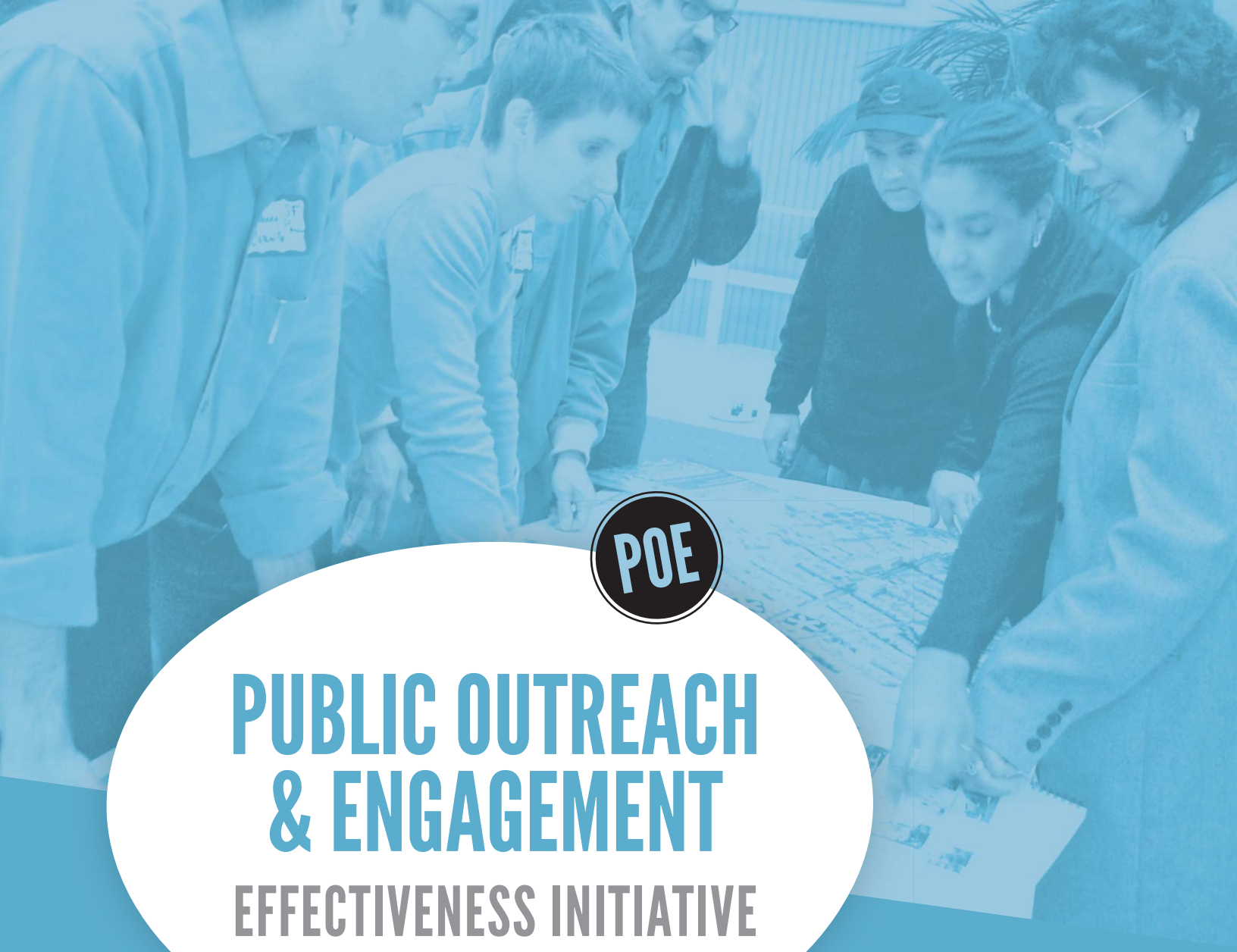

POE

PUBLIC OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

EFFECTIVENESS INITIATIVE

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT / SPRING 2012

SAN FRANCISCO
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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Executive Summary

The San Francisco Planning Department is conducting a **Public Outreach** & **Engagement** (POE) Effectiveness Initiative in an effort to better serve and work with the San Francisco community at large. The initiative, with technical and financial support from Friends of City Planning and the Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership, involves three general phases: a) assessing and documenting our current POE practices through surveys, interviews and focus groups; b) creating guidelines and tools for effective POE; and c) developing staff capacity through a training program for POE. This report summarizes the results of the first phase, which took place in summer 2011, and will inform the next steps, including the prioritization of recommendations.

