



CITY
ENERGY 

A JOINT PROJECT of NRDC + IMT

DECEMBER 2018

TIPS FOR DELIVERING TESTIMONY



ABOUT CITY ENERGY PROJECT AND THE CITY ENERGY PROJECT RESOURCE LIBRARY

A joint initiative of the Institute for Market Transformation and the Natural Resources Defense Council, the City Energy Project supported bold yet practical ways to deploy energy efficiency at the city level to boost local economies, reduce pollution, and create healthier, more prosperous communities nationwide.

The project partnered with 20 local governments across the U.S. from 2013–2018 to design locally appropriate energy efficiency policies and programs. Building upon the past successes and innovation of cities, the City Energy Project established best-in-class practices for energy efficiency to be customized and replicated nationwide. Models and recommendations have been distilled into the City Energy Project Resource Library. This curated set of resources contains the necessary blueprints for a city government to craft and implement customized solutions to productively manage energy efficiency initiatives across commercial, multifamily, and public buildings in its jurisdiction.

For more information on the participating cities and counties in the City Energy Project, and to search the City Energy Project Resource Library, visit cityenergyproject.org.

The City Energy Project was generously supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and The Kresge Foundation.

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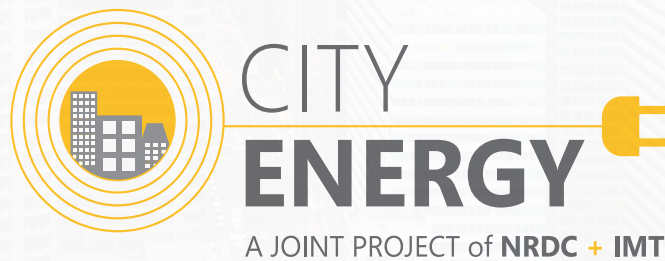




TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
GATHER PRELIMINARY LOGISTICS: KEY QUESTIONS.....	5
PREPARING YOUR TESTIMONY	6
PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT	8
THINGS TO PREPARE THE NIGHT BEFORE	8
WHEN IT'S TIME TO DELIVER.....	10
IF THEY ASK QUESTIONS AFTERWARD.....	11
IF YOU ARE COORDINATING OTHER TESTIFIERS	12

INTRODUCTION

As proposed policies move through the approval process in a city, public testimony may be requested in favor or against legislation. This document summarizes tips for delivering testimony as well as coordinating that of stakeholders.





GATHER PRELIMINARY LOGISTICS: KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the allotted time for your testimony? Usually members of the public get about two minutes to testify. However, city staff may get 10–15 minutes (with potential for PowerPoint slides), depending on the desires of the city council or committee.
- What is the format of the testimony? Usually members of the public stand at a podium facing the councilmembers for a few minutes. However, city staff may be asked to sit at a table facing the councilmembers the whole time the ordinance is being heard.
- Will you be asked questions? Usually members of the public are not asked questions about their testimony. However, city staff receive them.
- Does the committee or body hearing testimony want you to submit written testimony and then present an abbreviated version in person? Does it want you to address specific points in your testimony? If you are a city staffer or presenting as city staff, is your testimony meant to be objective or supportive? Given time constraints, what is the number one thing you want the decision makers to know?
- Are there other people scheduled to testify? Knowing who else will be speaking and what angles they may take can help shape your testimony to be most effective. It also allows you to better connect your testimony to other voices.



