

Public Outreach Notification Standards
Public Outreach & Engagement Team Strategy
(POETS)
A Guide to Conducting Community Outreach for SFMTA Projects
JULY 2016



SFMTA
Municipal
Transportation
Agency

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INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The SFMTA plans, builds and operates a wide variety of projects as part of managing the City's transportation system. Projects range from smaller projects with low community impacts to very large, multi-year projects that have the potential to impact thousands. The size and scope of a project can determine the level of public involvement required.

Simply defined, public outreach is the effort of conducting awareness activities through targeted community interactions. Public outreach activities are those efforts that can directly impact the opinions of the public as it relates to the completion of SFMTA projects.

Public Outreach and Engagement Team Strategy (POETS) initiative is the Agency's response to declaring a meaningful commitment to public outreach and engagement on all SFMTA projects that affect our customers and the community in which we serve.

The Agency goals for public outreach and engagement are the following:

- Build trust and relationships by better managing public and stakeholder expectations
- Create a consistent model for public outreach and engagement that can be leveraged across all divisions
- Identify and delivery useful tools and resources to support public outreach and engagement

Community outreach and engagement activities will become an integral element of planning for any SFMTA project. As such, the PM/PL will be expected to develop and implement a communications and outreach plan that is right for the project size and duration, supports the Agency goals and ensures outreach is synchronized with key project milestones. Every project, regardless of the level of impact on customers and community, will feature a relevant communications plan.

The POETS mission is to enable the PM/PL to develop and implement an effective communications and outreach plan by providing the necessary guidance, tools and resources.

The POETS mission will be accomplished by:

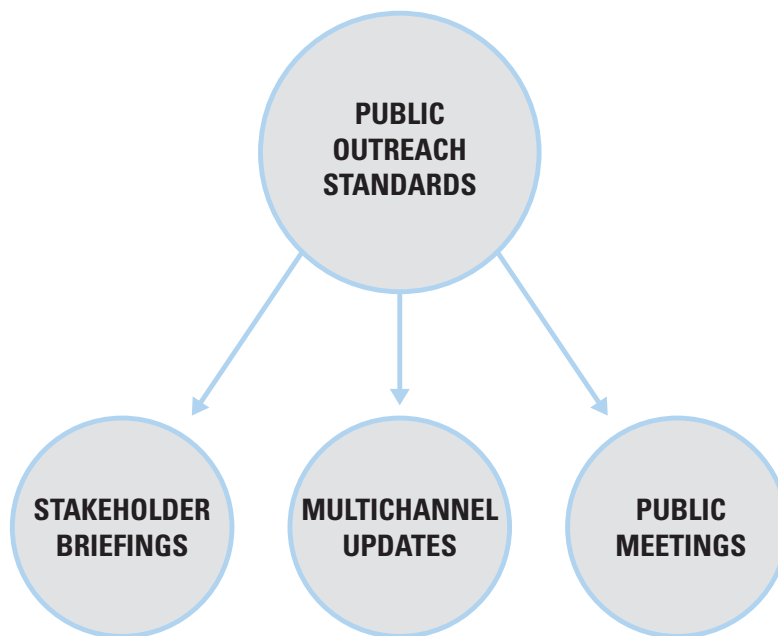
1. Defining public outreach standards
2. Delivering assessment and planning templates
3. Ensuring quality with relevant training, recognition and supporting resources

PUBLIC OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS

A standard level of community outreach will provide the public with the assurance that they will be presented with comprehensive, well-communicated information; ensure concerns are heard and considered to the extent possible; and that their feedback will be reflected directly in the projects when appropriate.

Required standards for outreach and engagement will ensure the appropriate level of resources are identified up front before projects are derailed by poor outreach efforts. The following strategies will be required for every SFMTA project.

- Provide briefings to stakeholders as appropriate to the project
- Distribute regular audience notifications and updates using the most effective tactics,
- Hold public meetings appropriate for scope and complexity of the project



STAKEHOLDER BRIEFINGS

The SFMTA POETS program ensures that key stakeholders are engaged in a dialogue to gather input, and improve decision-making and accountability for all projects the SFMTA undertakes.

Stakeholder briefings are the process by which a PM/PL involves key stakeholders who may be affected by or influence a project. This process allows the gathering of feedback and input and is an important step in engaging key audiences in a dialogue about a project. Various audiences could be obstacles in the forward movement of a project, and this process will assist in mitigating some of the difficulties, as well as identifying key pain points that need to be addressed.

