

TOWNHALLWALL.ORG

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H O W – T O S

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1. The Question

2. The Grid

3. The Wall

4. The Materials

5. The Community Statement

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1. The Question



The Question is the key to the Town Hall Wall (THW) experience.

1. The Community America's Town Hall Wall's question can be designed by a small all-partisan within the community. A good standard for choosing a question is finding one that its designers are sincerely interested in hearing people's opinions about.

The question should try to avoid influencing the answers; the answers are to be found on the Wall.

The question can address issues in the presidential campaign directly, or it can rise above the issues to address big pictures, larger aspects of life that nevertheless affect everyone, big pictures that are big enough to contain all the campaign issues within them anyway.

2. Suggested Questions:

“WHY VOTE?”

Question chosen for the Community America Town Hall Wall, Sept. 2004, in Santa Fe, N.M.

**“ WHAT MUST WE NOW DO TO BEST ADVANCE
PEACE, SAFETY AND PROSPERITY, FOR (YOUR
COMMUNITY'S NAME), THE NATION AND THE
GLOBE?”**

Adapted from the “Bridge to the 21st Century Town Hall Wall”, “An American Journey”, President Clinton's 2nd inaugural festival, and the “9/11 Commemoration Town Hall Wall”, 2002, WAH Center, (Williamsburg Art and Historical Center), Brooklyn, N.Y.;

or similarly,

“(NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY), THE NATION AND THE WORLD, WILL BE A BETTER PLACE IF... “

Adapted from the question contributed by a teenager from The Hague for the “Hague Peace Agenda Town Hall Wall”, 1999.

“WHAT ARE THE CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR NATION AND HOW CAN WE MAKE THEM BETTER”

Community America Town Hall Wall, North Brooklyn YMCA, Aug. 2004; question designed and responded to by students, parents and teachers of the High School for Civil Rights, Brooklyn, N.Y.

“HOW DO WE DEPEND ON EACH OTHER AND THE WEB OF LIFE FOR THE PLANET’S SURVIVAL?”

“Eleven Days of Global Unity”, in 12 countries around the world, New York City event sponsored by “We the World”, Sept. 2004

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3. The question can be hand-written, with a thick marker, hand painted with a brush and ink or paint, or blown up from a computer print-out. The question should run along the top of the Wall, preferably for the length of the Wall, generally, in a 1’ wide strip of space.

4. Unless the Wall is primarily for children, it is good to have the question about 7’ or 8’ above the ground, so that both physically and symbolically, it is “looked up to”. The top row of messages should be posted with outstretched arms.

The 1993 Clinton Inaugural Town Hall Wall was 10’ high and 80’ long, the two rows of horizontally placed 4’ x 8’ panels (of yellow corrugated plastic), nailed onto posts, 2’ off the ground. Even so, within 3 hours of opening the Wall, people had climbed onto each other’s shoulders to post messages, even covering the question.

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2. The Grid



People will post their hand-written, hand-drawn responses in the area below the question.

- 1. An important part of the Town Hall Wall design is that the response area is gridded. The grid adds a formality and a contrast to the informality of the handwriting, separating the Town Hall Wall from any resemblance to graffiti.**
- 2. The grid is usually drawn with 6" or 8" spaces because it is found that a 6" or 8" square piece of paper offers people enough space to write and/or draw a substantial message. Of course, people can write on as many squares of paper as they choose.**
- 3. The grid is most easily made by stretching 1/4" or 1/2" masking tape across the surface. Black masking tape accentuates the colored paper, but people have also used colored tape. Sometimes plain masking tape looks beautiful as well.**

The grid can also be drawn with a thick marker. The grid is so authoritative that when it is finished, small mishaps with the marker or tape don't matter at all. Infact once the spaces are measured out, the grid has been drawn free-hand, and it still works.

- 3. Sometimes the audience response is very heavy, sometimes the Wall is up for several days and the Town Hall Wall ends up five messages deep, with the grid covered over. But its presence at the beginning of the event is what gave the Wall a clear foundation and direction.**



3. The Wall



1. The simplest Town Hall Wall is a piece of paper or canvas stretched over an existing wall. White paper or brown wrapping paper works well; more refined designer paper if desired.

Some of the major Town Hall Walls have been paper on a wall, (see illustrations for the Reinvention Revolution Town Hall Walls, Washington, D.C., 1996/97; the Women's Wisdom Wall at the United Nations Women's Conference, Beijing, 1999; The Hague Peace Agenda THW, The Hague, 1999.

