

OVERVIEW OF THE ARIZONA TOWN HALL PROCESS

Arizona Town Hall is a private nonprofit organization founded in 1962 for the purpose of educating, engaging, connecting and empowering people to resolve important issues. Much of the success of Arizona Town Hall lies in the fact that the process incorporates the knowledge, thoughts and ideas of all the participants. The Town Hall process has been adapted and utilized by many other groups who strive to create solutions by drawing upon diverse views and building informed coalitions.

Panel Discussions

The Town Hall begins with panel discussions. Each panel addresses the same discussion questions during the first portion of the Town Hall. The process and guiding principles for the panel discussions are as follows:

- The Panel Chair reads one question at a time and discussion follows.
- It is important to stick to the question at hand.
- The panel strives for consensus (votes are taken only if absolutely necessary).
- Consensus is reached when no one wants to add anything, and no one objects strongly to the wording offered.
- The Panel Recorder's role is to keep the panel on time, capture the consensus comments, read back consensus statements to the panel and make edits with participants.
- Viewpoints of all participants are considered equally valuable, regardless of title or position.
- Discussions are encouraged to be robust while maintaining a respect for different viewpoints.
- Participants are allowed to criticize concepts—not people.
- Minority viewpoints must be very strong to find their way into the final document.
- Media will be present at the Town Hall and may be in attendance during panel discussions. You should assume that your comments may be quoted at any time.
- Observers may attend the sessions but generally cannot contribute to discussions.
- The process is as valuable as the recommendations.

Creation of the Draft Recommendations Report

Once complete, the consensus statements are taken from each panel to the Report Chairs. The Report Chairs review the statements and look for consensus across all of the panels. With assistance from the Panel Recorders, the Report Chairs create a draft report of what appears to be the consensus of the Town Hall participants.

The draft report is distributed early in the morning before the plenary session on the Saturday of each Town Hall. Panels meet prior to the start of the plenary session to review the draft and outline any areas the panel wants to address at the plenary session.

The Plenary Session

At the plenary session, Arizona Town Hall's Board Chair leads all of the Town Hall participants, as a full body, in an organized review of the document. All participants work to approve, amend or reject each section of the report of recommendations.