Briefings should also be used to obtain feedback and confirm that the project team is engaging with the appropriate stakeholders. Involving stakeholders in the decision-making processes is a tool utilized to increase project understanding, assist in moving a project toward completion, and develop lasting relationships throughout the community for SFMTA.

Stakeholder briefings can include communicating with various audiences, such as members of the Board of Supervisors whose districts will be impacted by the project.

- Stakeholder briefings should include the following:
- Summary of the project goals and objectives
- Benefits of the project to stakeholder
- Activities and impacts occurring as part of the project
- Project planning and implementation timeline

It is important to consider the full range of potential stakeholders who could be affected by the project. This means looking beyond the minimum legally required distance for project notifications and outreach. As a general rule, it is strongly advisable to expand rather than limit the scope of project outreach and updates, and to consider non-geographically defined communities that might also have an interest in the project.

MULTICHANNEL UPDATES

A variety of tactics can be utilized to regularly inform stakeholders and the public using an assortment of communication channels. Varying audiences can require varying types of communication tactics, including providing outreach materials in languages other than English. As a public agency that receives federal funding, SFMTA is required to comply with both federal and local language assistance requirements, depending on the type of project and the needs of the involved community. During the audience analysis, the PM/PL will identify the best way to communicate with key stakeholders, thereby determining which communications tactics are needed to engage audiences about a project.

Notifications can take a variety of forms, such as direct mailings, email updates, SFMTA alerts, partner lists, advertising, newsletters and earned media. Multiple channels can and should be used to extend the reach of project communications in an effort to keep all key stakeholders informed. Recall the advice above that notification, outreach and updates should extend beyond the minimum required distance to reach those who will actually be affected by and/or interested in the project. When applicable, a project should include a project web page on sfmta.com, project fact sheets and FAQs. As a general rule, all project collateral and communications should adhere to the SFMTA or Muni brand standards.

Communications channels, and the development of collateral materials, are an important component of any outreach plan. A variety of tools and resources are available to support SFMTA projects of all sizes and types. Requests must be made in advance and are subject to prioritization. In particular, requests for translating outreach materials and providing on-site interpretation services at public meetings must be made as far in advance as possible, whether translation assistance is being provided in-house or by an external resource. Some larger projects may have production, collateral, copy and creative outsourced; while other projects may need to enlist the assistance of the Marketing team, which functions as an in-house agency, and can provide similar services. The PM/PL would need to meet and discuss the deliverables, timeline, and resources available so that they can better assist with their needs and prioritize each request.

SUGGESTED TACTICS

Below is a list of a variety of outreach tactics to utilize when communicating with stakeholders about a project:

General

- Project brief
- FAQs
- Media alerts and news releases
- Press conferences
- Before and after photography

Web, Social

- SFMTA.com – project pages, calendar notices, and a homepage click-through banner
- E-mail blasts
- Social media updates: Twitter and Facebook posts
- Blogs

Location Specific

- Muni alerts
- Vehicle ads
- Bus stop signs
- Station signs
- Shelter/street signs
- Parking garages
- Bike share locations

Targeted

- Letters
- Alerts
- Information ambassadors
- Table events (festivals, civic events, in station)
- Fliers: Residential, transit riders, pedestrians, merchants/businesses
- Project evaluation surveys
- Public meetings
- One on one meetings: influencers, partners, merchants/businesses
- Phone calls
- Paid or earned advertisements

Internal

- Inside SFMTA internal newsletter or intranet article
- E-mail blasts

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings are open to stakeholders and the public where the Agency, or the PM/PL, makes a formal presentation on a project and the public is given the opportunity to react with questions and comments. Public meetings allow for a level of public participation in the process and can often include legislative meetings, informal meetings, and participation in external community meetings. As a general rule, language assistance (on-site interpretation) must be provided if requested 48 hours prior to a meeting. Interpretation services may be provided by SFMTA staff, through a vendor or with the assistance of a Community-Based Organization (CBO).

