



House Meetings

House meetings are the building blocks of community engagement and advocacy action. Examples of how house meetings have created “movements” include how the civil rights movement developed out of church meetings; the United Farmworkers used house meetings to grow their base, and the Tea Party movement started in small meetings in homes and public facilities.

House meetings are a way of doing the following

- Sharing a concern or issue with a small group to engage them in the advocacy journey
- Building skills and a common collective strategy for advocacy
- Listening to people’s concerns and ideas about how to deal with this issue
- Build coalitions between different groups already engaged in this issue
- Educates people about the cause or issue.
- Brings people of different backgrounds and interests together around a common interest.

Planning a House Meeting

- Define the purpose of the meeting, set end goals related to the issue, but also end goals for the meeting itself. Arrange the room so that everyone can see each other face to face.
- Keep the meeting to a max of 2 hours and up to 12 people to allow for sustained engagement.
- Invite participants no less than 2 weeks before the meeting and send out an agenda with those goals.
- Have a back-up list of participants if some cannot attend.
- Prepare all documentation that provide facts beforehand. Refreshments always an attraction.
- Consider providing child care

Running the House Meeting

- Have a good Facilitator to manage the participation, flow and goals of the meeting. See [BCS 004 Facilitating a Community Listening Session](#) as a useful guide for the facilitator. The facilitator is not necessarily the Leader, as the leader provides key input and direction of the substance, and the facilitator provides the process management of the meeting.
- Use a flipchart or whiteboard to record major points. Make sure someone is also keeping minutes for follow-up work.
- Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak and control the pace and time of the discussion to allow for summaries and conclusions and decisions.
- Prevent people from dominating the meeting and from going down irrelevant “rabbit holes” that digress from the core purpose of the meeting. Keep formal presentations to 15 minutes.

Getting Action Decisions and Commitment in the Meeting

- Ensure that decisions made are recorded and that they are germane to the goals
- Assign people to execute the decisions made. Ensure that deadlines and target dates are included in the decisions.
- Every decision should include ideas to engage more than the participants in the outcome and execution of the decisions made. Set recruitment goals for each decision.

**United Methodist
Church – North
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**Board of Church
and Society**

This series provides congregations and individuals the skills to build and deploy justice ministries and advocacy methods. Other methods in this series include:

**Building a relationship with your elected representative*

**Writing a letter or email to your elected representative*

**Writing a letter to the press, blog or website*

**Organizing a rally or protest meeting*

**Building a congregational justice ministry*

**Proposing legislation*

**Parish based Community Organizing*

**Creating a Conference Resolution*

**Asset Based Community Development*

**Challenging legislators*

**Community Listening*

The Board of Church and Society provides advocacy and justice programs for congregations.

<https://nccumc.org/christianformation/church-and-society/>

Ending the meeting

- Summarize the decisions and actions made and the assignments agreed upon.
- Do an evaluation of the meeting by getting comments from participants.
- Make sure any strong disagreements are not going to result in ongoing conflict.

Meeting Follow-up.

- Set a follow-up date for the next meeting.
- Send out the minutes to participants
- Send out the contact information of all participants to every participant unless they request this not be done to protect privacy.
- The Leader should keep track of the work done to execute the decisions by regularly contacting the participants.
- The Leader should contact participants about a week after the meeting to assess ongoing commitment of each participant.

Some Do's and Don'ts

Do's!

- Recognize and affirm all ideas and suggestions.
- Create a "Parking Lot" for good ideas that are not relevant to the topic or issue but that need to be followed up.
- Listen to all comments and seek clarification if they are unclear
- Be disciplined, organized and professional. Sloppy work is a big detractor.
- Keep good records.
- Always affirm contributions to sustain inclusion and commitment.
- Establish the institutions and organizations that attendees are associated with so that you can tap into a wider institutional base for recruiting more followers.

Don'ts

- Allow timewasting diversions.
- Derogatory comments about people opposed to the changes you are seeking, or those who are perpetrating what you are seeking to change.
- Avoid seating arrangements where people cannot see each other face to face.
- Don't be afraid to ask people how they can be engaged and mobilized.

House Meetings Management

House meetings are the opportunity to build relationships and provide space for substantive conversations that you cannot achieve in large rallies or large meetings. They also provide the opportunity to assess people's skills, experience, and knowledge for future use. So they serve as recruitment opportunities for the cause.

This document was created by Brian Heymans while he served on the Board of Church and Society.