Goals

The Department intends to accomplish the four goals identified below. This initiative is the first step toward achieving these goals. Implementation is key to actually achieving them.

1	***INCREASE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEPARTMENT'S MISSION AND WORK***
2	***ACHIEVE MORE EFFECTIVE AND BROADER ENGAGEMENT OF THE CITY'S RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES***
3	***DEVELOP MORE COLLABORATIVE AND POSITIVE WORKING-RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PUBLIC***
4	***ENSURE THE DEPARTMENT IS AN ADAPTIVE ORGANIZATION THAT USES THE LATEST METHODS FOR OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT***

What is Outreach and Engagement?

It is important to define what outreach and engagement mean in the context of the Department's work:

Outreach: the efforts to reach out and contact the public. Its goals: 1) to disseminate information about plans, services, events and projects; and 2) to form working relationships and recruit participants in the planning process, regardless of the nature of participation.

Engagement: the various ways in which staff involve the public in plans, events, and projects once the public has been reached through effective outreach. It is the activities and avenues for input, involvement, and collaboration between the public and the government agency.

Summary of Assessment Methods & Key Findings

In summer of 2011, staff conducted an assessment of our baseline practices to catalogue the Department's current practices, to identify strengths, challenges and areas of improvement, and to develop recommendations. Both staff and community were surveyed through online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews.

The data collected was evaluated through a framework that looked at:

- The depth of public involvement
- The breadth of public involvement
- The transparency and accountability of the Department's POE efforts
- The Department's current level or organizational resources for POE, and
- Overall effectiveness and satisfaction with the Department's current POE practices

Since the community survey respondents, the focus group and interview participants for this assessment were a small subset of the City's population (not a randomized, representative sample); the findings are not necessarily a precise measurement of the Department's performance across all of its community outreach and engagement activities. Rather, the generalizations and key findings outlined in this report are intended to determine some of the most common practices and community impressions of the Department, and to shed light on areas where the Department can focus on improvements. In summary, some of the key findings are the following:

- Staff and community participants rank the best way to disseminate information slightly differently: staff members rank 1) website, 2) email, 3) social media and 4) presentations at community organizations as most effective, whereas community respondents rank 1) email, 2) presentations at community organizations/meetings and 3) mailed letters as most effective.
- Staff and community participants agree that a vocal few tend to dominate the entirety of the public process.
- Community participants would like to see more culturally-relevant engagement, as well as participation opportunities in venues in which community members are already engaged (neighborhood meetings, local organizations, etc), in addition to the traditional public meetings hosted by the Department.
- Staff and community respondents generally agree that the role of the public process should be to inform, involve and collaborate with the public. They agree that the role of community involvement should vary according to the type and phase of each project.
- A few community respondents believe that a 'lead role' may be an appropriate role for the community at times, such as for implementing local projects, and that the Department should make greater efforts to empower the community.
- The majority of both staff and community respondents (77% and 54%, respectively) feel that the Department is "Somewhat Effective" with its POE efforts, but a higher percentage of community than staff (32% vs. 4%, respectively) believe the Department is "Not Effective".
- Community respondents as well as Commissioners feel more mechanisms are needed to increase accountability, transparency and trust in the public process.
- Community respondents, Commissioners and staff feel that more education about the Department's work is important, and that the Department would benefit from building stronger relationships with key community stakeholders.
- Staff members feel there is a need for enhanced communication systems, guidelines and tools, as well as training for planning, implementing and evaluating POE efforts.

Recommendations & Implementation Objectives

The report includes a range of recommendations to improve the Department's POE practices, many of which were suggested by community members. They are included in the appendix as a working document to be refined and prioritized. Based on the findings, the following six strategic objectives for improvement were identified to help prioritize implementation of the recommendations and focus the Department's POE efforts:

1. Guidelines & Resources

create guidelines, policies and systems for planning, implementing and evaluating POE efforts

2. Communication

improve and upgrade contact databases and communication systems, and continue the process to make notices and information accessible, clear and streamlined, including to limited English-speaking persons (LEP)

3. Participation

broaden public participation in planning efforts by ensuring POE efforts are varied, culturally sensitive and accessible, in particular to underrepresented and LEP groups

4. Relationship-Building

improve existing and build new working relationships with the public.

5. Education

focus on community education to increase understanding of the Department's work and opportunities for public participation in the planning process.