Table 1: Levels of Public Engagement Examples

Criteria for Categorization	Small	Medium	Large	Extra Large
Scope and Complexity	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Duration	Up to 6 months	6 mos - 1 yr	1 yr - 3 yrs	3+ yrs
Level of Public Engagement Needed	Low Up to 2 meetings	Medium Up to 10 meetings	High Minimum 10 meetings	Very High Minimum 10 meetings CAC, TAC, Policy Group
Project Impacts (i.e. construction, transit service, EJ Analysis, Title VI requirements)	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Examples	Bulbout, move stop	MMT Subway Communications	Church and Duboce Tunnel Carl & Cole	TEP Vaness BRT
Est. FTE Hours	500	1,300	2,700	5,500

Meetings that allow for public participation are a key component to many SFMTA projects, and should occur throughout the project planning, design and implementation processes to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.

Successful public meetings first and foremost require planning. Meetings not well planned often leave participants feeling frustrated. However, the Needs Assessment, stakeholder assessment, and Communications Plan, should assist the PM/PL in laying the foundation and executing public meetings successfully. Examples of public meetings for SFMTA projects could include a community meeting hosted by SFMTA, attending a community meeting hosted by a key stakeholder group, a formal public hearing, an MTAB meeting, etc.

Below are some ideas for how to prepare for a successful public meeting:

Determine the purpose of the meeting: Is the purpose of the meeting to inform, consult, or involve the public? Most importantly, also consider whether the purpose is best achieved through a public meeting. If it's determined that a public meeting should be held, then the reasons for the meeting must be articulated to the public.

Table 2: Public Participation Types

	Inform	Consult	Involve
Public Participation Goal	Provide public with balanced information; assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions	To obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives decisions	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure public concerns are consistently understood and considered
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen, acknowledge concerns, provide feedback on how to input influenced decisions	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 influence the decision

Build relationships with participants in advance: A successful public meeting will include a diverse group of key stakeholders, who have a substantial interest in the outcome of the project. Diverse participation ensures that relevant information about the project is not overlooked, and can also assist in legitimizing the final decisions or actions for the larger public.

Assess language needs: The language needs of a particular community should be assessed in advance of the meeting and appropriate arrangements made for on-site interpretation, translated materials, etc.

Provide an agenda: A public meeting agenda should be presented to the participants prior to the meeting or at the start of the meeting. This document will serve as a guide to keep the group moving forward in the discussion. The agenda should include the issues to be discussed, and the process for how the issues will be addressed.

Create a follow-up plan: Develop a strategy for following-up once the meeting is completed. Reconnecting with participants assists in preventing future obstacles and will provide another touch point to engage with key stakeholders.

ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING TEMPLATES

In order to determine the level of public outreach and engagement needed for a project the PM/PL will be responsible for completing a Project Needs Assessment and a Communications Plan for every SFMTA project. POETS provides a template for each.

PROJECT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A Project Needs Assessment (PNA) is a systematic process for determining and addressing how a project will affect key stakeholders. A needs assessment is a key part of the project planning process and will assist in identifying the level of public outreach and engagement needed for each project SFMTA undertakes. It can be an effective tool to gauge a project's impact on the public, and the levels of public input needed, as well as identify appropriate solutions to potential public impact. By thoroughly assessing the project in its early stages, the PM/PL will be gathering data that will inform the outreach and engagement process and lay the foundation for identifying resources and assessing the needs of key stakeholders. All of these elements are important for preparing and implementing the Project Communications Plan.

Prior to beginning any community outreach activities, a PNA will be completed by the PM/PL to determine the project's impacts on the public.

The PNA template included in the resources section of this document will guide the PM/PL with a clear view of their Project's impacts and guide them with defining and assessing the project by answering questions related to the following:

- Size and magnitude
- Public impacts
- Duration
- Budget
- Staffing for public outreach
- Project complexity
- Level of public input necessary
- Construction impacts
- Transit service impacts

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

In execution, the Communications Plan serves as a guide to the communications tactics throughout the duration of the project. It is a living document that should be updated periodically as audience and project needs change.

The Communications Plan is scalable and will not be the same for every project. The plan for a very large project may be quite complex, whereas a smaller project may require less outreach and engagement. More stakeholders will require additional information, which could necessitate supplementary delivery mechanisms.

Implementing a well thought out Communications Plan will:

- Assist in the management of expectations for the project
- Ensure methods used for communication are effective, including addressing the language needs of involved communities, if necessary
- Assure appropriate levels of communication with internal and external stakeholders
- Provide relevant, accurate, consistent information at all times
- Generate and sustain enthusiasm and support for the project

Additionally, there may be several individuals with responsibilities for the different types of communications required by a project. There may be many steps involved in the process of developing and approving communications on a large project in order to ensure communication is accurate, effective, and sensitive to the particular needs of the communities that may be impacted by the project.

