



CIVIC MANIFESTO

As you know Civic Voice is developing a Manifesto for the 2015 election. We need to produce it in time for the autumn party conferences in 2014. We want as many members of civic societies as possible to join in the debate about what is in the Manifesto. One way of doing this is for your society to organise an open meeting on the Manifesto between January and March 2014 or to make it part of your existing programme of meetings.

Here are some ideas about how you might want to organise it.

What themes or subjects?

Remember the focus of the discussion is on what we want the next Government (starting in May 2015) to do. The draft Civic Manifesto themes are:

1. The Planning System
2. Priorities for Growth (where should new housing and other development be built?)
3. Town & City Centres
4. Design Quality (better buildings and places)
5. Heritage
6. The Public Realm (better streets, squares and parks)
7. Civic Pride & Civic Action (how to get people actively involved in improving the places where they live)

This would be a lot to cover in one meeting if you considered them one by one. You could perhaps choose one or two of these themes or an overarching title such as "How can the next Government promote better places?" The chair could then have the 7 themes in mind and use them as prompts for discussion.

What kind of meeting?

We suggest you do not simply have an open discussion among members with a chair. Discussions like these tend to be dominated by a few articulate and confident people and the debate tends to ramble and get repetitive. There are a number of approaches to take to get a more stimulating and inclusive discussion:

Invite a panel of experts

One approach is the *Question Time* model with a panel of say 4 experts. Make sure they are from a variety of backgrounds and include some people that you do not necessarily agree with (like a developer or planner you have crossed swords with). Contact Civic Voice as there may be a board or staff member able to come and join the panel. Ask them to respond to the main question for 5 minutes (certainly no more than 10) and then throw the debate open for questions. It might be helpful, in *Question Time* style, to ask

people to submit questions in advance so you can select an interesting variety and move the discussion on.

Break into groups

You could break the meeting up into groups of no more than 6 people each to discuss a different theme. There are many people who will not speak up at a big open meeting but will talk to a group of people around a table. The other advantage of small groups is that people tend to be politer and seek consensus more, rather than stand up and make speeches from a fixed point of view. Make sure the groups have a chair and a note taker and give them a simple task to focus on such as coming up with three ideas for the manifesto.

World café approach

This is a different way of doing small discussions around tables. Assign different topics to your committee members who each take a table. Everyone else moves around the room to join a particular table. You can allow a free-for-all where people join one table and just move on when they get bored (it works better than you might think) or you could signal every 15 minutes that it is time for everyone to move on to a new table.

Find other ways of people contributing

Whatever type of meeting you run you can also provide other opportunities for people to contribute. Ask people to put their ideas on post-it notes and stick them to different sheets of paper for each theme. Give people sticky dots so they can mark the post-its they agree with.

Twitter can also provide a virtual way of doing the post-it thing. Give people a #hashtag for the evening and invite them to tweet ideas and comments. With a computer and large screen or projector you can create a 'twitter fall' in the room that picks up these comments so people can look at them. This also allows people who could not make it to the meeting to join in. Let Civic Voice know and we will tweet some questions and comments during the session.

Straw polls?

Take a tip from David Dimbleby. Turn to the audience every now and then and ask for a show of hands on a particular question.

We want to get lots of ideas and views from the Manifesto process, but we also want to get an idea of what the movement sees as its priorities. So you might want to make this part of the meeting. If there are six good ideas that have come out of the meeting ask for a show of hands as to which one is the number one priority.

Report back to Civic Voice

Make sure you assign somebody to record what happens at the meeting. Let Civic Voice know what happened so we can feed it in to the Manifesto process. Please do not send us a long written narrative of the meeting (we will not have time to read it). Summarise the main points that were made, the questions that were asked, the ideas that came forward, the results of any straw polls.