



Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 Meeting-In-a-Box Method Description

Purpose: To effectively engage a broad spectrum of local residents in informal, small group discussions about community life.

Format

- The meetings are hosted by volunteers who agree to invite 10 to 15 of their friends, neighbors, co-workers, or family members into their homes, workplaces or other convenient locations to discuss a specific topic.
- The meetings typically last about an hour and are generally very well attended. All of the materials needed to conduct a successful meeting are contained in a cardboard box decorated with the project logo. The meeting host is provided with an instruction sheet and discussion guide. Since participants are typically asked only for their opinions, and not their judgment, it's not necessary to distribute information about the topic at hand.
- Following the discussion guide provided, the group generally discusses the topic for 30 to 40 minutes, then people are asked to individually complete response forms that focus on the same topic. All forms are collected and the box is returned to the sponsoring organization for compilation.

Strengths

- This method capitalizes on the strength of personal recruitment and very effectively involves people who would not normally participate in public meetings.
- Because they are being invited to attend by someone they know personally, people generally participate at very high rate, and since the meetings are comfortable and non-intimidating, participants' reactions to the meeting are usually quite positive.
- The Meetings-in-a-Box method is very effective at the beginning of a process when residents' opinions are solicited about broad topic areas, such as community values. Since people normally enjoy these initial meetings, many often stay engaged through the remainder of the process.

Products

- People are generally asked to offer their opinions in a group discussion about broad topics and to complete individual response forms that ask them about that same topic.
- For the Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 process, Meetings-in-a-Box will be used to solicit residents' ideas about community values and elements of a vision for the Marshall community in the year 2022.

Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 Meeting-In-a-Box Host Recruitment Talking Points

Marshall's a great place, but just like all communities across the country, we're going through some changes. And, since great communities don't just happen, we all need to work together to talk about and plan for, rather than just react to, those changes.

"Marshall Area in Focus: 2007" is a community involvement process open to every person in the Marshall area. It has a very simple purpose, and that's to talk about what we believe this community is and what we'd like it to be, to set goals for our future, to decide which of those goals is most important for first action and what we need to do to achieve them.

The first step in the six-month process provides a way for people all over the area to participate in a way that's convenient and comfortable for them. Through 30 "Meetings-in-a-Box," we're all encouraged gather in each other's living rooms, workplaces, or other convenient locations to talk about what we value about life in the Marshall area and what we'd like our community's future to be.

And we're asking for the help of volunteers like you to serve as hosts for these small group meetings to be held anytime between May 8 and June 7. As a volunteer host, your responsibilities would be to simply invite about 10 to 15 of your friends, neighbors and colleagues to meet with you in your home, workplace, or other comfortable setting (such as a neighborhood school) to talk our community. Volunteers with "Marshall Area in Focus" will do the rest.

We'll bring you a special box that literally has everything in it you and your neighbors will need to have a good meeting. You don't have to make any decisions at your meeting, and it should only take about an hour and a half of your time. Just follow the discussion guide provided to talk about our community and then fill out and collect the short individual response forms provided.

Can we count on you to help as a volunteer host?

(If he / she agrees -) What date between _____ and _____ would work best for you to hold your meeting?

Marshall Area in Focus: 2007
Meeting-In-a-Box Host Confirmation Letter

Dear _____:

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a volunteer host for our Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 "Meeting-in-a-Box" gatherings. In order for the Marshall Area in Focus plan truly reflect the interests of our area community, it's important that we hear from people who don't normally attend public meetings. We appreciate your willingness to invite your friends and neighbors to come together for a small group discussion about what we value in the Marshall area and what we'd like our community's future to look like.

As we discussed on the phone, the meeting you are hosting is scheduled for:

date: _____

time: _____

(You'll need to put information here about pick-up / drop-off arrangements for the box).

I would encourage you to place reminder phone calls about a week before your meeting to the people you've invited. That simple reminder to people will increase meeting attendance.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can help in any other way to make your meeting a success. I can be reached at _____. Thanks so much for helping Marshall Area in Focus connect with people in our community.