Highly visible projects may require separate public information or communications expertise. For example, a bus rapid transit project would require a much more robust communications plan and resource deployment than completing a bulb out project (See Table 1, page 5). However, most projects will require some form of external communication on a regular basis to sustain momentum on the project and to fulfill SFMTA's standards of public engagement.

PMs/PLs will be responsible for determining the level of engagement and tactics to include in the Communications Plan. The SFMTA Communications Team, and a Public Outreach and Engagement Manager (POEM), will act as a resource assisting Project Managers and Project Leads throughout the process, including finalizing a communications plan and developing appropriate tactics.

A Communications Plan is imperative to the success of realizing the Agency outreach and engagement goals. It is the responsibility of the PM/PL to prepare a comprehensive plan customized to each project, to oversee implementation and to evaluate its effectiveness.

POETS provides a step-by-step planning tool for completing a Project Communications Plan. It guides the PM/PL on preparing the fundamental elements of the plan.

- 1. Preparing a project brief.** A project brief concisely describes the scope of the Project and enables quick understanding. The PM/PL will be directed on how to prepare a project brief – summarizing its goals, benefits, start and end dates, areas of impact and potential risks.
- 2. Defining communication goals.** The goals of every Communications Plan will be those of the Agency (see Introduction), but there may be other goals unique to the project. The planning template will direct the PM/PL to define those goals.
- 3. Setting measurable objectives.** Measurable objectives are necessary for evaluating the changes in stakeholder understanding and support for the project as the communications plan is executed. They enable the PM/PL to make informed course corrections as necessary.
- 4. Identifying the audience.** The planning template will provide tables that will enable the PM/PL to build an organized target list of the primary, secondary audiences as well as potential partners in building awareness and support. It will also guide the PM/PL on assessing the audience awareness, support, misperceptions, required behavior changes, language requirements, the project's compelling benefits, safety issues. Frequently the best way to answer these questions is to utilize past SFMTA project information on similar key stakeholders, or ask them directly, which can often be the first step in building a successful relationship with members of the community who have an interest in the project. Remember that they might not live or work in the immediate vicinity of the project.
- 5. Crafting key messages.** After completing the audience section, the template will provide instructions for preparing the relevant messages for each type of audience.
- 6. Preparing communication strategies and tactics.** Every project's Communications Plan will be required to include the standard strategies (as defined on page) and a list of possible tactics will be provided to assist the PM/PL with identifying the most effective ways to inform and engage the public.
- 7. Building a timeline of outreach deliverables.** Every PM/PL understands the importance of a timeline for scheduling and implementing a project plan. The template provides examples for how to build an effective action plan for outreach.

RESOURCES AND RECOGNITION

The POETS team has developed a number of resources for project managers, project leads, and other staff tasked with public outreach and engagement. The POETS website features a wide range of educational and skill-building resources available to staff, including training opportunities, on-demand webinars, an online library, and peer-to-peer support. General and agency-specific resources include guides, tools and tips, along with an expanding database of SFMTA project needs assessments and communications plans.

To acknowledge outstanding effort and results, POETS also features a recognition program in which public outreach and engagement staff can apply for three progressively higher levels of achievement, all of which come with specific rewards and benefits. The highest level – POETS Master – is reserved for those who have demonstrated positive outcomes for the agency and the community through use of best practices on a project. Each time someone becomes a POETS Master, their project will be documented as a case study to showcase effective planning and implementation. As we continue to add case studies to our resource library, our staff can learn from experience within the agency to better inform current and future projects. You can read the requirements for every level of recognition and submit an application form on the POETS website.

SUMMARY

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency is committed to ensuring that key stakeholders remain engaged and informed about the planning and implementation of key Agency projects, ensuring the SFMTA is more efficient and effective at delivering projects.

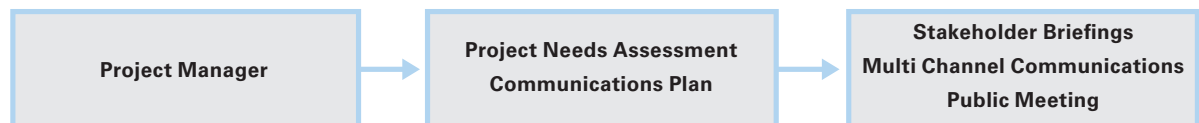
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Public Outreach and Engagement Team Strategy (POETS) will be the new standard for public engagement throughout San Francisco for the SFMTA

The following process will occur for all SFMTA projects:

- All Project Managers and Project Leads will provide a Project Needs Assessment and Communications Plan for all SFMTA Projects
- The minimum level of outreach and engagement for any SFMTA project will include, but will not be limited to, Stakeholder Briefings, Multi-Channel Notification and *Public Meetings (when applicable).



