



ARIZONA TOWN HALL

Building consensus - Charting progress

What is Arizona Town Hall?

Arizona Town Hall is a private nonprofit civic organization created in 1962 to establish, through research and discussion, an ever-increasing body of Arizona citizens accustomed to the processes of searching analysis and well-informed on the many facets of the state's economic, cultural and social life. It is governed by a sixty-two member board of directors, representing a composite of leadership from Arizona's fifteen counties and from approximately twenty diverse occupations and interests. Board members are elected to two-year staggered terms with bylaw stipulation that no board member may serve more than two consecutive two-year terms. There are currently over 1,500 Town Hall members throughout the state. Membership is attained only by participation in an Arizona Town Hall.



Twice each year the Arizona Town Hall brings together a wide cross section of approximately 150 prominent Arizona citizens to consider and discuss a topic of major concern to Arizona's future. Since the very specific Town Hall process cannot encompass all of Arizona's more than four million citizens at one time, individuals are nominated for invitation to each session by the sixty-two Board members. If an individual is interested in taking part, they either should contact one of those Board members, expressing interest, or send a résumé to the Town Hall office for consideration. The 150 invitees are considered from among more than 2,000 recommendations for each session. Greatest consideration for invitations are given to those who are very active in their communities with the realization that those are the individuals who will have the greatest opportunities to disseminate the information to their communities following a Town Hall as well as to help assure that the Town hall recommendations are enacted.

Topics are chosen almost a year in advance, using input from an annual poll of the statewide membership. One of the state's three universities then develops a comprehensive research document on the subject. This important contribution by the universities plays a strategic role in the development of each Town Hall.

The Town Halls follow a carefully developed process. The background research is sent to invitees well in advance of each three-day conference. Those Town Hall participants then meet in small groups for four sessions over a two-day period, all groups using the same discussion questions. On the third day, at the close of these informal, no-holds-barred discussion sessions, participants meet in plenary session to adopt a final report of findings and recommendations. That official report is then bound with the research and distributed to Town Hall members, all members of the Arizona Legislature and other elected officials, all public libraries and to the general public.



Enactment of Town Hall findings is not a primary purpose of the organization. Even so, the Town Hall recommendations have spread across Arizona in all directions. Many of the controversial topics discussed at the Town Halls have been on political agendas for a long time, but the opportunity that a Town Hall provides to discuss without pressure or rancor brings about a heightened level of understanding and responsibility among our state's citizens.

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