Sincerely,

Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 Meeting-In-a-Box Host Instructions

Dear _____:

Thanks again for serving as a host for one of the small group Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 meetings. This sheet should give you all the information you'll need to have a good meeting. It's intended to describe what your group needs to accomplish. The only thing we would ask you to follow word-for-word is the phrase that's underlined. Otherwise, use whatever words are comfortable for you.

HOST INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before your guests arrive, please unpack the box and arrange the meeting materials for easy access.
2. Please make sure each guest signs in on the form provided.
3. To begin the meeting, simply tell people the purpose of the meeting: to talk about what people value about life in the Marshall area and what they would like the future of their community to look like. Distribute the Marshall Area in Focus handouts at that time.
4. Then begin your discussion by asking the group the first question on the discussion guide. Allow about 20 minutes for discussion of the first question before asking the group the second question. If your group's conversation gets off-topic and continues for awhile, gently remind people of the purpose of the discussion and what you need to accomplish.
5. When people have had a total of about 40 minutes for discussion, please distribute the short individual response forms and pencils and ask people to fill out the forms.
6. When everyone has completed his / her form, please collect them.
7. Ask people one more time if they have signed in so we can put their name on the project mailing list.
8. Thank people for coming and encourage them to attend the Goals Workshop on from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, July 25 at the Marshall Activity Center to set goals for our community.
9. Put all the completed response forms, the sign-in sheet and any extra handout materials you have back in the box.
10. Please return the box to _____ by _____.

Thank You So Much For Your Help—We Couldn't Have Done It Without You!

April 28, 2002

Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 Contents of Boxes for Meeting-In-a-Box Meetings

A cardboard box, decorated with the Marshall Area in Focus logo, containing:

- Host instructions
- Sign-in form
- Project handouts
- Discussion guide
- Response forms
- Pencils
- Two packages of microwave popcorn (*if possible*)

Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 Meeting-In-a-Box Discussion Guide

1. Thank you so much for coming. I know you're all really busy, so I appreciate your fitting this into your schedule. This meeting is being sponsored by Marshall Area in Focus: 2007, a community involvement project that will result in setting goals for our community so that we can plan for, and not just react to, the changes that are happening in the Marshall area. (*Distribute handout*).
2. The first thing we're going to talk about today / tonight is what we value in our community. A value is a core quality or characteristic of a community, defining its soul and character. What do you believe are the values that best define the Marshall area? (*Encourage discussion for 20 minutes*)
3. That was a good discussion. Now our next question for discussion is: Thinking ahead 20 years, if you could create the perfect Marshall community, what would it be like and why? (*Encourage discussion for 20 minutes*)
4. Great discussion and interesting things to consider. Now it's time for each of us individually to write down what we think by filling out these response forms. Let's take about 10 or 15 minutes to do that. (*Collect forms when everyone's finished*).
5. All of the forms we've filled out will be compiled along with forms from all of the people who attend about 30 of these meetings being held over the next few weeks. The results of all those meetings will produce a list of community values and a list of important elements of a vision for Marshall's future.
6. The next step in the project is a community Workshop to work together to set five-year goals for Marshall, and we're all invited and encouraged to attend. It will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, July 25 at the Marshall Activity Center. I'm planning to attend and I hope to see you there, too.
7. That completes our work for today / tonight. Please make sure you've signed in so Marshall Area in Focus can stay in touch. Thanks again for coming.

Marshall Area in Focus: 2007
Meeting-In-a-Box Response Form

1. Please list 4 values that you believe reflect the best of the Marshall area, keeping your answers brief.

Value #1: _____

Value #2: _____

Value #3: _____

Value #4: _____

2. Please list 5 characteristics of the ideal Marshall community in the year 2022.

#1: _____

#2: _____

#3: _____

#4: _____

#5: _____

3. Now think about what you'd like our community to be like in 20 years. Pretend you are a newspaper reporter doing a story on the Marshall area 20 years from now. Write down the headline that describes what the Marshall community is like in the year 2022. Please be as specific as possible.

Headline: _____

Thank you very much for participating in this meeting. Please stay involved in Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 by attending the Community Goals Workshop on From 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, July 25 at the Marshall Activity Center.