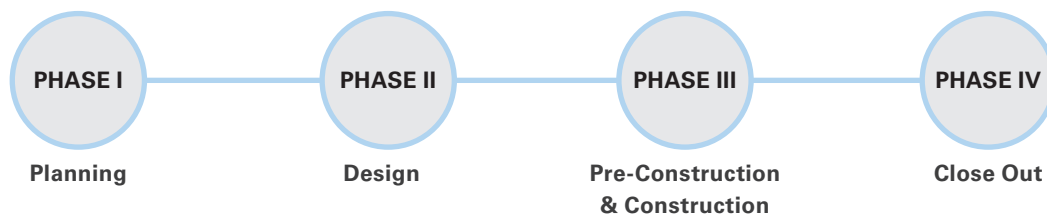
APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF OUTREACH PROCESSES

Outlined below are examples of outreach processes for small and large complex projects that can be utilized by the PM/PL:

OUTREACH PROCESS FOR A SMALL PROJECT

- Outline goals and objectives of the project
- Identify issues and impacts related to the project
- Identify key stakeholders
- Determine the level of public involvement
- Define budget for communications resources and outreach support (i.e. Ambassadors, etc.)
- Develop an informational piece (e.g., flyer) for dissemination or repurposing, translate into appropriate languages, as needed
- If applicable, post on sfmta.com website (see resources section for assistance)
- Share information with internal and external stakeholders including Board of Supervisors
- Disseminate and post public hearing letters and notices

Table 1: Phases of Small Project Outreach



PHASE I - PLANNING

- Elected officials are notified of project, activities and impacts (input is invited)
- Information is shared with internal SFMTA stakeholders
- Residents, merchants and community organizations are identified and notified of project through a direct mail letter or briefing as needed, in the appropriate languages
- Updates are shared via social media channels
- Create graphic timeline and update as needed
- Develop and create project collateral if needed
- Webpage is created if needed

PHASE II - DESIGN

- Public hearing notice is posted in project area
- Public hearing letters are sent to residents and businesses as needed
- Website is updated continuously with pertinent information as needed
- All of the above are translated into the appropriate languages

PHASE III - PRE-CONSTRUCTION & CONSTRUCTION

- Updates are shared via social media channels
- Graphic timeline is updated
- Stakeholders are notified if needed

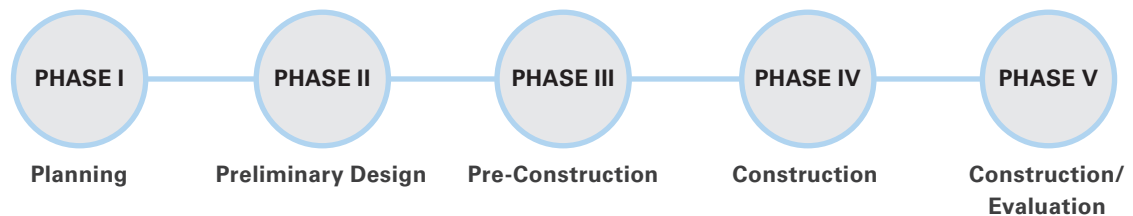
PHASE IV - CLOSE OUT

- Updates are shared via social media channels
- Graphic timeline is updated
- Stakeholders are notified if needed
- Project Evaluation is completed

OUTREACH PROCESS FOR LARGE, COMPLEX PROJECTS

Larger, complex projects require additional outreach and engagement over a longer period of time. The following outlines a more extensive phased approach for handling projects of a larger magnitude or projects that have significant impacts to the community; such as loss of parking, bus reroutes, or significant and/or prolonged construction.

Table 2: Phases of Large, Complex Project Outreach



PHASE I - PLANNING

The purpose of this phase is to determine the level of public and stakeholders' involvement and utilize this information to develop an outreach and communications plan to implement throughout the course of the project. Language needs should be assessed and incorporated in the items below as required.