6. Capacity Building

increase staff capacity (including cultural sensitivity and staff diversity) to carry out the recommendations of the POE assessment

Next Steps

The next steps in the POE effectiveness process include:

1) Reviewing the recommendations to determine which most effectively support the Department's POE goals

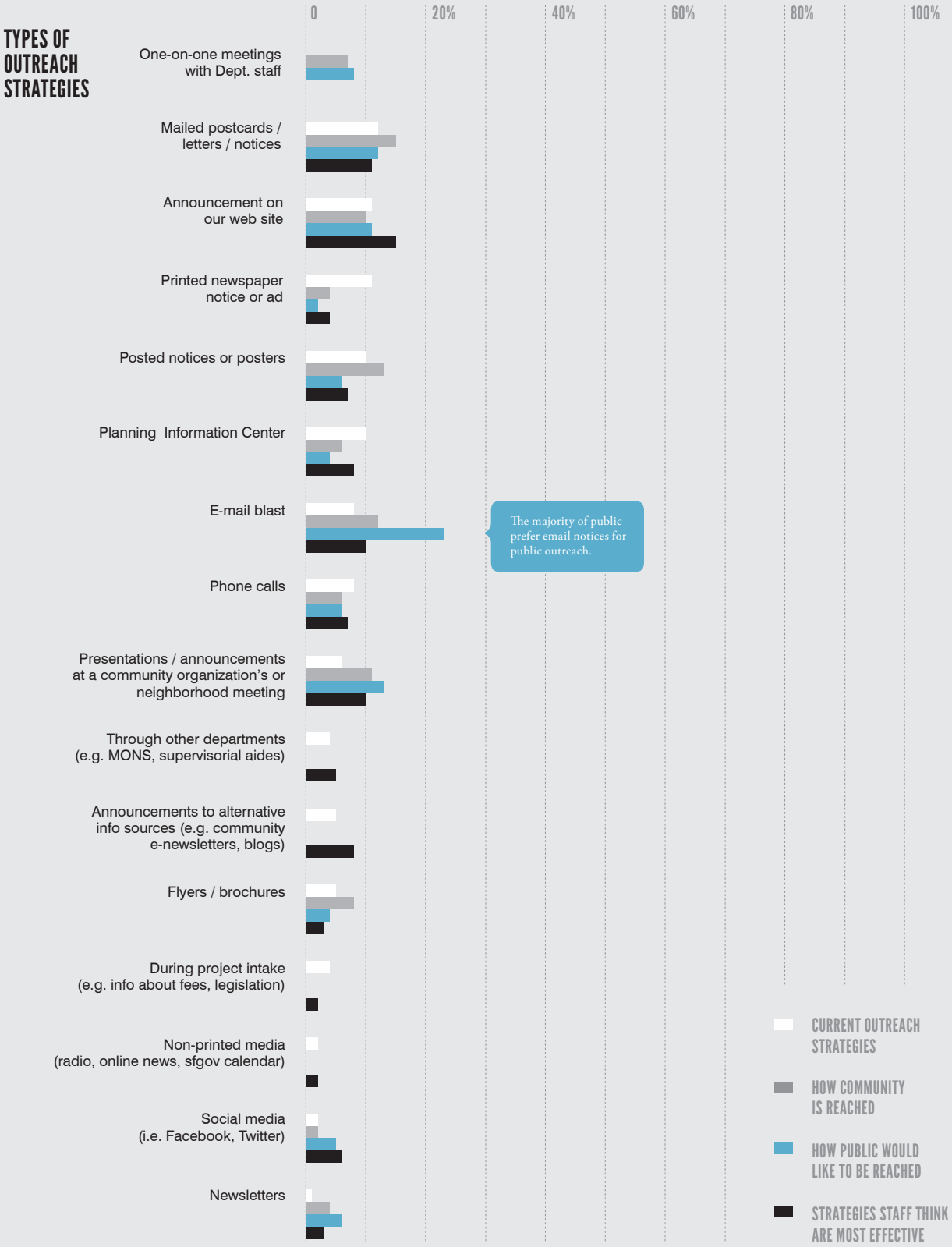
2) Prioritizing those recommendations for implementation

3) Completing the second phase of this initiative, which entails developing a customizable set of Guidelines for planning and carrying out POE and setting up a library of tools and best practices

