

**Mecklenburg County Government
Policy Governing BOCC Town Hall Meetings**

I. Purpose

To establish policies and procedures for County staff in scheduling, coordinating, and providing board support for district or community meetings, referred to in this document as Town Halls, that are organized or initiated by a member of the Board of County Commissioners.

II. Procedures for Staff-Supported Town Hall Meetings

- A. Beginning the day after Election Day until the beginning of the next filing period is considered the “non-election year.” During this time, staff will support Commissioners who request town hall meetings with a variety of logistic and promotional assistance.
- B. If a Board member would like to have a staff-supported town hall meeting, the Board member must contact their Board liaison at least 30 days in advance of the desired meeting date to allow time to plan and secure resources.
- C. The Board liaison will coordinate with other County staff to manage logistics of the meeting.

Logistics – BOCC Liaison Checklist

- Meet with the commissioner and Public Information staff to discuss meeting logistics and content.
- Identify and reserve a meeting location.
- Order refreshments (if desired and at expense of Board member’s predetermined budget)
- Mail or email postcards (if desired and at Board member’s expense.)
- Coordinate the meeting room set-up. Set-up projector and screen, if applicable.
- Print and distribute programs/agendas

Agenda Setting and Raising Awareness – Public Information Checklist

- Coordinate speakers and subject matter experts (if applicable).
- Publish community meetings on the public calendar on MeckNC.gov.
- Distribute a media advisory no later than five days prior to the meeting and on the day of the meeting. Media advisories are distributed to all major Charlotte and Mecklenburg County news media outlets and other people who subscribe at the County's website to receive media advisories via GovDelivery distributed via email.
- Promote the event on social media once the week before the meeting and once the day before the meeting, at the discretion of the Social Media Coordinator.
- Create a flyer and social media graphic promoting the meeting. Provide an electronic copy to be used at the commissioner’s discretion.
- Create a program/agenda based on the event details.
- Create and bring the sign-in form for attendees to provide their information
- Event Box: Meeting agenda, any materials the commissioner(s) have requested etc.; materials left after meeting are brought back to the office by the commissioner(s).
- Event Staffing: County staff will provide support at BOCC Town Hall events as needed.

III. Recommendations for Best Attendance:

- A. Finalize the date, time and meeting location at least 30 days in advance to allow enough time to raise awareness of the meeting
- B. Board Members should use their personal social media networks or other contacts to raise awareness and attendance.

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- C. Board Members should distribute flyers/meeting announcements to area residents directly and during other meetings they attend and/or other places where people often congregate in the area where the meetings will be held.

IV. Facebook Town Hall Meetings

The procedure for a County-assisted BOCC Facebook Townhall meeting will allow for County promotion and support from the social media team.

- A. Scheduling:
 - a. Facebook Townhalls require 30 days' notice to Public Information for scheduling and promotion purposes.
 - b. Support from Public Information is dependent on staff availability.
- B. Location:
 - a. To reduce connectivity issues, location of Townhall will be chosen by social media and video team, with preference for CMGC 11th floor or the Judge Johnson Building.
- C. Format:
 - a. Meeting will be hosted by the Commissioner, on the Commissioner's own Facebook page. No script or talking points will be developed by the County.
 - b. Consideration should be given to the nature of the platform as a place to engage with an audience. Q&A format is recommended.
 - c. Consideration should be given to the potential for small audiences and small number of questions/comments. 30 minutes recommended, not to exceed 1 hour. Any down-time without questions will need to be filled by hosting Commissioner.
 - d. Up to 2 guests can be accommodated for the Townhall with 7 days advanced notice. Guests that are County employees can be arranged by PI (based on their availability).
 - e. Video production will be managed by our Creative Media team for high-quality video and audio.
- D. Promotion:
 - a. County will promote the Townhall once on Facebook and once on Twitter. Event will also be added to the MeckNC.gov calendar. Additional promotion of event to be managed by the hosting Commissioner.
- E. Account access:
 - a. Since Townhalls will take place on the Commissioner's Facebook page, the social media team will need access to the associated Facebook Page at an "Admin" level at least 48 hours prior to the event.
 - b. Social media team will remove themselves from the account within 24 hours of the event and supply instructions to the Commissioner detailing how to ensure access has been removed.
- F. Day of Event
 - a. At least two members of PI will be on hand to assist
 - b. Commissioner should arrive at least one hour in advance for set-up and have:
 - i. Their Facebook log-in information
 - ii. A phone, iPad, or laptop to monitor questions as they come in
 - c. Commissioner will be responsible for monitoring comments/questions on their own device and answering questions that may get posted after the conclusion of the event.

V. Election Year Protocol

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- A. During election cycles staff supported meetings and events are reduced to 2 (two) town hall style events (at which no political campaign signs or literature may be present or distributed) to address pertinent county concerns; from the beginning of the candidate filing period for election to the Board of County Commissioners or other public office through Election Day, unless otherwise noted. Some consideration can be made for Board Members who are not running for re-election or adjusted to fit expectations after the Primary Election. The County Manager will determine if the meeting topic fulfills this requirement.
- B. Staff will never provide support for town hall meetings where political contributions are being solicited. Additionally, County staff and resources will never be used in conjunction with activities that are or may be perceived to be related to a political campaign.
- C. If a Board member requests that staff provide information pertinent to County business for a district/community meeting held during the time between the date that the candidate filing period for Board of County Commissioners begins and Election Day, staff will provide the information to the incumbent Board member and will make the same information available to the entire Board of County Commissioners.
- D. If Board members run for offices other than the Board of County Commissioners in non-election years, staff will not support those meetings.
- E. The Hatch Act - The Hatch Act is federal legislation that restricts the political activity of certain government employees. It was enacted to ensure that the influence of partisan politics in government institutions was limited and to protect public servants from perceived pressure from political parties to work on political campaigns or give political contributions.
- F. How is it Administered? The provisions of the Hatch Act attempt to ensure that the government institutions' impartiality and integrity are not compromised. While the Hatch Act is a federal law, it applies not only to individuals employed by an agency in the federal executive branch but also to individuals principally employed by state, county or municipal executive agencies in connection with programs financed in whole or in part by loans or grants made by the United States or a federal agency.
- G. Are County employees subject to the Hatch Act? Yes, if a municipal employee performs duties in connection with an activity financed in whole or in part by a federal loan or grant, it will not matter that he or she receives his or her salary from non-federal monies; that he or she has no authority or discretion on how those federal funds are spent; or that the federal monies fund only a small portion of the program; he or she will be subject to the Hatch Act.
- H. What activities are prohibited? The Hatch Act prohibits those municipal officials subject to its provisions from:
 - a. Using their official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or nomination for office
 - b. Directly or indirectly coercing, attempting to coerce, commanding or advising a state or local employee to pay, lend or contribute anything of value to a party, committee, organization, agency, or person for political purposes.
 - c. Running as a candidate for public office in a partisan election, that it, in an election in which any candidate represents, for example the Democratic or Republican party.
- I. How does Mecklenburg County HR Policy administer regulations around political activity? See below:

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Every employee of the County has a civic responsibility to support good government by every available means and in every appropriate manner. Each employee may join or affiliate with civic organizations of a

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political nature and support the principles or policies of a civic or political organization in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the State of North Carolina and in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the United States of America.

However, no employees shall:

1. Engage in any political activity while on duty or within any period of time during which they are expected to render services for which they receive compensation from the County;
2. Be required, as a duty of their office or employment, or as a condition for employment, promotion or tenure of office, to contribute funds for political or partisan purposes;
3. Solicit, or act as custodian of, funds for political or partisan purposes while on duty as an employee of the County;
4. Coerce or compel contributions for political or partisan purposes by any other employee of the governmental unit;
5. Use County funds, supplies, or equipment of the governmental unit for partisan or political purposes; or
6. Use their official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or nomination for political office.

HATCH ACT

Those agencies that are funded by federal monies are subject to the Hatch Act which prohibits certain political activity by County employees in those agencies.

Mecklenburg County Human Resources Policy and Procedures; Section 1; Board Policy; General

Kim, Sung Mo. “Applicability of the Hatch Act to Municipal Officers and Employees.” *Municipal Lawyer*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2006, pp. 15–17.