**How to Hold Successful Town Hall Meetings**

Town hall meetings are one of the most popular formats for political meetings.  Candidates love them because they provide a chance to press the flesh with regular voters, and voters love them because they get the chance to ask their own questions and hear answers straight from the candidate.

While town hall meetings can be a great part of your grassroots strategy, they are not without risk.  Any time you place your candidate in front of unscripted voters, there’s a chance things could take a wrong turn.  In order to hold great, successful town hall meetings, use the following five tips:

1.  **Prepare, Prepare, Prepare** – There’s no substitute for a well prepared candidate.  During the week prior to your event, your candidate should carve out a significant amount of time to prepare for the town hall, just as he or she would for a debate.  Know the issues, write out pithy quotes and one-liners, figure out what the tough questions will be, and know how to answer them.

2. **Control the Crowd** – One of the main reasons you are holding a town hall meeting is to meet voters and be seen in the community, so it is unlikely that you’re going to be able to hold a “closed” town hall meeting with just your supporters in attendance.  (You could, but unless your goal is footage for an upcoming campaign ad, it will defeat the purpose of your event).  Even so, you’ll want to make sure that if things get hostile, you have a clear base of support in the audience.  For that reason, be sure to hand out tickets to the event to your campaign supporters, volunteers, friends and family.  A good rule of thumb is to make sure at least 25-50% of the crowd are known supporters.  That way, if an ugly question or two come up, you’ll have support in the audience.

**3. Make Sure They’re Comfortable** – Nothing make s a crowd hostile like an uncomfortable environment.  Have your campaign staff and volunteers ensure that there’s proper seating, that the temperature is right, that lighting isn’t too bright on the crowd, and that there are restrooms available for your audience.

**4. Take Names, and Give Info** – Town hall meetings are great opportunities to reach out to new supporters, people who may not yet be on your radar screen.  Make sure you have a registration table to track who comes to them event – get names, addresses, e-mail addresses, etc.  Ask people if they want to sign up for your newsletter (this is a great way to figure out who is a supporter, and thus ripe for additional follow-up) and be sure to hand out literature to every attendee.  After the event, send a thank you letter or postcard (a form letter is ok) to everyone who attended, pointing them to your campaign website for additional information.

**5. Relax and Have Fun** – Town hall meetings should be informal, fun events.  The crowd will know if you’re uptight, nervous, and unhappy to be there.  Practice in front of crowds several times to make sure that you’re comfortable with the format… then go and have fun.  You’ll enjoy the event more, and the crowd will see you as a more “likeable” candidate.

Town hall meetings can and should be a part of your grassroots strategy.  Be sure to plan for these events well in advance, practice, and remember to publicize them well – the only thing worse than a hostile crowd is when there’s no crowd at all.