2. Free Standing Structures: This writer is not a carpenter, and the information submitted here based on Walls we have done is probably obvious. But here are some often used ideas that might serve as points of departure.

a. On ground, if permitted, sink 10' 1' x 2''s or 2'' x 2'' into the ground about 15'' to 24'' and nail 4' x 8' panels onto them, either horizontally or vertically.

b. A right triangle support system of 2'' x 2''s, the posting panels nailed onto the perpendicular boards.

c. 4' x 8' panels connected vertically in a zig-zag position, further stabilized by rope or wire to a nearby support.

3. The Town Hall Wall posting surface should be perpendicular to the ground, another way to give authority to the Wall. If there is a situation that makes that difficult, 4' x 8' panels can be leaned up against a wall, a building or fence, with as little tilt as possible, tied to something nearby with wire or cord.

4. If there is a situation that makes all of the above impossible, large scale successful Town Hall Walls events have worked by laying canvas, paper, or panels, on the ground. One such festive event was on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

The setting should still include a table surface for holding the materials and writing the messages, but in a pinch, people have passed out the paper squares on clip-boards.

5. The Mobile Unit Town Hall Wall

A mobile unit Town Hall Wall can be created by mounting paper, canvas, or panels to the outsides of a truck, scheduling Town Hall Wall public event stops in more remote parts of the community.

Fold-out tables, chairs, and writing/drawing materials can be carried inside the truck.

With a permit for a sound-system, the Mobile Unit Town Hall Wall passes through the community, looking very theatrical, playing music, making announcements, and being its own outreach mechanism.

6. The Panels: Traditionally, they are cardboard, plywood or foam-core. Yellow corrugated plastic was used at the 1993 Clinton inaugural Town Hall Wall. The group who mounted the Imagine N.Y. Town Hall Wall in Hoboken, N.J. introduced aluminum faced insulation board. Its silver surface created a wonderful looking Wall even before any messages were put on it. It was used again in the Union Square Town Hall Wall.

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4. Materials



1. Near to the Town Hall Wall are chairs and tables where people sit and reflect their answers to the question(s), then write and/or draw them and place them in one of the spaces on the grid.

2. On the tables:

a. The Paper

Neon-bright, colored construction paper cut into either 6” or 8” squares to fit the spaces on the grid.

Sometimes the square is printed at the top with the title and date of the event, and at the bottom, with a few dotted lines for people to optionally write their name, address and numbers.

b. Paper Holders

Napkin holders or desk-top letter holders that hold the paper squares upright are used successfully. They prevent paper-sprawl, keeping the writing environment neat and beckoning. Otherwise, don’t forget the paper weights for surreptitious afternoon breezes.

c. Markers and Pens

For writing/drawing the messages for the Wall. When possible, offer people many colors and thin and thicker writing points. Plastic containers, baskets, or empty cans will serve as containers.

d. Adherents

Depending on the surface of the Wall: glue-sticks, push-pins, tacks, or

plain masking tape that can be rolled sticky-side out and placed on the back of the message so that it won't show.

Remember that after the Town Hall Wall event you might want to detach the paper squares from the Wall. Thousands of messages can be stored in a small pile of shoe boxes.

e. Optional

(1) To further articulate the portrait of the community during this campaign season, people can be invited to optionally write “R” (for Republican), “D” (for Democrat), “G” (for Greens), “U” (for Undecided), on a corner of their message. Little stickers can be provided for this purpose.

(2) Add crayons, glitter and little scissors to the equipment table and you give people the added potential for making their squares little works-of-art, and the whole Town Hall Wall a dazzling combination of public poetry and art.

Glitter can be adhered to the paper with glue-sticks. It is sold in little shakers, but if a lot of glitter will be used, it can be bought in large jars, and put on the table in small paper soufflé cups, refilled when necessary.



5. C r e a t i n g t h e C o m m u n i t y S t a t e m e n t



The pattern of community thought is revealed on the Town Hall Wall.

A small group of all-partisan members of the community is invited to come together to consolidate that pattern of thought into the Community Statement to be entered on your community's page on the Town Hall Wall website and forwarded to the candidates for response.

A community Town Hall Meeting can also be called for this purpose.

One of the ways that the Community Statement can be formed is by defining the categories of thought and feeling that appeared on the Wall and counting the percentage of those who thought one way and those who thought another.

The Community Statement can include particular messages that are chosen because they are exceptionally wise, witty, poetic or artistic, or because they stand out as examples of the community's trend of thought.