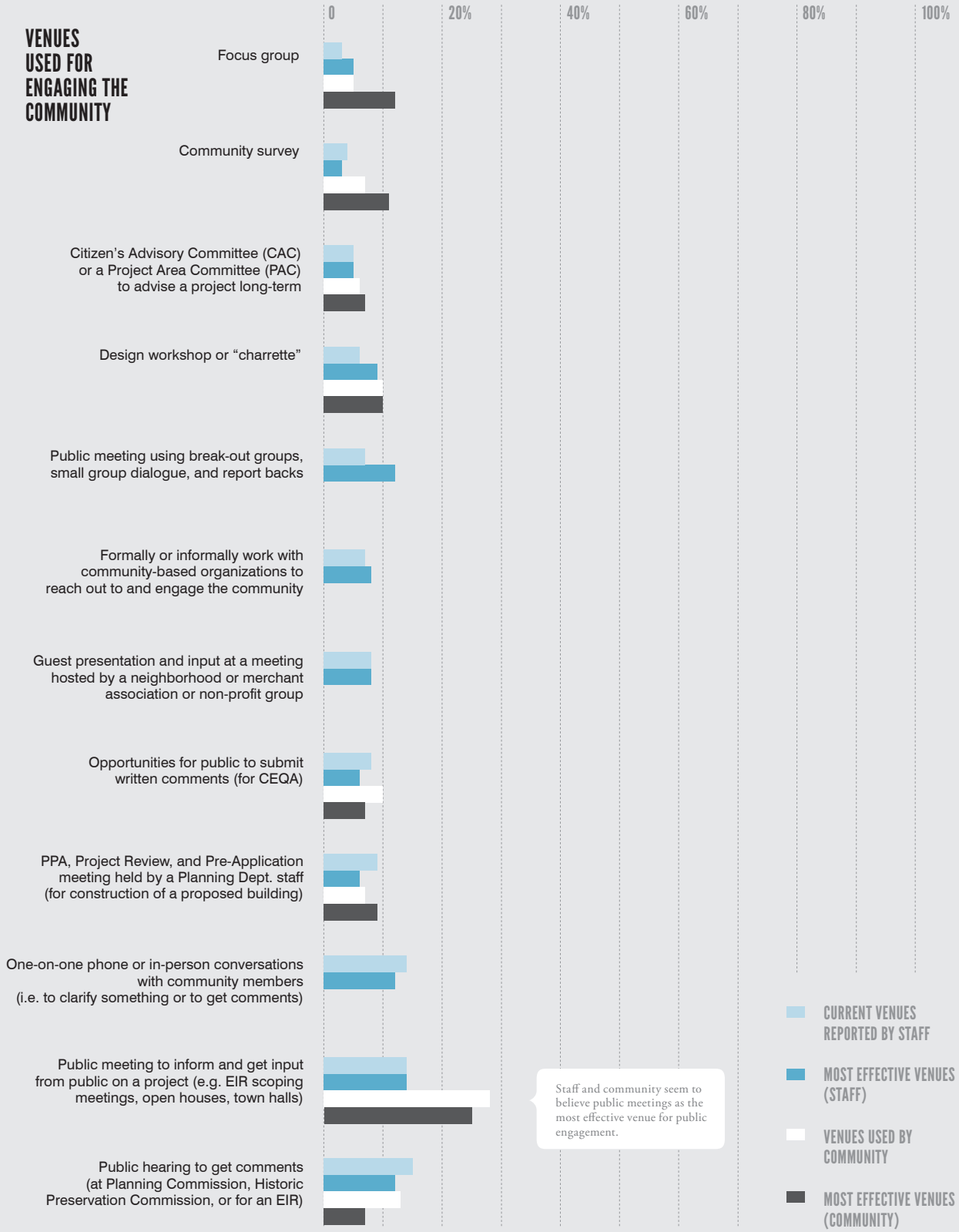
4) Planning the first training, led by Davenport, of the Department's training program series

APPENDIX A: GRAPH 1

CURRENT OUTREACH STRATEGIES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS



APPENDIX A: GRAPH 2
CURRENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS



APPENDIX C: *GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS*

- Formally acknowledge Public Outreach and Engagement (POE) program and adopt goals.

    Place POE under the Department's communications function

    Secure staff support and develop employee performance metrics for POET

    Develop and adopt POE principles

- Create training program for staff which may include: facilitation skills, mediation, cultural awareness, customer service, public participation techniques, and public speaking.

- Create guidelines and tools (resource library); and monitor and evaluate POE efforts.

- Diversify POE venues (online, social media, and facilitation techniques)

- Develop a long-term communications plan, inclusive of public outreach and engagement, employee communications, media relations, marketing, website and intranet management.

- Monitor and evaluate communications initiatives.

- Create general best practices and templates for use of plain language.

- Coordinate and confirm compliance with Language Access Ordinance.

- Investigate opportunities to improve department notices and public information.

- Develop a Planning 101 program for Supervisors, Commissioners, community members and stakeholders.

- Secure additional staff for communications support.

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