

Public Outreach & Engagement Plan

Guide

v.1.0

POETS

Public Outreach & Engagement Team Strategy



SFMTA



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Introduction

The SFMTA moves nearly a quarter million people daily within the city of San Francisco. To fulfill the agency's mission to "work together to plan, build, operate, regulate and maintain the transportation network, with our partners, to connect the community," the agency undertakes more than 200 projects at any given time, including major transit corridor investments, safer designs for local streets, and improvements to all modes of transportation throughout the city.

The SFMTA has made a long-term commitment to keep the public informed and engaged as part of our work. We do this to strengthen and sustain our relationships with the community, and to help the agency deliver quality transportation projects to those who need them. This commitment is expressed in the SFMTA [Strategic Plan](#) and through our Public Outreach and Engagement Team Strategy (POETS).

The purpose of this document is to support those staff members who are required to plan for public outreach and engagement, and to clarify the agency's expectations for project managers who must review or approve Public Outreach and Engagement Plans. This Guide is a companion to the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan Template, which project teams can use to develop a Plan that meets our agency's Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements. The requirements represent the SFMTA's commitment to fulfilling the promises we make to the public. POETS can only be successful when staff are prepared to enact this commitment at the project level, and managers and leadership ensure accountability.

The first section of this document provides instructions for using the fillable Template to create a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. The second section presents general principles, practices and tips to consider when developing any Plan. The final section summarizes the "Spectrum of Public Participation," a helpful framework for thinking about your Plan's purpose and goals.

The process of developing the SFMTA's requirements and guidance involved extensive feedback from the community. It is strongly recommended that you review the summary of this extremely valuable input in [Appendix 1](#).

Guide to the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan TEMPLATE

Following is a step-by-step guide for developing the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. It should be used in conjunction with the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan TEMPLATE, which includes detailed instructions for each step.

When you have completed your Plan, it is mandatory to submit it to the POETS website here: [\[link\]](#). Keep in mind that your Plan is a public document and may be reviewed by SFMTA leadership and staff, city partners and members of the public.

Project Overview

The purpose of the overview is to summarize briefly the project scope, purpose, benefits and timeline. It also includes some early considerations about decision space – constraints and decisions that have already been made, and decisions that are yet to be made. When preparing this information, take into consideration that the overview may be used for the project webpage, fliers, etc. Note that the next step (Project Needs Assessment) adds valuable information – project impacts, stakeholders, opportunities for public input – that can be added later to the basic information in the Project Overview.

Project Needs Assessment

A Project Needs Assessment is critical to the planning process. It is your chance to think carefully about those who will be affected by the project, the purpose of your outreach and engagement strategy, and the relationships that will matter most for the success of the project.

The Project Needs Assessment should help to identify three things: stakeholders, impacts and decision space. Note that while the Template presents the identification of these as sequential steps, they are in fact interdependent, and the assessment should be more iterative than linear. As you complete the following steps, consider how each of the components informs the others. For example, understanding what decisions can be influenced by the public (step 2.3) might influence the potential impacts (step 2.2) and stakeholders (step 2.1)

Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

- IAP2 Core Value

Within the Needs Assessment, the **stakeholder analysis** identifies those audiences that need to be informed and/or engaged. It also suggests a method of gauging the level of outreach that is required. Research on stakeholders should clarify their roles, the degree to which they are organized, their capacity to participate, and specific considerations for ensuring an inclusive and culturally appropriate public process (language, accessibility, barriers to participation, etc.). The Template helps to identify which key stakeholders should be contacted early on, to make them aware that the project team will be reaching out to the community. Valuable internal resources to help gather the information for the stakeholder analysis include the Public Outreach and Engagement Team, District Liaisons, POETS Division Leads, and the Regulatory Affairs Manager (for help with language access).

The **impact/interest analysis** in the Needs Assessment indicates how extensive the outreach and engagement effort should be, and what resources are needed to carry it out. While the level of community impact and interest does not by itself determine the level of public participation that should be included in the Plan, a higher score generally suggests that more effort and resources will be needed for community outreach.

