



EVENT STRUCTURE: *How To Structure Your Town Hall*

Town hall events are meant to be customized so that commissions can focus on the policy issue(s) most critical to the wellbeing of young children in their counties or regions.

The town hall provides an optimal opportunity for you to:

- 👉 Spotlight the issues that impact young children
- 👉 Highlight the work of First 5 in your community
- 👉 Provide a forum for a productive dialogue with local policymakers about your priority policy issues
- 👉 Effectively get a commitment from policymakers to take action

These are lofty yet achievable goals, and this toolkit is designed to guide you along the way. In this section, we provide an in-depth example of how to set up a “traditional” town hall event that includes presentations and a panel discussion. This is just one type of event a commission may choose to hold. (For additional event ideas, see bottom of page 2.) The most important element of planning an event is to ensure it engages legislators, and discusses the unmet needs of children in your county. The type of event is less important than achieving these two goals.

In the next sections of the toolkit, we provide tips and advice about who to include and invite to your event, how to plan it, and ways to promote it.



**CHECK
IT OUT!**

Use the Toolkit templates to communicate a consistent brand

The toolkit materials are strategically designed, branded templates to help build a consistent statewide brand for each town hall. These recommended templates can be customized and used by your county commission.



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Town Hall Structure Overview

PART 1: Welcome and Introductions

Warm welcome by a county commission representative or other high-profile influential community member who also introduces the “why” for hosting a town hall. The person who kicks off the town hall then introduces (and hands off the event to) the moderator.

PART 2: Brief Presentations

Introductions and presentations by subject matter experts on the selected issues with content specific to what each issue looks like in your community.

PART 3: Panel Discussion

Moderated Panel Discussion

Panelist introductions and discussion. Panelists may or may not include the experts who just presented — this depends on how many policymakers attend the event and how you structure the panel discussion. At a minimum, your policymakers should make up the bulk of your panel, as they are the event’s main draw. Guests are there to hear what they have to say!

Moderated Q&A with Audience Participation

The moderator should moderate all questions (both planned and audience), facilitate the “ask” for panelists’ commitment to specific First 5 Calls to Action, and lead the discussion of next steps needed to advance the work.

PART 4: Positive Event Close

Moderator provides event summary/top level take-aways, and highlights any commitments made during the event.



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Think Outside the Box

A traditional, four-point town hall event is an effective way to convey your key message. However, you should not feel limited to holding a traditional town hall. The most important elements to include in your event are:

- 👉 A theme that is pertinent to your community
- 👉 Relevant speakers who can connect to First 5 priorities
- 👉 Engaging the community in an impactful way
- 👉 Educating and engaging elected officials on First 5 priority issues.

Here are two examples of unique spins on the town hall concept that conveyed the First 5 story in a fresh way:

First 5 Fresno: Fresno County has one of the highest infant mortality and pre-term birth rates in California and across the country. To highlight this local issue, First 5 Fresno hosted a [live town hall meeting](#) on its local TV news affiliate. The town hall included a diverse set of panelists (including the district attorney, a county supervisor, a rural mayor, a county superintendent of schools, and a state senator) to discuss preterm births and infant mortality from all aspects. The news anchor who moderated the town hall also helped produce three story packages to communicate the issue across the community. While the live town hall was only one night, these video stories continue to be shared and convey the message of the community's unmet need.

First 5 Santa Barbara: Why talk about it when you can show it? First 5 Santa Barbara, alongside partners and sponsors, invited community and philanthropic leaders to join a [day-long bus tour](#) to the north side of county to: 1) see key First 5 investments in action, and 2) visit an area of the county that is often overlooked and under-appreciated. The day not only featured First 5 investments, it also highlighted the effectiveness of the public, non-profit, and private investments that comprise the safety net in the north side of the county. The event was so popular that First 5 Santa Barbara ended up obtaining a second bus to accommodate those interested in attending.