PREPARING YOUR TESTIMONY

- Start your testimony by greeting the body you are addressing. (“Good Morning Chairman XXX and Members of the YYY Committee.”)
- Very briefly introduce yourself, state your position on the ordinance, and explain your organization, if needed. This should be no more than three sentences. (“My name is [insert name] and I’m the [insert job title] for the [insert organization or company]. I’m here to express our strong support for this ordinance. [Insert a brief one-sentence description on the role of your organization or company and why it may be relevant to the ordinance.]”).
- If you are a city staffer or speaking as a city staffer, you should check with other staff on the appropriate tone and requested content of your testimony. You may be required to be objective and factual in your presentation.
- Articulate the issues the ordinance is trying to address and focus on solutions. Otherwise, people will tune out—they don’t want to feel hopeless or depressed.
- Use short sentences and action verbs to keep people listening. Do not overestimate the audience’s knowledge. Avoid acronyms, jargon, and complex terms.
- Emphasize themes that resonate in your city such as leadership, jobs, economic development, public health, sustainability, and transparency.
- Think about facts and anecdotes you can share to support your claims.
- Begin and end on a high and memorable note, with special emphasis on your closing. People often give too little thought to their final sentence, and end up trailing off in an unmemorable way.
- Monitor your delivery length: Some experts say normal speaking speed is 120 to 150 words per minute. Be aware of yours. As a benchmark, one page of double-spaced testimony takes about two minutes to read at a reasonable pace.

- Decide in advance what to cut from your oral remarks if you are informed at the last minute that you have less time than expected. Sudden scheduling changes mean this often happens.
- Always anticipate these questions and try to address a couple of them in your testimony if applicable:
 - » Why is this significant?
 - » What is new about this?
 - » How does this affect the average person?
 - » Will this raise costs or taxes?
 - » How much will this cost building owners?
 - » How does this policy benefit the city or the council districts?
- Be ready to answer the most difficult question you could possibly receive. When in doubt, always stay on message. “I can’t speak to that but I would be happy to look that up and get back to you. What I can tell you is…”
- Ask other allies or supportive staff to review your draft testimony (and potential slide deck) as well as your local stakeholders’ materials, if they exist.



LEARN MORE

Learn more about engaging stakeholders and reaching the community in the City Energy Project resource, [**ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT.**](#)

[VIEW RESOURCE >](#)



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

- Double-space your presentation so you can read it easily.
- Use bullet points to break apart sentences.
- Read your presentation aloud a few times beforehand to make sure it flows. If it does not, edit it.
- Be aware of your time limit. Again, one page double-spaced of testimony takes about two minutes to read.
- If possible, practice with a recorder so you can listen and ensure you sound natural.
- If applicable, practice for potential questions from your audience (more on this below).
- Practice your responses to possible questions, including gestures. Work with colleagues to prepare sample questions and answers to help with you with testimony and Q&A prep.
- Write down key points of anticipated responses and practice them. Stay flexible on wording but consistent on messaging to make sure your responses would answer the question asked.

THINGS TO PREPARE THE NIGHT BEFORE

- Identify the room number where the testimony will be heard. For city council meetings, this is often online on the council website under meeting agendas for the relevant committee or council meeting.
- Note the ordinance number. Often council or committees call people up to testify based on ordinance number.

WHAT TO EXPECT THE DAY OF TESTIFYING

- Make sure you eat and are hydrated beforehand to remain energized. A committee or council meeting can address dozens of resolutions, motions, and ordinances in a session and in any order, and city council meetings can last several hours.
- Wear professional business attire.
- Locate the room of the hearing or meeting. City council committee meetings can be held in smaller side rooms or the large city council chamber.
- If you are speaking as a member of the public, identify where to sign in. Often there are sign-up cards near the front of the room to fill out and give to a city staffer. You may need to do this even if you were invited to testify.



- On the sign-up card, list the ordinance number so that your time is allocated to the proper ordinance.
- If it is not clear, ask someone with a city badge where to sign up to testify.
- The council or committee chair will usually call out the order of the testifiers, or she or he will ask that testifiers line up. You may or may not be divided by testifiers who support and oppose the ordinance. Be prepared to follow or be followed by someone with opposing views.
- It is fine to bring your written notes with you when testifying.

WHEN IT'S TIME TO DELIVER...

- Make sure the microphone is level with your mouth so you are heard and are comfortable.
- Relax but maintain good posture. Sit or stand straight. Avoid fidgeting and defensive body language such as crossing the arms.
- Make sure you open by thanking the audience for hearing testimony on this issue.
- Tell them what you are going to talk about, talk about it, and then sum it up. Remember your high-level points.
- Stress the words that are key to each sentence. Vocal variety and varied pacing makes you sound passionate and engaged.
- Project your voice and enunciate.
- Smile and scan the audience, making eye contact when possible.
- Be aware of your speed. Slow yourself down and pause.
- Do not be discouraged if it appears that not everyone is listening—someone will be and it may be recorded.