The **decision space analysis** in the Needs Assessment identifies the purpose of public participation at different phases of the project, and the opportunities for stakeholders to provide input and potentially influence the project. The determination is based in part on the level of impacts and expectations revealed in the earlier analysis.

Goals and Objectives

The Project Needs Assessment provides the information needed to establish goals and objectives for the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. This can be the most difficult task in developing the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan, for at least two reasons. First, it only makes sense to establish goals and objectives if they can be MEASURED. This means that metrics need to be realistic, so that information and data can be gathered to evaluate the success of the Plan. Second, it is important to have goals and objectives that are MEANINGFUL. The key metrics should measure not only the activities of outreach and engagement (How many people did we reach? How many people attended our meetings?) but also measure the results that matter (How did public input affect the final project? Did our outreach and engagement provide helpful input to decision makers?).

This section provides a brief guide to setting goals and objectives for a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. The approach is to (1) Keep in mind the agency's goals for working with the public, (2) Establish project goals that correspond to the "levels of participation" on the IAP2 Spectrum, and (3) Establish project objectives that can be realistically measured and related to the project goals.

Every Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should consider the broader **AGENCY GOALS** for communication and public participation as expressed in the SFMTA Strategic Plan and the SFMTA Public Participation Plan. Keep this agency-wide context in mind as you develop project-level goals and objectives.

Strategic Plan Goal 4.0, Objective 4.3 commits the agency to enhance customer service, public outreach, and engagement: "Effective communications and consistent messaging can create meaningful opportunities for community input, give policymakers the information they need to support their communities, and improve the agency's projects and service delivery. Not only is community engagement critical in developing near-term projects that serve the community, it can also benefit long-term, comprehensive efforts related to safety, transit service, and mode choice. Placing this objective in Goal 4 underscores the agency's commitment to not only improve agency communications and engagement processes, but to also overhaul the agency's internal communications processes to better serve the public and agency staff."

The SFMTA **Public Participation Plan** emphasizes that the agency is committed to EQUITY, INCLUSION and ACCESSIBILITY. Planning for all SFMTA projects should meet these expectations. In practice, this means that project teams should consciously address barriers to participation and should reach out to communities that are underrepresented in the public process.

The **GOALS** of public outreach and engagement for a specific project should correspond to the four levels of public participation on the IAP2 Spectrum: Inform, Consult, Involve or Collaborate. The identification of goals comes directly from the Decision Space analysis in the Needs Assessment. Every Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should have the goal of **INFORMING** the public about the project. In addition to informing, most projects will also have an opportunity for the public to provide input that might influence the project. Therefore, most projects will also **CONSULT** to some extent as a goal of the project, with the parameters for potential public influence (the Decision Space) clearly defined. Some projects will also present further opportunities for public partnership and influence, meaning that the goals for public participation might be to **INVOLVE** the community or to **COLLABORATE** with stakeholders.

“Reach out and listen to people, don’t just ‘educate’ them.”

- Stakeholder Feedback

The **OBJECTIVES** of public outreach and engagement for a specific project should be meaningful and measurable. Objectives should have a meaningful relationship to the goals of the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan (How do we know that the public was informed or consulted? What did we hear that would be helpful to decision makers?). Objectives should also be measurable. Measures can be quantitative (How many people did we reach through various communications channels?) or qualitative (How did the project change as a result of public input?). The key is to create objectives that are linked to the goals for the Plan, and that can be documented and communicated to decision makers and the public.

Some examples of Objectives that could correspond to Goals:

- Number of those reached through communications channels and attending meetings
- Number of users accessing the project website; number providing online feedback
- Percentage of stakeholders surveyed at meetings who feel informed about the project
- Specific ways that public input influenced the project (a “We Listened” category)

Key Messages

Design your key messages about the project for both general and specific audiences, building on the Project Overview. Keep in mind that the most important consideration is the desired impact of the communication effort within the overall Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. For every project, the goal of communication is to inform the community about the project, its benefits, its impacts, and opportunities for formal public comment. Plans that also call for consulting or involving the community during project planning will require additional information and communication to support an engagement strategy. Successful messaging is not just about content, but also the impact of communication. In all cases, it is important to be consistent and transparent in messaging – providing the community with a clear path to information and staff contacts – in order to build trust throughout the life of the project.

