

Headquarters–Caltrans Planning Horizons Presentation: Public Participation Best Practices

Project Summary

Carolyn Verheyen, Principal and Lou Hexter, Senior Facilitator with MIG, Inc., made the presentation “Public Participation Best Practices” as part of the Caltrans Office of Professional Development Planning Horizons series on February 2, 2011. The presentation provided an understanding of the importance of public involvement in transportation planning, identified success factors for creating positive results, and reviewed a number of successful District and Headquarters projects that exemplify these best practices. The hour-long presentation was followed by questions and discussion with Caltrans planning staff. A copy of the presentation is available on the Caltrans Public Participation and Engagement (PPEC) Website at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ocp/pp.html, and is also archived on Caltrans’ Past Planning Horizons Presentation website (Presentation #73) at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/opd/pastpresentations.html.



Presentation Summary

The presentation began with an overview of Caltrans’ four-year Public Participation and Engagement partnership with MIG. Ms. Verheyen noted that demonstrated successful outcomes of the contract included:

- Substantial increase in Caltrans staff outreach skills
- Improved relationships with stakeholders and agency partners
- Increased response to community concerns and advancement of responsive solutions
- Improved interagency partnerships
- Increased community collaborations
- Heightened environmental justice community involvement
- Public participation levels that exceeded SAFETEA-LU requirements
- Demonstrated receptivity to public input
- Improved overall project results

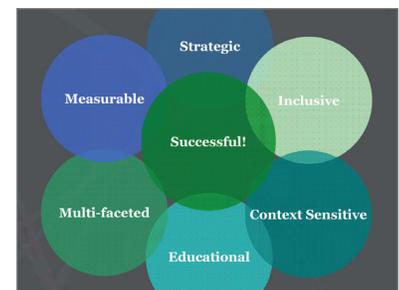
Ms. Verheyen then reviewed overall findings of the research conducted as part of the process of developing Caltrans’ Public Participation Plan for the CTP 2035 and FSTIP. This research indicated that Californians want to know more about how the transportation system is planned, programmed and funded, and that members of the general public provide invaluable insight into how the state’s transportation system is working and

what can be done to improve it. Caltrans agency partners and stakeholder groups also recognize and support the importance of participation, and everyone wants Caltrans to maintain transparency and keep the public informed.

Toward achieving these ends, Ms. Verheyen identified success factors for public participation processes—strategies likely to achieve positive outcomes, while ensuring that the project team is flexible and prepared for managing the unpredictable nature of public interactions. The success factors identified were:

- Develop shared goals and objectives
- Identify your partners and key stakeholders up front and throughout the process
- Develop agreements within Caltrans
- Develop agreements with your partners
- Create a solid foundation of facts
- Determine your readiness to go out to the public
- Start where you have agreement
- Understand where there are disagreements
- Focus on outcomes
- Evaluate your results

Mr. Hexter then presented a series of detailed case studies of PPEC projects that exemplify best practices for Caltrans’ public participation and engagement. Project case studies included Kroy Pathway Conceptual Improvement, the Crenshaw Neighborhood Workshop, the BART to Livermore



Deliverable

PowerPoint Presentation

continued next page

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continued from previous page

Community Workshops, the SACOG Environmental Justice Focus Groups, the SR 46 East Comprehensive Corridor Study, the Highway 99 Soundwall Community Safety and Enhancement Project, the Chalfant and Benton Community Visioning processes, Corridor System Management Plan Outreach, and the City of Winters SR 128 Complete Streets Project.

Environmental Justice Community Involvement

Ms. Verheyen and Mr. Hexter showed numerous examples of how Environmental Justice (EJ) requirements were met and exceeded in all of the projects under this contract. All promoted the involvement of underrepresented communities through methods such as coordination with local community groups, targeted recruitment of EJ and underprivileged community members, materials translation, and consideration of how transportation projects can be geared to the needs of diverse areas such as rural, agriculturally-based communities. They also emphasized both the requirement and the need to engage the community in a fully inclusive way, in both the “Success Factors” and the characteristics of best practice in public engagement.

Several of the case studies specifically highlighted how MIG enabled Caltrans staff to achieve greater success in engaging EJ communities. In particular, the SACOG Environmental Justice Focus Groups demonstrated how working with local CBOs can draw participants who might not otherwise have heard about the participation opportunities, and yielded in-depth information about their transportation needs. The Highway 99 Soundwall project successfully engaged a predominantly low-income community, and the Chalfant, Benton and Winters projects educated staff on how to accommodate the distinct needs of rural, largely agricultural communities.



Lessons Learned

Pro-active efforts to engage diverse stakeholder groups and the public lead to a greatly increased ability for Caltrans to plan projects that meet public and stakeholders’ needs. Reviewing the best practices identified over four years of innovative public participation processes assists staff from Headquarters and District offices to continue utilizing public involvement as inclusively and successfully as possible.



Results

Forty Caltrans staff members attended the training, with over 30 participating via the Web. The training provided Caltrans staff with an understanding of the best practices for using public involvement to develop stronger projects. This allows community members to understand and support plans, designs, policies and programs; decision makers to move forward confidently; Caltrans to enjoy constructive relationships with the community, agency partners, and local staff and officials; and leads to mobility improvements which enhance the quality of life for all Californians.

This presentation and the related Best Practices overview served as an excellent method of sharing information and educating Caltrans planners statewide on public engagement best practices.

This project also assisted Caltrans in meeting SAFETEA-LU public engagement requirements, as specified under Section 450.210, summarized below:

- Provide early and continuous public involvement throughout planning process
- Provide adequate notice and allow public to comment at key decision points
- Consult with non-metropolitan local agencies & officials, MPOs, and RTPAs
- Seek out the traditionally underserved (low-income, minority, seniors, youth, rural communities)
- Public meetings held in convenient locations at reasonable times
- Use visualization techniques to describe statewide plans
- Public access for technical and policy information on statewide plans
- Public information made electronically accessible (websites)
- Allow access for public comment and demonstrate a response
- Provide periodic review of public involvement process
- Provide documented process for consulting non-metropolitan local officials
- Document process for consulting with Tribal governments