

What Works: Town Hall Events

The below recommendations represent learnings from the work of The Black Church & HIV: The Social Justice Imperative initiative and are meant to catalogue the best practices for educating local communities' faith leaders on addressing the HIV epidemic in their city.

A core component of the initiative's work in this regard included the convening of faith and community leaders for town hall style events in the 30 cities most impacted by HIV. As the initiative created forums for these important discussions, it found that certain methods effectively spurred meaningful conversations that moved the needle towards its ultimate goal of eradicating HIV in Black communities. The following recommendations are meant to catalogue the best practices for convening groups of this type for those who are involved in similar work.



Finding Partners

Narrowing down individuals doing HIV work in your community will be an essential component to planning a meeting of this nature. Start by talking to your local health department as they tend to partner with community groups and initiatives who might have information on local HIV workers. If the health department is unaware of any initiatives, approach local AIDS service organizations or HIV/AIDS provider coalitions (such as community planning groups) to assess local efforts.



QUICK TIP: Plan Ahead

Leave plenty of time to plan the logistics of your event ahead of time. Typically, three months will be necessary to plan one of this nature. Consider venue logistics, event date, event time, presentations, and any materials you'll want to distribute at the event.

Assembling a Core Team



Once you've narrowed down those doing HIV work in your community, begin assembling a "core team" of those leaders and local faith leaders who can better assist in planning and executing the event. This group of people should have varying backgrounds, including: backgrounds in HIV prevention and treatment, social justice, and spiritual guidance. Examples of "core team" members may include: an **employee of your local health department, a member of your local NAACP branch, someone from a local health clinic, a church leader, or a faith leader(s).**

QUICK TIP: Event Promotion

Consider having your "core team" assist in event promotion. Types of promotion may include: mailing physical letters, email invites, social media promotion, phone calls, and fliers. Note that follow up emails and calls are critical to ensuring a healthy attendance.

What Works: Town Hall Events Cont.

Facilitating an Impactful Event

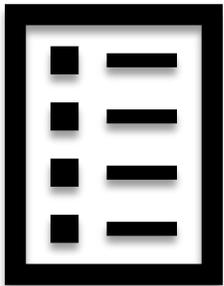
One individual should facilitate the event. This person must be deeply involved, well-versed on the messaging, and have a tie to the African American faith community or be a trusted community leader. The event should be to primarily create a forum for discussion on the barriers and opportunities that exist in addressing HIV within the faith community. While numerous faith-based challenges may be identified during the discussion, the event facilitator should always be mindful in steering discussion towards the opportunities and solutions that exist to help balance the conversation.



QUICK TIP: Making Sessions Impactful

While information on the epidemic in your city and community is important, discussion should ultimately lead to why HIV ministries, or health ministries that include HIV, are vital and can make a difference in curbing the epidemic. Sessions should be interactive and foster dialogue between participants and focus on outcomes. Working in small groups and reporting out to larger groups often fosters collaboration among participants. Additionally, using flip charts and visual aids to help participants take notes about their ideas is helpful in sharing ideas with other attendees.

Concluding the Event and Positioning for Action



Conclude each session with a plan, listing actionable steps and/or opportunities for faith and community leaders to begin combating HIV/AIDS as a social justice issue. Sending attainable action items or important follow up information is best to keep momentum as individuals respectively work toward the overall goal.

Continuing the Work: Following Up

Schedule a follow up on the discussion session with event leaders and participants to review progress on the action plan.