IF THEY ASK QUESTIONS AFTERWARD

The key with any question and answer session is to be respectful of the questioner while staying on message.

- Listen carefully and write the question down if you need to.
- Pause with “That’s a really good question” if you need to— even if it is a question you have already answered in your testimony.
- If you do not understand the question, ask the questioner to repeat it.

Before giving the answer, repeat the question back (unless it is a negative one, see below). However, do not repeat a negative question. Simply answer it briefly and pivot/bridge to the topic you want to discuss.

For example:

- » “What really matters is ...”
- » “The most important issue is ...”
- » “It’s important to remember that ...”
- » “What we should really make clear ...”
- If the questioner states falsehoods or figures, correct him or her politely. Say something like, “I’m glad you brought this up. This is a common misperception and here’s why...” or “Thank you raising this issue. I want to correct the misconception that XXX.”
- Do not personally attack another questioner.
- Do not respond to hypothetical questions. Instead, clearly state your general position and offer examples.
- Give short answers. Finish your answer with a declarative sentence that ends on a vocal downtick to make it clear you have completed your answer.
- Avoid complicated answers. You do not need to tell the audience everything you know about the topic. Be descriptive and use images the

audience can picture. Use analogies and active language.

- You may need to bring your sense of humor. You do not need to be a comedian, but be willing to laugh—especially if the questioner is trying to be humorous.

IF YOU ARE COORDINATING OTHER TESTIFIERS

Someone in each city will need to communicate to others the logistics involved in testifying. Many people have never testified before a decision body before, and it is important they know what to expect. Otherwise, it can be a very intimidating experience.

- Set appropriate expectations. Know how long each testifier will have to speak and communicate that clearly. Usually it is just two minutes, which means that someone could be waiting to testify for three hours to speak for just two minutes. This is the nature of city council, but stakeholders need to know that.
- Be clear with what you want. Do you want oral or written testimony? Should stakeholders provide you with both? Should the written be longer than the oral? When should the written be submitted to be considered part of the record?
- Coordinate testimony content. If you get several stakeholders to testify, each should cover a slightly different perspective to avoid redundancy. Energy efficiency service providers can talk about benefits to the economy and job creation. Real estate leaders can talk about how this policy is important and how it is easy to comply with it. Avoid pre-assigning any order to the testimonies as that order can get jumbled the day-of and cause confusion. Rather, stick with having each testifier provide a different theme to his or her testimony that could be read in any order. Avoid stacking the deck with a single kind of stakeholder (such as energy efficiency service providers).
- Prepare stakeholders for potential changes. Changes happen all the time. Prepare stakeholders that the hearing date could change at any moment, or the committee could run out of time to hear all the testimony.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR MARKET TRANSFORMATION AND THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR MARKET TRANSFORMATION

The Institute for Market Transformation (IMT) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that catalyzes widespread and sustained demand for energy-efficient buildings. Founded in 1996 and based in Washington, D.C., IMT specializes in driving the intersection of real estate and public policy to make buildings more productive, affordable, valuable, and resilient. A trusted, non-partisan leader, IMT focuses on innovative and pragmatic solutions that fuel greater investment in energy-efficient buildings to meet local market priorities. IMT offers hands-on technical assistance and market research, alongside expertise in policy and program development and deployment and promotion of best practices and knowledge exchange. Its efforts lead to important policy outcomes, widespread changes in real estate practices, and lasting market demand for energy efficiency—resulting in greater benefits for all people, the economy, and the environment. Visit us at www.imt.org and follow us on Twitter [@IMT_speaks](https://twitter.com/IMT_speaks).



ABOUT THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Bozeman, MT, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter [@NRDC](https://twitter.com/NRDC).





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