- Outline goals and objectives of project
- Identify issues and impacts related to the project
- Identify key stakeholders and begin initial engagement to determine perspectives and interest level
- Brief appropriate Elected Officials
- Determine the level of public involvement that is acceptable and preferred
- Assess need for a Citizens Advisory Committee, a Technical Advisory Group or a Policy Steering Group
- Develop a timeline with major milestones for design, funding, approval and implementation with key points for outreach delineated
- Determine core messages and communications tactics such as a webpage, newsletters, mailings, email updates, flyers, posters, brochures, fact sheets, FAQs, social media, media releases and special events participation
- Budget for communications resources and outreach support (estimated hours of support x estimated project implementation period)
- Set up stakeholder database tracking and shared files infrastructure to capture and retain project information

PHASE II - PRELIMINARY DESIGN

The primary purpose of outreach and engagement during this phase is to consult with the public and key stakeholders on preliminary designs and gather input.

- Use multiple channels of communications to inform stakeholders that preliminary designs are ready for review. This can include radial mailings, emails, newsletters, community groups and city agency lists, ads in community papers, social media and media alerts, in the appropriate languages
- Host or make arrangements to participate in community meetings in order to present preliminary designs and gather input
- Engage Community Advisory Committees and other advisory groups
- Update Elected Officials, SFMTA Board, and other city agencies
- Provide a project contact (e-mail and phone) to accept project input and feedback
- At the end of the preliminary design process, after all design-related meetings have occurred and feedback incorporated, a final public meeting should be held to present the final proposed plans
- Share information related to final designs, environmental review, funding and approvals with stakeholders via website, email, SFMTA alerts, radial mailings, social media and other channels as appropriate
- SFMTA Alerts should be used on a regular basis to update project stakeholders on a quarterly basis at a minimum or more frequently, as needed
- Respond to letters and feedback in a timely manner; generally within 3-5 days
- Review and update core messages based on final designs and implementation plans
- Update communications materials and website with final designs
- Survey participants to gauge stakeholder feedback

PHASE III - PRE-CONSTRUCTION

The purpose of outreach and engagement during this phase is to inform the public and stakeholders about impending construction timing and impacts.

- Outline and clarify dates and milestones for construction
- Update SFMTA Board of Directors, Board of Supervisors, elected officials and other City agencies on planned construction plans and timing
- Send radial mailings and emails to updated database of stakeholders to inform them of impending construction
- Post construction information and updates on the SFMTA website
- Carry out communication activities related to construction through newsletters, flyers, posters, brochures, fact sheets, FAQs, SFMTA alerts, social media and other channels as appropriate
- SFMTA Alerts should be used on a regular basis to update project stakeholders on a quarterly basis at a minimum or more frequently, as needed
- Respond to letters and feedback in a timely manner; generally within 3-5 days

PHASE IV - CONSTRUCTION

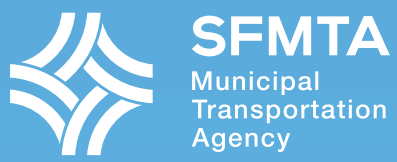
The purpose of outreach and engagement during this phase is to inform the public and stakeholders about the construction progress.

- Update SFMTA Board of Directors, elected officials and other City agencies on construction updates and impacts
- Post construction information and updates on the SFMTA website
- SFMTA Alerts should be used on a regular basis to update project stakeholders on a quarterly basis at a minimum or more frequently, as needed
- Share progress updates with internal SFMTA stakeholders and notable external stakeholders such as advisory councils, interest groups and key community organizations
- Inform residents and merchants in the immediate area of impacts, and when applicable through a public hearing notice letter and public hearing notices posted in the vicinity, in the appropriate languages
- Field and respond to constituent complaints and perform site visit, if necessary
- Host informal meetings or participate in community meetings upon request
- Draft a media release with construction details and distribute it prior to construction (requires approval by Media Relations)
- Translate and submit media release to appropriate ethnic publications within the project area
- In the case of route changes and where appropriate, post signs in transit shelters and facilities to inform customers about changes that may affect their travel routines that may be required to facilitate the efficient, safe movement of people and traffic
- Share ongoing updates via social media and SFMTA Alerts

PHASE V - POST-CONSTRUCTION/EVALUATION

The purpose of outreach and engagement during this phase is to celebrate project completion, communicate project benefits and evaluate stakeholder satisfaction.

- