

HOW TO CONDUCT A COMMUNITY INTEREST MEETING

Many church planters have effectively used community interest meetings in preparing to launch their new churches. Though they may vary slightly, most planters have the same perspective, purpose, and process in these meetings.

The Perspective

After much of the preparation phase work has been done, the church planter should begin plans to introduce the target community to the new church. The community interest meeting will be the first time the public has been invited to attend. This should not be thought of as a worship service, but as an informal introduction to interested residents.

The Purpose

The purpose of the community interest meeting is at least three-fold:

1. **Educate**—The church planter should educate those who attend that a new church is being started in their area. He should use this opportunity to underscore the importance of church planting as an effective means of fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).
2. **Explain**—This meeting is a perfect opportunity for the church planter to explain or “cast” his purpose, vision, and values statements. He should have them printed in professional form and, if possible, share them on power point or in some other effective visual manner. This may be a good time to deal with questions from the group.
3. **Extend**—The church planter will want to extend an opportunity to those who have expressed interest to become personally involved in the new church. They can pray, contribute financially, serve on a start team, or join the core group.

The Process

The process of the community interest meeting involves at least four key steps:

1. **The Place**—The place for the meeting should be secured well in advance. It should be of adequate size to accommodate the anticipated participants but not too large. If the room is too large for the group, the group dynamics will be negative. The room should be as near the center of the target community as possible and in a well-known location which is easily found.
2. **The Promotion**—The meeting should be well advertised. Radio and cable T V spots, local newspapers, fliers taken door-to-door, and signs in local businesses will help to promote the meeting. The beginning and ending times should be stated and adhered to with 60 to 90 minutes allocated.

3. **The Planning**—The church planter will need to do advance planning by deciding on an agenda for the meeting. The agenda should be printed and given to all who attend. The following is a sample agenda suggested by Phil Bryant:

- The purpose of planting new churches.
- A demographic report on the proposed target area—keep it simple using maps and graphs—no more than 10 minutes.
- The purpose of the new church.
- The values of the new church.
- The vision of the new church.
- Question time.
- Opportunity for response.¹

A response card should be prepared and distributed near the end of the meeting (sample response card below). The church planter should explain the various levels of response, lead in prayer, and ask all participants to complete the cards. The information from the cards will make possible the follow-up as he gathers a core group and other support from the meeting. The church planter may elect to schedule several community interest meetings until he has gathered the support he needs to launch the new church.

RESPONSE CARD NEW CHURCH	
Name _____	
Address _____	
Phone _____	Email _____
Number of children _____	Ages _____
Church Member _____	Where _____
I/We are interested in supporting NEW CHURCH in the following ways:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Will pray regularly	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;"> <i>"Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her" Ephesians 5:25</i> </div>
<input type="checkbox"/> Will share financially	
<input type="checkbox"/> Will join the "core group"	
<input type="checkbox"/> Will serve on a "start team"	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> No further interest	

4. **The Prospects**—Each person who completed a response card should be followed up quickly. If possible a letter should be sent the very next day. A phone call and a personal visit should follow after the letter has had time to be delivered. The visit will give the church planter time to further refine his vision and to clarify any questions or concerns the prospects may have. Plans to begin core group meetings should already be in place and printed information on this should be left.

¹Phil Bryant, The Church Planting Workbook (Victoria, Australia: The Baptist Union of Victoria), 2.7.

