



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

MEMO

DATE: October 6, 2011
TO: Planning Commission members
FROM: Claudia Flores, Project Manager
RE: Public Outreach and Engagements Effectiveness Initiative

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Background:

For years the Planning Department has been facilitating public meetings to solicit public input on proposed policies, plans and projects as well as to generally inform the public of changes. Although facilitated by planning professionals experienced in land use policy and practices, the structure, intent, and audience of these workshops has varied widely.

In order to achieve more effective and broader engagement of the City's residents and businesses in the planning process and the public's understanding of the Department's mission and our work; and to develop more collaborative working-relationships, the Department, in collaboration and with support from the Davenport Institute for Public Engagement, has been engaging in an Public Outreach & Engagement (POE) effectiveness initiative. It involves three general components: 1) Assessing and documenting our current practices, 2) Creating guidelines and tools for effective POE, and 3) Developing staff capacity through a training program for POE.

The Department has already been implementing some changes, such as more lunchtime forums with community speakers and guests, an informal shadowing program with community youth, and improving our website and incorporating social media to our POE toolkit.

Objectives:

Through this project we seek to address the following interrelated issues and challenges present in our current POE work:

- Identify effective strategies for engaging a more diverse public in the planning process; this includes tools to better articulate and facilitate public

engagement and participation as well as best practices for working with community groups, dealing with controversial projects, reaching hard-to-engage groups, and other issues that arise during the process.

- Clearly define our public engagement and institutionalize some principles and guidelines for POE by training all planning staff. The goal is to develop adaptable guidelines for POE efforts in order to improve the process and outcomes.
- Deploy and learn to manage Web 2.0 and new technologies
- Promote understanding, technical assistance and education about our work and about the planning and policy issues that affect our city and our region.
- Foster respectful, effective and trustworthy relationships, partnerships and communication with community stakeholders and the public

Status:

With the help of a summer intern and Davenport's expertise, the Department has almost completed the assessment and inventory of our current practices. This summer we completed the following:

- -A community online survey
- -A staff online survey
- -Several focus groups with staff, Commissioners and community members
- -Multiple individual interviews with staff and some community member

Attached you will find a summary of some key findings of the assessment as well our overarching recommendations based on the assessment.

Next Steps:

Next steps are to complete a full report with findings and with detailed recommendations to be prioritized for implementation. We will also be working with a consultant to develop an adaptable set of guidelines and a compilation of tools. In addition, we will be planning our first staff training.

Attachment: Summary of Findings & Recommendations

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SF Planning Department Public Outreach & Engagement (POE) Improvements Project
Summary of Findings & Recommendations

SOME KEY FINDINGS:

- 23 interviews and focus groups with groups, individuals, commissioners and staff
- **Surveys**
 - **Community Survey Respondents:** approximately 230 respondents (some partial)
 - 91% respondents live in SF; 67% work or study in SF
 - 70% homeowners, 21% renters, 28% business owners, 22% property owners
 - **Staff Survey Respondents:** 99 responded (some partial)
 - 36% Current Planning, 31% Citywide, 13% Environmental Planning, 20% Other (Admin, Oasis, ZA, etc.)

ROLE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Staff and public reflection is similar on the spectrum – both believe the role is to Inform-Consult-Involve the public; fewer chose Empower/Lead.

OUTREACH

Community Findings (ranked):

- Prefer to be reached via 1) email, 2) presentations/announcements at their meetings, 3) letters/mail
- Most have not participated because 1) did not about a meeting in advance, or 2) had time constraints
- Top new outreach ideas: newsletters, local sources (news, blogs, cafés, etc.), online!

Staff Findings (ranked):

- More Effective Methods: 1) website, 2) email, 3) social media, and 4) presentations at community organizations' meetings
- Less Effective Methods: 1) mailed postcards, 2) printed newspaper notices

ENGAGEMENT

- Staff, commissions and community feel the process tends to be overtaken by a vocal minority.

Community Findings (ranked):

- People prefer to participate via 1) public meeting, 2) focus groups, 3) surveys
- People are more likely to attend meetings when have 1) convenient location and days/times, 2) combined agency meetings, 3) shorter meetings

SF Planning Department Public Outreach & Engagement (POE) Improvements Project **Summary of Findings & Recommendations**

- Top new engagement ideas: 1) meetings by the community and by the Dept; 2) focus groups, 3) 24-hr access: slides, videos, comments email, blogs, social media. For CP: More lead time before hearings.
- Strong sentiment of lack of trust, transparency, and authenticity in Department's efforts

Staff Findings:

- More effective methods: public meetings, including use of break-out groups; one-on-one calls or meetings
- Least Used method: Focus Groups, surveys, CACs

Overall Effectiveness

- 69% of public believe the Dept is "Somewhat Effective" (54%) or "Effective" (15%), almost exactly in line with what staff believe the public think.
- 96% of staff believe the Dept is "Somewhat Effective" (77%) or "Effective" (19%)
- Only 40% of public believe the Dept communicates openly and explains how input is used, or believes their concerns were considered in final outcomes.
- 52% believe the Dept seeks to develop a collaborative relationship with community.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

ON OUTREACH STRATEGIES

1. ***Create, update, and maintain a centralized contact database***
2. ***Continue Improving accessibility of written notification***
3. ***Improve Public Awareness and Image through Department-wide Outreach and Education***
4. ***(CP) Standardize notification requirements***
5. ***Increase use of mainstream and alternative media***
6. ***Focus on on-the-ground outreach to communities (CP & CW)***

on Public Engagement

7. ***Use Creativity and Strategies in Addition to the Standard Large Community Meetings***
8. ***Improve Feedback Loops for Increasing Accountability and Trust***
9. ***Pay Attention to Staff Diversity, Cultural Sensitivity and Existing Inequities***
10. ***Remember Traditional Relationship Building***

ON ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR POE

11. ***Develop guidelines, resources, staff training, and evaluation strategies***