks callers for participating
 - Talks about [topic]
 - Shares instructions on how to ask questions and how to get more information
 - Introduces second speaker
- 7:15 p.m. Remarks: [Name of person] (15 minutes)**
- Thanks callers for participating
 - Talks about [topic]
- 7:31 p.m. Discussion: [Name of person] (20 minutes)**
- Thanks previous speaker
 - Shares instructions on how to ask questions and how to get more information
 - Recaps/highlights remarks
 - Opens call up for questions/calls on prepared participants
- 7:52 p.m. Close the Call: [Name of person] (2 minutes)**
- Thanks everyone for joining
 - Shares how participants can get more information
- 7:55 p.m. Call ends**

Checklist for a Successful Telephone Town Hall

PLANNING

- Determine goal of telephone town hall and format needed (e.g., poll questions?)
- Assign vendor
- Confirm date and time
- Set call universe and budget
- Recruit team members
 - Moderator
 - Speakers
 - Screeners
- Set program/agenda
 - Determine speaking order and timing of poll questions
 - Supply talking points/notes to speakers
 - Prep participants with questions
- Draft and record prompts
 - Invitation robocall
 - Event intro robocall
 - Missed call/answering machine message
- Assign caller ID setting

OUTREACH

- Email
- Robocall
- Social media/text program

DATA

- Send invitation list to vendor

POST TOWN HALL

- Send thank-you notes/acknowledgment to speakers
- Follow up with prospective volunteers
- Upload vendor's returned file to your database