

Public Outreach & Engagement Plan



Requirements

v.1.0

POETS

Public Outreach & Engagement Team Strategy



SFMTA



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Message from the Director

Ed's introductory message goes here.

Introduction

The SFMTA is committed to involving the people of San Francisco in the decisions that shape the city's transportation system. This commitment is expressed in the agency's [Strategic Plan](#) and our Public Participation Plan. It is based on an understanding that:

- Those who are affected by government decisions should be informed and have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process;
- The community's trust in the public process directly affects our ability to deliver projects; and
- Most projects must meet legal requirements related to public notification and participation.

The agency's approach to working with the communities we serve is reflected in our core values:

RESPECT

We are courteous and constructive in our treatment of others. We recognize that our colleagues and their contributions are vital to the agency. We listen and directly engage our colleagues and the public to understand their needs and deliver effective services.

INCLUSIVITY

We seek a variety of identities, abilities, and interaction styles to promote a diverse and fair workplace. We operate from the context of teamwork and positive intent. We serve the public and address historic inequities in transportation by including all communities in the agency's decision-making processes.

INTEGRITY

We are accountable for and take ownership of our actions. We are responsive and honor our commitments to our colleagues and stakeholders. We are transparent and honest in everything we do, from internal operations to external delivery.

To ensure consistent public communications and outreach across projects, the SFMTA established our Public Outreach and Engagement Team Strategy (POETS). The main components of POETS are:

Requirements for every project, **Resources** to support staff, **Relationships** with the community, and **Recognition** of outstanding work.

This document presents the REQUIREMENTS for public outreach and engagement that every SFMTA project is expected to meet. More information about the other components of the Public Outreach and Engagement Team Strategy, including supportive resources and recognition opportunities for staff, can be found on the [POETS website](#). 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.

Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements

To ensure a consistent approach throughout the agency, all SFMTA projects that impact the public are required to do the following:

- **PLAN** for public outreach and engagement for the project
- **IMPLEMENT** the public outreach and engagement plan
- **DOCUMENT** the implementation of the plan and the feedback received

Development of the Plan

Every SFMTA project must develop a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan at the outset of the project, and the project team must evaluate and revise the Plan at each subsequent project phase. The Plan should be reviewed and approved within the division by the direct report manager or the POETS Division Lead. **When your Plan is complete, you must upload it to the POETS website. THIS STEP IS MANDATORY. 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.**

To help empower staff to meet these requirements, the agency provides a **Guide** and **Template** for creating a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. These companion documents include guidance on doing a project needs assessment to identify stakeholders and impacts, writing a project brief, crafting key messages for target audiences, identifying the opportunities for public participation, selecting outreach and engagement techniques, establishing goals and measurable objectives, scheduling activities and tasks, evaluating the Plan, and reporting back to the public.

At a minimum, every Public Outreach and Engagement Plan **MUST** include:

- Identification of who should be involved in developing the Plan (staff, consultants, partners)
- An assessment of stakeholders, project impacts, and scope of public participation
- Early engagement with key stakeholders
- Use of multiple communication channels
- Compliance with language & accessibility requirements
- Coordination with other SFMTA projects that affect the project
- Coordination with other city partners who will be involved with the project
- Goals and measurable objectives for each phase of the project
- A strategy for outreach during “inactive” periods (e.g., detailed design phase)
- Closing the “feedback loop” with stakeholders once decisions have been made
- Evaluation and updates to the Plan after each project phase
- Sufficient budget to carry out the activities specified in the Plan

Respect

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It is not mandatory to use the specific Template provided, but any Public Outreach and Engagement Plan must include comparable content regardless of the format. The Guide provides detailed instructions for the content of any Public Outreach and Engagement Plan.

Programmatic Public Outreach and Engagement Plans

Every SFMTA project that impacts the community must have a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. Larger, more complex projects require their own detailed plans. In addition to large projects, the SFMTA routinely implements many smaller, similar projects (e.g., stop signs, signal changes) that can rely on a single, programmatic Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. Divisions that deliver such projects should develop programmatic outreach and engagement strategies that apply to typical projects in each category. Every small project must still consider community impacts, but the programmatic Plan can be used as a guide by each project. Only the programmatic Plan must be uploaded to the POETS website, not the plan for individual projects.

