

Using Town Hall Meetings to Uncover Your Congregation's Vision

Common techniques for congregational visioning include surveys, one-on-one interviews, house meetings, focus groups, and "dream teams". In addition to these methods, ChurchFuture has refined a technique called "Town Hall Meeting" that achieves high participation and reliable results in minimal time.

Town Hall meetings combine small group discussions with facilitated large group reporting, using carefully-worded non-suggestive questions.

We've found that this technique tends to reveal a future-positive vision, in part because of the influence of group reporting. Malcolm Gladwell explains this phenomenon in *The Tipping Point*, Little Brown and Co., 2000. In small groups everyone is heard, and in the large group people get the big picture

The technique is validated by the success of congregations that have used their Town Hall reports as a foundation in their plans for the future. In June, 2007 ChurchFuture sent an online survey to 21 lay leaders and pastors from churches that had used Town Hall Meetings in their planning process at least one year prior to the survey. Below are excerpts from the survey:

How important were the Town Hall Meetings for your church's planning?

- Should or could have been skipped – 0%
- Helpful – 9%
- Very helpful – 36%
- Essential – 55%



Regarding Town Hall visioning, what is your advice to other churches exploring joint ministry?

- Don't use Town Hall-type visioning – 0%
- Conduct Town Hall Meetings if easy – 9%
- Definitely conduct Town Hall Meetings – 91%

Thinking back, what were your feelings during the Town Hall visioning?

- The visioning was boring, not enjoyable – 0%
- The visioning was OK but not notable – 0%
- The visioning was stimulating and enjoyable – 100%

Town Hall Meetings can be scheduled immediately after worship or at other convenient times. They can be structured as two 45-minute sessions (which work well after worship) or as one 90-minute session. Just over 60% of the survey respondents recommended Sunday after worship over other times, and a similar number recommended 2 shorter sessions instead of one 90 minute session.

Attendance at Town Hall meetings has ranged from 24 to about 80. The ideal maximum number is probably closer to 60 or 70, however. In a larger congregation it would be possible to invite a random sample of members to participate instead of everyone.

A quote from the June survey:

"When people express their vision of what their church could be, they are more likely to want to work to make it look like that vision. Talking and dreaming about the future energizes and gives one hope."