For almost any project, key messages include:

- Purpose and benefits of the project
- Potential impacts of the project
- Project timeline, including what has happened already
- Opportunities for public participation and the available “decision space”
- The person(s) to contact about the project and where to find information
- Specific messages for specific stakeholders based on their interests.

In general, key messages should be concise (a few short statements that are easily understood), relevant (limit information to what is essential), compelling (lead with benefits and highlight opportunities for public comment) and tailored to the audience (with special consideration of language needs). Use plain language and avoid jargon and acronyms. Ideally, you should check your messages with representatives of the audiences you are trying to reach.

Outreach and Engagement Techniques

The selection of outreach and engagement techniques should be based on the Needs Assessment and the project goals and objectives. When the goal is to inform, the techniques used should be tailored to specific audiences. When the goal is to invite feedback from stakeholders, the Plan should include techniques and tools designed to gather and compile public input, and it should be specific about the kind of feedback that could affect the project.

The field of practice offers a wide variety of techniques and tools to choose from. The key is to think carefully about the intended purpose of public participation at each phase of the project, and to select techniques, tools and meeting designs that fit the project goals while getting information to stakeholders in the manner they prefer to receive it. For example, all flyers and posters should use large print and plain language, and they should be placed in multiple locations and at various heights. All electronic communication should be reviewed for accessibility.

A summary of communication techniques that are commonly used for SFMTA projects can be found in [Appendix 2](#). The Needs Assessment can suggest methods and meeting designs that fit the purpose of outreach and engagement at each phase of the project. A description of various outreach techniques, engagement strategies and meeting formats that correspond to different goals on the public participation spectrum can be found in [Appendix 3](#). Guidance for making meetings accessible can be found in [Appendix 4](#). Your division lead can also help with decisions about communications tactics and meeting design.

Schedule and Responsibilities

Once the goals for public outreach and engagement have been determined and the methods have been selected, the next step in developing the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan is to create a schedule of activities and assign responsibility for implementation tasks.

The schedule should be detailed enough to be useful to the project team, but also appropriate as a tool to report to stakeholders, agency partners and decision makers. It should include the timing of specific communications efforts, outreach to key stakeholders, and key meetings or events. It should also note those activities that are ongoing throughout the duration of the Plan, as distinct from communications for a specific meeting or event.

Project teams may use their own formats (or those provided by consultants) to track detailed tasks, individuals responsible, and due dates. The format for your project's outreach and engagement strategy can be a single spreadsheet, or a combination of tables for different tasks. The format is less important than the content: When do activities need to happen and who is responsible for carrying them out? When planning public meetings, the action plan should highlight dates for inviting participants, arranging meeting logistics, producing meeting materials, recruiting facilitators, etc. One approach is to create a summary timeline and a separate, more detailed production schedule for individual tasks.

Budget

The budget for Public Outreach and Engagement can be estimated based on the size and scope of the project, as well as the extent of activities in the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. Costs can vary widely based on staff time, communications collateral, language support, online engagement, and the number of public meetings held.

As noted above, it might be necessary to estimate the budget for public outreach and engagement before the Plan is fully developed. To ensure adequate resources are devoted to outreach and engagement (including for language translation and interpretation), it is critical to conduct a Needs Assessment as early as possible. If your project requires a budget estimate before the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan is complete, the POETS team or your POETS Division Lead can provide guidance.

Plan Review

Once the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan has been drafted, it is important to review it within the SFMTA before moving to implementation. As a practical matter, the Plan should be developed in concert with all of the team members responsible for carrying it out (including staff and consultants), and ideally in consultation with key stakeholders. As noted at the outset of this Guide, one of the first steps in developing the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should be to identify all of those individuals and groups who should be part of the conversation before the Plan is developed and approved.

Any project that will involve a transition from the SFMTA to another city agency (e.g., between legislative approval and construction) must address this transition in its Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. As early as possible, the project lead should meet with city partners to establish roles and budget responsibilities.

The project lead should meet with the District Liaison for the project area to be aware of any other SFMTA projects that might affect your project. If there are intersecting projects, the outreach and engagement activities for both should be coordinated to the extent feasible.

It is always a good idea to review the draft Plan with an experienced colleague. Consider reaching out to your POETS Division Lead, a public information officer, or the POETS team if you have questions or challenges while completing your Plan.

Once the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan is reviewed internally and with city partners, it must be approved by the project manager and then uploaded to the POETS website. At the end of each project phase, the evaluation section of the Plan should be filled out and submitted to the same link.

Prior to implementation, the project lead should provide a summary of the project and the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan to the SFMTA's Media Relations Manager and should consider whether to reach out to elected officials (District Supervisors' Aides, State delegation offices).

Plan Evaluation

The Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should be viewed as a living document. Adaptation to changing or unforeseen circumstances is a basic principle of good public engagement. The implementation of the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should be carefully documented, with records kept on who was contacted and who participated in any meetings held. Ideally, any meeting other than a public hearing should include a feedback form from participants. An example of a meeting evaluation survey can be found in [Appendix 5](#). At a minimum, the project outreach and engagement lead should submit a brief report at the end of each phase of the project. The Plan should be reviewed and updated every six months if the project phase lasts longer than this.

Review of the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should include answers to the following questions outlined in the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan Template:

- Was the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan implemented as planned?
- If there were changes in practice from the original Plan, please explain.
- How did the Plan perform on its identified goals and objectives?
- What were the key lessons learned during implementation?
- What changes would you recommend to the Plan going forward?
- How did you document public input and how it was taken into account?

There is space on the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan to answer these questions at the end of each phase.

Report Back to Stakeholders

After evaluating the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan, the project team should also report back to stakeholders (including partners and decision makers) at the end of each project phase. What was the purpose of outreach and engagement at this phase of the project? Who was contacted and/or engaged in the public process? What feedback did the public provide? If applicable, how was public input taken into account? How was it conveyed to decision makers and how did it affect the project?

The project brief created at the beginning of the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan, along with the evaluation conducted at the end of the Plan, provides the information needed to complete this report

back to the community at the end of each project phase. All stakeholders engaged in the process should receive this summary report, which completes the “feedback loop” that the public expects and deserves.

Tips for Developing a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan

Tip 1: Determine what Kind of Plan your Project Requires

The SFMTA’s Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements mandate that every SFMTA project must have a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. For the purpose of this requirement, a “project” is defined as, “A one-time effort to construct, acquire, replace, improve, expand, or rehabilitate the transportation system in the City and County of San Francisco.” The assumption is that “one-time” includes projects that occur in multiple phases. In cases where the distinction between a “project” and “operations” is not clear, the key question is whether the agency’s action impacts the public. If there are community impacts from an action, then the agency should plan for some level of public outreach and/or engagement.

If a project needs a Plan, the first question to address is whether the project team needs to create a new, customized Public Outreach and Engagement Plan, or whether this is a smaller, routine project that can use a template developed within each Division. POETS refers to the latter as a **Programmatic Public Outreach and Engagement Plan**. The kinds of projects that are appropriate for Programmatic Plans are determined by each Division, and each Division is responsible for developing a Programmatic Plan for each category of projects. Examples might include stop signs or signal adjustments. Every small project must still consider community impacts, but the Programmatic Plan can be used as a template for each project that falls within the program category. The Programmatic Plan should be on file with POETS, and if so, individual projects in the program category do not need to file separate plans (e.g., there’s one Programmatic Plan on file for stop sign changes, so it’s not necessary to file a separate Plan for every stop sign change).

In addition to determining the kind of Plan your project requires, it is essential to determine WHO needs to be involved in the development of the Plan. Planning for outreach and engagement is not a solitary exercise in the office, but instead should involve collaboration among a team of staff members (and any consulting members of the team), informed by conversations with SFMTA colleagues, key community stakeholders, partner agencies, and decision makers. Given all the information and judgements that are necessary to create a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan, one of the first steps in planning is to identify who should be part of the process.

Tip 2: Scale the Plan to fit the project

The Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should be appropriate to the scale of the project. Plans for large projects will be detailed and complex, while those for smaller, simpler projects can be more standardized, as described above. The templates are designed to be helpful for all projects regardless of their size, and they are intended to be flexible. If the Project Needs Assessment determines that project impacts are minimal or that there is no opportunity for public influence, then the purpose of the Plan might only be to inform stakeholders. On the other hand, even the simplest project might offer some opportunity for public influence, so it is important to conduct a needs assessment to consider this possibility.

Tip 3: Begin outreach and engagement as early as necessary

Planning for outreach and engagement should always begin as early as possible, ideally at the conceptual or pre-planning phase of a project. This does not necessarily mean that public outreach should be the first step in project implementation, only that an early needs assessment should identify WHEN is the best time to begin outreach and engagement with the public. In general, opportunities for the public to provide input on a project are greater during the early stages of a project (versus during post-legislation or construction). However, it can be counterproductive to reach out to the public too early, before relevant questions are addressed in the needs assessment (scope of the project, decision space, etc.). You get one chance to make a first impression, so it is critical to be prepared before going to the community. The point is to begin planning for public outreach and engagement at the outset of the project, and to include early outreach to key stakeholders in the Plan whenever appropriate.

From the stakeholder's standpoint, "early" generally means before key decisions have been made, and in time for the public to have meaningful input on the project to the extent possible.

Realistic planning for outreach and engagement also includes early consideration of funding. As a practical matter, the needs assessment must be done soon enough to estimate the budget for outreach and engagement before the Plan is fully developed. The POETS team can help with budget estimates.

Tip 4: Coordinate with other SFMTA projects and city partners

The Project Needs Assessment identifies stakeholders, including those who will work on the project within the SFMTA and the city of San Francisco. When planning for public outreach and engagement for your project, it is important to know which other teams within the SFMTA might be working in the same geographic area. Project teams working in the same community should connect with one another as early as possible to share information, formulate communications strategies, and coordinate activities in a way that facilitates community understanding and input opportunities for intersecting projects.

"Nobody cares if it's MTA or PUC or DPW. To us, it's the city."

- Stakeholder Feedback

It is also essential to think forward about all phases of the project during initial planning. It is common for a project to be handled by different SFMTA divisions at different phases, or for a project to be handed off by the SFMTA to another agency (e.g., Public Works, Public Utilities Commission) at some phase. In either case, it is essential to coordinate with those agency and city partners to maintain a consistent standard of outreach and engagement, even if the SFMTA is not the lead during a particular phase of the project. From the community point of view, it doesn't matter which agency is working on a particular

phase of a project. If it was seen as an SFMTA project from the beginning, then the SFMTA will be held responsible for how the project is carried out.

Tip 5: Comply with language access laws

The SFMTA must follow both San Francisco's Language Access Ordinance and federal rules including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and supporting guidance to ensure that all customers, regardless of their ability to read, speak, write and understand English (also called "limited-English proficient" or "LEP"), are informed and able to participate in our important decision-making processes. The SFMTA's 2016 Language Assistance Plan details the agency's policies about providing both written translation and verbal interpretation (via interpreters or bilingual employees) language assistance for our limited-English proficient customers and other stakeholders.

The Language Assistance Plan includes maps detailing concentrations of limited-English proficient communities by language that may be used as a resource when determining the language needs of a particular community. The specific languages that should be considered for written translation or interpretation at meetings depends on the communities that are affected by the project in particular areas of the city. In general, and at a minimum, public information pieces should be translated into Chinese, Spanish and Filipino. Depending on content, transit-related public information pieces might require additional translation. All public communication pieces and meeting notices MUST include the agency's approved "Free Language Assistance" tagline (which can also be adapted to include the phone number of the project lead or person responsible for organizing meetings):

311: For free interpretation services, please submit your request 48 hours in advance of meeting./Para sa libreng serbisyo sa interpretasyon, kailangan mag-request 48 oras bago ang miting./Para servicios de interpretación gratuitos, por favor haga su petición 48 horas antes de la reunión./如果需要免費口語翻譯，請於會議之前48小時提出要求。Đổi với dịch vụ thông dịch miễn phí, vui lòng gửi yêu cầu của bạn 48 giờ trước cuộc họp./ Для бесплатных услуг устного перевода просьба представить ваш запрос за 48 часов до начала собрания./ Pour les services d'interprétation gratuits, veuillez soumettre votre demande 48 heures avant la réunion./ 무료 통역 서비스를 원하시면 회의 48 시간 전에 귀하의 요청을 제출하십시오./ 無料通訳サービスをご希望の場合は、会議の48時間前までにリクエストを提出してください。/บริการให้ความช่วยเหลือในหลายภาษาด้านภาษาฟรี ณ ที่ประชุมโดยต้องแจ้ง ล่วงหน้า 48 ชั่วโมง/

A presentation on the SFMTA's Title VI Program, including the Language Assistance Plan, can be found in [Appendix 6](#). Specific language assistance questions should be directed to the SFMTA Regulatory Affairs Manager for a final determination at Kathleen.Sakelaris@sfmta.com or 415.701.4339.

Tip 6: Make communications and meetings accessible

All activities outlined in the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan must be implemented in a way that is inclusive and equitable. Activities should include methods for soliciting feedback that meet communities on their own terms, and that are accessible to youth, seniors, people with disabilities, and underrepresented community members, regardless of ability. The goal of the SFMTA is to inform anyone affected by our projects about their benefits and impacts, and to include anyone in the public process who has an interest in participating. The purpose of making communications and meetings accessible is not to "check a box," but to ensure that opportunities for public participation are open to all.

All communication materials should be provided in accessible formats. As noted above, [Appendix 4](#) provides guidance on making meetings accessible. For assistance on making your materials and meetings accessible, contact Annette.Williams@sfmta.com or 415.701.4444.

Tip 7: Think broadly about stakeholder identification and notification

The goal of outreach and engagement is to be inclusive and equitable. Consider the full range of stakeholders who might be impacted by, or interested in, the project. As a general rule, it is advisable to expand rather than limit the geographic scope of project notification and updates, and to consider non-geographically defined communities that might also have an interest in the project. In cases where notification is legally required within a specified distance, consider doing outreach beyond the minimum legal requirement if indicated by the needs assessment. One of the most consistent messages we have heard from community members is that notification should not be limited to the immediate neighborhood in which a project is taking place. Residents and other stakeholders in surrounding neighborhoods can be affected in sometimes unanticipated ways, so it is always advisable to err on the side of doing wider notification and outreach.

Tip 8: Plan for communication during “inactive” project phases

It is critical to maintain ongoing communication across all phases of the project, including those periods when there are no public meetings or legally required notices. Most large projects face a period between legislation and construction when the project has been approved but construction has not yet begun. Often, this phase can take years and can result in the community not knowing or understanding that the project has been even been approved, let alone that it is going to be implemented after a period of inactivity. In such cases, when construction begins, community members can be caught unaware. The approval process may be a distant memory for those who were involved, and newer residents may feel alarmed that they did not have an opportunity to participate during the early project phases.

For this reason, the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan must include a strategy to keep the public informed during these “quiet” or “inactive” periods. An example of a Plan specifically tailored to the detailed design phase of a project can be found in [Appendix 7](#).

“Public Participation” refers to the role of community members in the public process from their point of view.

“Outreach” refers to efforts by the agency to inform stakeholders about the project and the public process.

“Engagement” refers to the agency’s strategy for encouraging and considering public participation and input as part of the planning and decision-making process.

Tip 9: Consider opportunities to increase engagement

There is always an obligation to inform the public about a given project. But despite the temptation to think our work ends here, it is rare that our only obligation is to inform through one-way communication. In almost every case, there is also an opportunity to engage stakeholders more deeply on some aspect of the project and to consider how public input might affect the project. Even during construction, there might be choices about sequencing, scheduling or mitigation that stakeholders can influence. While the minimum goal is always to inform the public about a project, good practice requires thinking carefully about how the “decision space” for public influence can be defined and potentially expanded at each phase of the project’s delivery. The next section on the “Spectrum of Public Participation” provides a framework for thinking about decision space.

Tip 10: Update the plan between project phases

The Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should lay out a strategy for the life of the project, with the understanding that the Plan will be reviewed and updated at the end of each phase based on lessons learned and changing conditions. As a general rule, it is advisable to update the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan approximately every six months, even if a project phase lasts longer.

The Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements call for documentation of the how the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan was implemented. The templates for creating the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan provide space to record whether the Plan was implemented as expected during a particular phase, the lessons learned, and the recommended revisions to the Plan going forward.

The Spectrum of Public Participation

A key step in developing the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan is identifying the purpose of public participation at each phase of the project. Is the purpose to inform stakeholders about the project, or is it also to ask for public feedback that might shape the project? POETS refers to this as the project's **Decision Space**. To what extent can the public influence the project? What has already been decided, and what is on the table for consideration? The SFMTA makes a commitment about how public participation can influence each of our projects. Defining the “decision space” gives the community clear expectations about the purpose of public participation and helps planners understand how public input that can potentially influence the project.

The SFMTA has worked closely with the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), whose **Spectrum of Public Participation** is a useful framework for helping to think about the decision space for a project. The Spectrum defines the project sponsor's commitment to public participation during each phase of project delivery. Once the goal of public participation has been defined, the Spectrum helps the project team choose the outreach and engagement methods that are appropriate for the project. The agency can reach out to stakeholders just to inform them about a project, or also to engage them in higher levels of participation along the Spectrum. Any level of public participation beyond “inform” requires some level of “engagement” by the agency in addition to communications “outreach.”

The figure below defines four levels of public participation on the IAP2 Spectrum and suggests methods that correspond to each level. It is important to note that the correspondence between the level of participation and the methods used is suggestive rather than definitive. Different methods can be used for different purposes. For example, while we have heard from our stakeholders that “open houses” are forums for staff to speak, and “town halls” are opportunities for the public to speak, it is certainly true that staff can listen and take valuable feedback at open houses. Similarly, a walking tour or an ambassador can be methods to inform and/or involve the community in planning for a project.

SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following levels of participation describe different roles of the public in the planning and decision-making process, and the commitment made by the agency at each level. The agency's outreach and engagement strategy should correspond to the purpose of public participation at each project phase.

LEVEL	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Purpose of Outreach and Engagement	We will keep you informed about the project and the decision-making process.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the project and decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the project and decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions, and we will incorporate your advice and recommendations into the project and decision to the maximum extent possible.
Example Tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open house • Newsletter • Website • Factsheet • Email • Social media • Mailer • Poster • Phone hotline • Ambassador 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town hall • Public meeting • Comment form • Survey • Focus group • Interview • Tour • Pop-up booth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop • Charrette • Deliberative poll • Recurrent conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory committee • Participatory budgeting • Collaborative problem-solving • Small group dialogue

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

The Spectrum is helpful in thinking about the purpose of public outreach and engagement at different phases of a project. Typically, there is more decision space – more opportunity for meaningful public input – at earlier stages of a project (although, as noted above, even the construction phase generally allows some room for public input, even if it is more limited than at earlier phases).

At the same time, if outreach occurs too early, the project might not be well defined, and it might not be clear to the public how to provide input. The key is to think carefully about the goals of public outreach and engagement, and to time the work appropriately. It is critical for the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan to allow enough time to inform and/or engage the public before legal milestones for public comment are reached and decisions are made.