



Chapter 7:

PUBLIC MEETINGS & **PUBLIC SPEAKING**

For Advocacy On Behalf of Early Education

Public meetings are forums to discuss or debate public issues, inform and educate the citizenry and elected officials, and move public policy. Public entities such as councils or boards may hold meetings to receive public input, or citizens such as you and your coalition partners may organize them yourselves. In any event, public meetings usually follow a somewhat formal format, using Robert's Rules of Order, to ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect.

Organizing a Public Meeting

Organizing a public meeting around your issue is a good tactic for getting media attention and educating the public. A public meeting can be a forum for questioning a public official and galvanizing support for your cause.

Planning is the key to a well-organized, informative, and productive event. Be well prepared as your credibility and that of your organization are on the line:

- Advertise widely to ensure you have a full crowd and the particular people you especially want to influence. Be sure to invite the media.
- Be bipartisan if elected officials are attending and be sure to invite all candidates if it is an election year. Select a person to greet officials and get them settled.
- Prepare an organized agenda that will move quickly and allow plenty of time for questions and answers from the audience. Printed materials are always helpful.
- Include a time-keeper to stay on track and end the meeting at the determined time.

Public Speaking

Draw upon your passion for children's issues as a spark to speak out and to overcome any timidity you may have. Remember, you are an expert in early education and others can benefit from your knowledge. Public speaking can be easy and fun – the trick is to be well prepared. And like anything, public speaking gets easier the more you do it.

Here are some tips:

- Be prepared – research the issue thoroughly
- Organize your data and the materials so that you build your case.
- Use cue cards or write out the speech in large print with double-spacing.
- Make simple and clear statements with the “Call to Action” at the end.
- Don’t over talk; let the audience have time to think about your statements. (Many public meeting formats limit public comment to three minutes; practice your speech to keep it well within this time.)
- Anticipate the questions that you may be asked.
- Practice, practice, practice!

Here are some links to additional resources for public meetings and public speaking:

[How to Organize a Public Meeting](#). (2008). Van Geest. Citizens for Public Justice.

[Planning and Conducting Effective Public Meetings](#). Sharp, Smith, & Patton. Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet (CDFS-1555-02).

[Changing the World: A Guide to Public Meetings](#). Vermont Institute for Government.

[So You've Been Asked to Speak](#). (1997). Norry & Black. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture.