

# Meeting in a Box

## Complete Count Committee Toolkit for Census 2020

### Introduction

North Chicago Complete Count Committee offers Meeting in a Box as a toolkit to assist in organizing your Census 2020 informational meeting. We provide tips and suggestions, as well as models for you to adapt to your particular group. Use this guide as you rally your first supporters, meet with the public and share Census 2020 educational information.

### A. Getting Started

Getting everyone together, or building a coalition, requires careful planning and thought.

The first step is to organize a local group of enthusiastic and engaged community members—those who'll help you persuade the greater community of the Census 2020 value later on. Here are a few important tips for this early stage of gathering troops:

- **Reserve a space in a neutral location** (City Hall, the library or community center) that is easily accessible, safe for anyone traveling at night, and large enough to accommodate your expected audience. Check as well on the availability of audio/visual equipment and chairs.
- **Invite a wide variety of people and groups** with potential interest in the Census 2020 (someone with a business or non-profit in the community). Send a concise, attractive invitation, and provide a name and number for further information.
- **Plan an agenda**, have copies for everyone who attends, and clearly identify the desired outcome of the meeting. Include a get-acquainted time during which people will give their name, the name of the organization they represent, and why they are interested in this project.
- **Do your homework.** Know everything you can about the Census.
- **Respect people's busy schedules by starting and ending on time.** Estimate (and write it on your copy of the agenda) the amount of time to be spent on each item, and then try to stick to it. Allow some cushion for questions and diversions, and if the meeting is still running long, ask the group what they would like to do. You can suggest another meeting be scheduled to cover a particular topic, or you can offer to stay after the meeting to talk.

#### Meeting in a Box Includes:

- Getting Started:** how to organize your local coalition-building meeting. **1**
- Meeting Checklist:** a step-by-step guide to planning a successful meeting with the public. **3**
- Speaker Tips:** a crash-course in preparedness and public speaking. **6**
- Model Speech Outline:** a practical tool for drafting a persuasive pitch. **7**
- Managing the Q & A:** how to prepare yourself for a comfortable and productive session.

- **Be open to questions and discussion.** You may not have all the answers at this point, and don't be afraid to admit that you are not sure of a particular response. But do offer to find the answer and get back to the person as soon as possible. This back- and-forth will help you to get a sense of the level of support and enthusiasm or opposition.
- **Achieve the goal of your agenda.** If you set out to agree on another meeting, get someone from the audience to assist in planning it and establish a time frame.
- **Get names, email, addresses and phone numbers** of every person who attends. This list will be the core of your coalition.

As soon as you've built this solid groundwork of support, the next step is to 'go public' with the project and convince the broader community to participate. The "Meeting Checklist, PowerPoint presentation" "Model Speech Outline," and "Managing the Q & A" sections are designed to be of special assistance during this phase of committee development. Keep looking for opportunities, at this point, to speak about the 2020 Census at civic groups, schools and community organizations, as well as to city boards and commissions.

## B. Meeting Checklist

Successful meetings are carefully and thoughtfully planned. Even if you are not responsible for the entire meeting, your portion will be remembered and valued if you have properly prepared.

This Meeting Checklist is designed to be copied and completed for each meeting in which you are involved or will speak. Check off the answers, add notes or comments in the margins, and fill in the blanks. After the event, jot down your thoughts on how it went, things to do differently next time, names of people to contact, or any follow-up that you need to do. Use this framework as your worksheet.

### Before the Meeting

#### Understand the Meeting

- What is your role? To...
- Be part of a larger agenda
  - Introduce the concept the Census
  - Build support for participation
  - Respond to issues and concerns expressed about the 2020 Census
  - Other:

**Know Your Audience** Knowing the types of people who will attend will help you prepare your remarks, so try to get a sense of their attitudes before you begin. Who will be there?

- Friends and supporters of the Census 2020 Complete Count Committee
- Public officials/decision makers
- Community leaders
- People without a firm opinion about the census
- Reporters from newspapers and/or broadcast media
- Business people from the community

**Time and Location** Meeting day/date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address of meeting: \_\_\_\_\_  
Directions to location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Starting time: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Details for Presentation

Time allotted for presentation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other agenda items: \_\_\_\_\_  
My place on agenda: \_\_\_\_\_  
Person who will introduce me: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of people expected to attend: \_\_\_\_\_

Equipment needed:

- Microphones and speakers for audience Q&A
- Podium Computer (and projector for PowerPoint)
- Extension cord Table for handouts

Other:

- Room set-up: Location of head table (behind or alongside speaker?)
- Visual obstructions (pillars, people entering/exiting/moving about)
- Audio/visual equipment (easy viewing/hearing by everyone in attendance, accessible to electrical outlet)

### **Handout Materials**

Pass out materials at the door when people arrive. Attendees will have an opportunity to look through them before your presentation. But if the information needs explanation, unnecessary questions may arise before you have presented the material in a larger context. If you reference the material in your presentation, then early distribution has the benefit of reinforcing your points.

At the time of your presentation. People always shuffle through papers when they receive them, so plan accordingly. Give them time to shuffle and settle, then keep them focused by identifying the page you are referencing.

At the conclusion of the meeting. If the materials replicate any visuals you use and repeat the information you give, then a takehome flier may be your best approach to keep your points fresh on their minds.

### **Introduction**

If someone will introduce you, write the introduction for him/her. They will greatly appreciate it, and you will know exactly what will be said—no surprises or errors. Make the introduction short and relevant to why you are speaking on this topic.

## Day of the Meeting

<b>Verify</b>	Call the sponsoring office or host to verify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting time</li><li>• Room number</li><li>• Agenda</li><li>• Number of expected attendees</li><li>• VIPs</li><li>• Audio/visual equipment</li><li>• Other equipment needs</li><li>• That the room will be open approximately one hour before the meeting</li></ul>
<b>Review</b>	Look over your presentation, practice and rehearse your remarks, and double-check your handout materials.
<b>Visualize</b>	Close your eyes and envision the meeting and your role in it. See yourself walking to the podium, laying out your notes, and looking over the audience. How will you look and sound to them? Imagine the Q&A period. See yourself as calm, in control, knowledgeable, able to respond to even the toughest questions.
<b>Relax</b>	If you've done the work, you're ready.

## One Hour Before the Meeting

<b>Arrive</b>	Check room set-up and acquaint yourself with the audio/visual equipment. Is everything: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plugged in</li><li>• Turned on</li><li>• Organized with remote control and ideal sound level (go to back of room and listen)</li></ul> <p><b>How about the:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Microphone: ___on/off switch___volume</li><li>• Materials: ___table set up___materials arranged</li><li>• Visuals and/or maps</li></ul>
<b>Greet Attendees</b>	If appropriate, be at the door to say hello to the people you know and also introduce yourself to unfamiliar faces.
<b>Compose Yourself</b>	About five minutes before the meeting is to start, remove yourself from the crowd. Get a drink of water, collect your thoughts and focus on what you are going to be saying. Block out all distractions and do a quick visual re-run of the meeting.

## C. Speaker Tips

Speaking to an audience should be little different than talking with your best friend over coffee. Your subject matter is something you believe in and want to share with others. Your audience is made up of ordinary people—just like you and your friends—from the community. You work together, shop together, do business with one another. Think of them as friends and supporters and you will feel more comfortable speaking to them.

Here are a few valuable pointers to assist you in your presentation:

### Appearance

You have five seconds to make your first impression. Recognize that some people in your audience may be rather conservative in their dress and appearance, and conservative dressers are more uncomfortable with ‘under-dressed’ speakers than casual dressers are with ‘overdressed’ speakers.

### Organize

Have your notes in order, clearly marked, in large type. Number the pages in case you drop or mislay them. Don’t take ‘play things,’ like pens, pencils or paper clips, to the podium with you. These fidget items can be very distracting to the audience. Indeed many speakers carry their speech inside a folder to keep everything tight and together; this easy step adds a polished “look.”

### Look at your audience

Find a friendly face or two for ready reference throughout the talk. Notice if the audience is restless or tired, as these are clues for how to pace your presentation. If they look weary and the meeting has already gone on for a while, then invite them to stand for a minute and suggest that your topic ties right in to the benefits of movement and exercise.

### Breathe

When speakers are tense, their breathing is shallow, which further contributes to nervousness. Take a deep breath, hold it for a count of five, exhale and begin. If you feel yourself getting tense, breathe deeply again.

### Jokes

Don’t tell them unless jokes fit your style and personality, and you are experienced and comfortable telling them. A flat joke can disrupt an audience as much as a good joke can disarm and endear them to you.

### Speak up

Volume and tone are important parts of your message. People must be able to hear you, and your tone tells your audience about your attitude (enthusiasm, confidence, uncertainty) on the subject. Also be sure to maintain eye-contact and speak to your audience, not to your notes or the podium.

### Speak clearly

Pronounce your words correctly and clearly, and talk a little slower than you think you should. Your nervous instincts may tell you to speed along as quickly as possible, but remember that the message you are sharing is new to your audience. The faster and more monotonous your tone, the more you risk sacrificing your effectiveness—lines have to be delivered, not just recited. So avoid slang, jargon and acronyms, and keep your sentences short and simple. Also beware of verbal tics, like saying “um” between thoughts or using “like” repetitively, which can distract from your message.

### Variety

Your presentation will be more interesting if you vary the pace and the volume. Slow way down when you make your key points, but then speed up again when you are telling a more narrative story. And never be afraid of a pause. Silence, appropriately and deliberately placed, gives your audience time to catch up and think about what you’re telling them.

### Summarize

Be sure to summarize each major point after you make it, and then again—briefly, in a few words—at the end of the presentation. These summaries should be “take-home” phrases, memorable, often catchy thoughts that your audience will remember most clearly.

### Relax

Enjoy yourself! You have the best message in town, and this is your opportunity to talk about it.

## D. Model Speech Outline for Public Meeting Presentation

### Introduction (*an example*):

<b>Acknowledge VIPs</b>	It's good to see each of you here tonight, but I'd especially like to acknowledge our Mayor, Leon Rockingham, Jr (and any other elected officials present). Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule(s) for this important discussion.
<b>Purpose</b>	<p>I'm here to introduce you to an exciting opportunity right here in our community. This is...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• an opportunity to ensure a complete and accurate count during for the 2020 Census.</li><li>• an opportunity to join with other communities all across the country</li><li>• an opportunity to make a difference in the quality of life here in North Chicago.</li></ul>
<b>Outline your speech</b>	<p>I'd like to accomplish <b>three</b> things this evening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First, I'd like to show you an informational presentation about the 2020 census.</li><li>• Then I'd like to share some more detailed information about the impacts of your participation.</li><li>• Finally, I'd like to answer your questions.</li></ul>
<b>Presentation</b>	<p>To provide your audience with facts about the 2020 census, use the included PowerPoint presentation to explain it and the impact it has on communities. Use the U.S. Census Bureau website (<a href="https://www.census.gov/">https://www.census.gov/</a>) or the Illinois Complete Count Commission website (<a href="http://illinois2020.com/">http://illinois2020.com/</a>) as resources to collect information about Census 2020 across the country and state, and the benefits that will be most appealing to your audience.</p> <p>Contact your local Complete Count Committee director if you need assistance acquiring maps or aerial photography. (But resist the temptation during your presentation to talk to the map rather than your audience.)</p> <p><b>Step X</b> —</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What must be done? Describe the action in broad terms and then in more specific terms.</li><li>2. How will this action advance impact ?</li><li>3. Who has responsibility for this action?</li><li>4. What resources will be required?</li><li>5. What is the timeline? How long will it take? Are there any set deadlines that must be met?</li></ol>

**Summarize**

This is our opportunity to ensure we are all counted once and in the right place, but we must begin now by:

(Step One from above)

(Step Two ... )

(Step Three ... )

**Q & A (Watch your time!)**

Now I'd like to hear your questions and comments.

**Conclusion**

We've talked about an exciting possibility for our community, a possibility that I believe will truly enhance our lifestyles. To ensure government funding of key programs and protect our legislative voice, we must act now and work together. Thank you all for your interest. I will stay after the meeting for a while to answer further questions.

## E. Managing the Q & A

A Question and Answer session following your presentation can be very valuable and informative for both you and the audience. As the speaker, you benefit from the questions in two ways: first, they help define the concerns of people in your audience, and second, you have an opportunity to expand on some of the points in your presentation and clear up any misconceptions.

A Q & A session can pose problems, however, if you are not prepared. So here are some pointers to ensure your effective handling of the audience's questions and concerns.

- Know more about your topic than time allows in your presentation. The informational flyers included in your supplies may be a good source of information, and they provide important fodder for answering specific questions that you may not have been able to address up front.
- Anticipate questions that might be asked. A list of FAQ's from the US Census Bureau is provided.
- Listen carefully to each person who asks a question, and look directly at them while they are speaking. They deserve your full attention, regardless of the quality of the question. Don't be dismissive of anyone's interests.
- Understand the question. If it's not obvious what someone is asking, or even if you are not absolutely certain, then ask for clarification. You might say, "As I understand your question, you would like to know... ." If the question is perfectly clear, then it's still a good idea to repeat the question in your answer. Also, in large rooms, some people may have difficulty hearing the question, so repeating it can perform a double service to make sure everyone understands what's being discussed.
- Never argue with the person asking the question. Give your answer and if the individual insists on challenging you, suggest that the two of you continue the discussion after the meeting because there are others in the audience with questions. Then politely move on to the next question.
- Correct inaccuracies immediately and in a positive manner. It's better to say, "Let me correct something you just said..." than to confront the person with, "What you just said is wrong."
- Be positive in your answers. You can use connector phrases to steer discussions and questions in more productive directions:

The real issue is... *or* We might be overlooking...

It's equally important to know...  
Let me add... *Or* You can go a step further...  
For instance... *Or* For example...  
Let me give you some facts...  
You should also know... *Or* Let me explain...

- Be honest. If you don't know the answer, say so, but also commit to find the answer after the meeting. Be sure you get the questioner's name, phone number or e-mail so you can get back to them.
- Double-check to make sure your answer is clearly understood. If the person asking the question has a puzzled look, use that behavioral feedback as a clue that you might need to be clearer. If you can't read their facial expression, then you can also plainly ask, "Did that answer your question?"
- Be friendly and sincere. You want these people to share your enthusiasm. If you can win them over from their skepticism or their doubts, you will have that many more hands to work and voices to encourage others to participate.
- Be available after the meeting to answer further questions, and invite people to stop by and discuss the project with you anytime.