Reviewing the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan between Phases

The Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should be reviewed and updated at the end of each phase of the project. The initial Plan should anticipate outreach and engagement strategies for each phase of the project, with the assumption that the strategy for later phases will likely be adapted based on what is learned during implementation of earlier phases. When projects transition from SFMTA to another agency between phases, it is essential to coordinate with those city partners to maintain a consistent standard of outreach and engagement, even if the SFMTA is not the lead agency during a particular phase of the project. The Public Outreach and Engagement Guide provides advice and an example of an approach to outreach during the phase of detailed design when projects can appear “inactive” to the community. In order to achieve a successful transition for larger projects, POETS recommends funding for a Public Information Officer to work with the city partner(s) throughout the transition and until project completion.

Internal Coordination

In planning for public outreach and engagement for a single project, it is important to know which other teams and projects within the SFMTA (including those in different divisions) might connect with, intersect or impact your project. Brief related staff and teams on your Public Outreach and Engagement Plan as early in the process as possible.

Implementation of the Plan

What is a “Project”?

For the purpose of these requirements, the SFMTA defines a project 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 Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements apply to all capital projects, as well as one-time policy initiatives that are not capital in nature (including those that occur in multiple phases). Smaller, routine “projects” are sometimes classified as “operations.” Regardless of terminology, any action that impacts the public is subject to compliance with the Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements. As discussed below, there are specific guidelines for smaller, routine projects.

Once your project receives division approval for the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan, the project team is responsible for carrying it out. The Public Outreach and Engagement Guide and Template provide advice and tools designed to help schedule and track activities. The POETS team, the POETS website, POETS Division Leads and District Liaisons are also available to offer information and contacts to project teams who are implementing their Plans.

Regardless of the specific activities outlined in your Public Outreach and Engagement Plan, its implementation must be inclusive and equitable. The plan should include methods for soliciting feedback that engage and are accessible to youth, seniors, people with disabilities, and underrepresented community members.

Compliance with Language Assistance Requirements

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

The Language Access Plan includes maps detailing concentrations of LEP communities by language, which can be used as a resource when determining the language needs of those who are affected by the project. In general, and at a minimum, most public information pieces should be translated into Chinese, Spanish and Filipino (Tagalog), and all public communications and meeting notices must include the 311 "Free Language Assistance" tagline (included in the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan Guide). Depending on content, transit related public information pieces might require additional translation support.

When considering language accessibility, the agency provides resources and training to assist with implementation. A presentation on the SFMTA's Title VI Program, including the Language Assistance Plan, can be found [here](#). Specific language assistance questions and requests for individual consultation should be directed to the SFMTA Regulatory Affairs Manager Kathleen Sakelaris at Kathleen.Sakelaris@sfmta.com or 415.701.4339.

Inclusivity

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Required Notification

When implementing any Plan, the legal minimum distance for notification about the project should be treated as a starting point. In most cases, those neighborhoods and stakeholders who are affected by the project will extend beyond the minimum required distance, warranting broader notification. All Public Outreach and Engagement Plans — including programmatic Plans for smaller projects — require an assessment of the project’s impacts. The expectation is that most projects will need to expand the distance for public outreach. If the choice is made to do minimal notification, then it must be justified in the Plan. The Public Outreach and Engagement Plan template provides guidance on how to assess this need, as well as examples of SFMTA projects that have successfully done so.

Online Presence

Every SFMTA project is required to have an online presence, either a page on the agency website or an equally accessible and comparable alternative. At a minimum, the information posted online should include the basic project information (described as the Project Brief in the Public Outreach and Engagement Guide) and the contact information for the appropriate staff member who can address questions or comments. If the website is designed to receive written questions or comments, it must be monitored regularly so that staff can reply in a timely manner if a response is appropriate. In addition to a web presence for the project itself, every public meeting associated with the project **MUST** be posted on the SFMTA master calendar at the same time that it is announced through other channels.

Documentation of the Plan

Project teams must track key indicators related to outreach and engagement by documenting at a minimum:

- How the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan was implemented (and any changes in implementation from the original Plan)
- Any input received from the public
- How public input influenced the project (and the reasons why or why not)
- How public input was presented to decision makers
- The indicators established for the Plan’s Goals and Objectives

At the end of each project phase the team must complete a brief summary of lessons learned and recommendations for the next project phase. Upload this summary to the POETS website and include a brief end-of-phase report as described in the Guide and included in the Template.

From the community standpoint, documentation of public input is essential to closing the “feedback loop.” If the Plan calls for public consultation, the stakeholders who participate should know how their input was conveyed to decision makers and whether it had any influence on the outcome. This can only happen if the project team documents public input and the process by which it was taken into account. For this reason, the final step in each Public Outreach and Engagement Plan should be a report back to stakeholders at the end of each project phase.

From an internal perspective, planning for public outreach and engagement is an ongoing process, and each project team is expected to review and revise previous Plans as the project moves through each phase. To make informed decisions, the team needs to know what was learned from public participation in earlier phases. Documentation at the project level also supports an accumulation of lessons throughout the agency that can inform future practice on other projects.

Finally, from the decision maker's point of view, documentation of public input provides essential information to inform their decisions about projects.

Accountability

Project Management General Notice 2017-005 emphasizes that all SFMTA projects are subject to the Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements. It also clarifies the points within the project development and approval process that project managers will be held accountable for meeting the requirements. In short, a failure to adequately plan for and implement public outreach and engagement can jeopardize project funding and delivery at any phase of the project.

Specifically, General Notice 2017-005 calls for a Project Needs Assessment at the earliest stage of every project (Project Inception), and it directs projects to include the cost of public outreach and engagement in the Original Project Budget. During the Planning phase, the project team must create a Public Outreach and Engagement Plan and integrate it into the Pre-Development Report (ensuring that every project will have a completed Plan no later than the end of the Planning phase).

Throughout all phases of the project, there are multiple opportunities for review of the Public Outreach and Engagement Plan. These include:

- Review of funding requests for planning and preliminary engineering through the Project Integration Committee and the Transportation Capital Committee;
- Review of phase milestones by the Project Management Office before approval of funding for subsequent project phases;
- Review of project implementation by the Project Delivery Technical Advisory Committee;
- Interdepartmental reviews of proposed street changes by the Transportation Advisory Staff Committee (TASC) and related internal reviews by the Pre-TASC Engineering public hearings;
- Development of a Construction Mitigation Plan, which is explicitly required to comply with the Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements.

In addition to these structured opportunities to review project Plans and their implementation, every Plan

Integrity

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is subject to random audit by managers and agency leadership. The POETS team is available to provide support in developing budgets and strategies for outreach and engagement to ensure that projects are in compliance with the requirements.

Conclusion

The Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements are meant to hold the SFMTA to a high standard of planning and practice. At the same time, the POETS program is designed to give staff members the support they need to meet the requirements. The Public Outreach and Engagement Plan Guide and Public Outreach and Engagement Plan Template, companion documents to the Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements, provide a blueprint for how to develop, implement and document an appropriate outreach and engagement strategy for each project. In addition, the POETS team is available to offer guidance on an ongoing basis as project teams create and revise their Plans. As part of that support, the POETS website includes a wealth of resources and training opportunities available to staff members who work closely with the community.

The purpose of the Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements is to ensure that those who are affected by SFMTA decisions and actions are included in the decision-making process, and that the interests of the community are carefully considered as the agency carries out its mission of maintaining and improving San Francisco's transportation system. A related goal of these requirements is to give every SFMTA project the best possible chance to be delivered smoothly, anticipating challenges and avoiding extreme course corrections. Thoughtful planning is the key, and the needs and concerns of the community must be an integral part of that process. In the end, the POETS approach of establishing high standards and providing the necessary support to meet them is intended to strengthen the position of staff who are responsible for working with the community. By taking the time up front to plan for meaningful public outreach and engagement, project teams are more likely to have a positive experience in the community and will be more confident and better prepared to deliver their projects with outstanding results.