



Questions for Witnesses: Civil Society Field Hearing

First, Understand the Purpose of Questioning. The goal of questioning is to build a clear public record, surface credible lived experience or expertise, test claims, and support collective understanding and accountability. Good questions clarify facts, reveal impacts, and connect testimony to broader democratic or policy implications.

1. Choose the Topic, Prepare the Frame

Before drafting questions, be clear on:

- **What the hearing is trying to establish** (facts, harms, gaps, alternatives, accountability).
- **Why this witness was invited** (experience, expertise, representation, decision-making role).
- **What the public record should show** at the end of the hearing.

Take some notes. What is an objective for each witness? (e.g., *“Establish how this policy affected the community’s health”*).

2. Know the Witness

- Review written testimony, bios, or prior statements.
- Identify **what they know directly** versus what they infer or believe.
- Note potential **constraints** (legal, professional, personal) that may limit answers.

Avoid asking witnesses to speculate beyond their role.

3. Structure Your Questions

Organize questions in a logical sequence:

1. **Grounding questions** – establish role, location, and experience
“Can you briefly describe your role and how you encountered [issue]?”
2. **Descriptive questions** – what happened, how, and when
“What changed after [action/event]?”
3. **Impact questions** – consequences for people, systems, or norms
“How did this affect your community or organization?”

4. **Accountability questions** – decisions, authority, and responsibility
“Who had the power to act, and what did they do or fail to do?”
5. **Forward-looking questions** – lessons, needs, and recommendations
“What would meaningful reform or outcome look like from your perspective?”

4. Use Effective Question Design

- Prefer **open-ended questions** (“how,” “what,” “why”) to invite narrative.
- Ask **one question at a time**.
- Use **plain language**; avoid jargon or compound phrasing.
- Frame questions neutrally—do not argue with the witness.

5. Listen Actively

- Allow witnesses to finish before redirecting.
- Be prepared to ask **follow-ups** that clarify or deepen the record:
 - “Can you give a concrete example?”
 - “What happened next?”
 - “Why does that matter?”

6. Protect the Integrity of the Record

- Keep questions relevant to the hearing’s purpose.
- Avoid editorial commentary during questioning.
- Ensure witnesses understand their testimony is **on the public record**.

7. Close with Clarity

End by inviting the witness to add anything essential:

- *“Is there something important we did not ask that should be part of the record?”*

Final Check Before the Hearing

- Do my questions advance the hearing’s purpose?
- Do they respect the witness and the public?

Will the answers help future decision-makers understand what is at stake?