



# Key Considerations for Founding a Local Listens Organization

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## Key Planning Questions

1. What is the “climate” in my community? Are there particular issues or events that have led to sharp divisions and/or shared concerns?
2. What is the likelihood of cooperation across differences? How could a climate for cooperation be developed as part of founding a local Listens organization?
3. Are there respected leaders of diverse interests in my community who could be mobilized to organize a local Listens group?
4. How will we establish our legitimacy as a fair-minded, nonpartisan (multi-partisan), competent resource to my community?
5. What criteria should we use to determine which topics to address in our initial work?
6. What kind of advisory structure is best, and who should be part of it?
7. Should we be a local or regional group? If regional, what other towns might be involved?
8. When is the best time to announce our formation at a selectboard or city council meeting? In the local media?
9. What resources do we need from NH Listens to help us successfully create a local Listens organization?
10. Is there an existing organization that could serve as the home for My Town Listens, or will we be free-standing? In the future, should we create a nonprofit organization [501 c(3)] to serve as fiscal agent and independent home for our Listens group?

## Sample Proposed Vision

*My Town Listens* is founded on our shared desire to foster a political and social culture that values civil, informed deliberation of complex, polarizing issues. *Our Town Listens* helps us talk with and listen to each other across our differences of opinion, perspective, and ideology while respecting one another as fellow citizens who need to live, work, and govern together.

## Sample Proposed Mission

- To create a local organization of residents seeking to strengthen engagement in public life and decision making
- To augment formal, traditional means of engaging residents by creating venues and resources for face-to-face and online deliberation

## Possible Objectives

1. To organize community conversations where residents can get informed, talk with each other, and focus on shared solutions
2. To support our elected leaders with very difficult and controversial decisions needing in-depth citizen participation
3. To identify other potential partner organizations who share our goals and with whom we could collaborate for the purposes of increasing public engagement
4. To use a variety of conversation and dialogue formats to address specific challenges leading to concrete recommendations and actions
5. To increase the participation of community members who don't typically engage in public meetings or events, in order to ensure their voices are heard (for example, youth, low-income residents, and newcomers to the community)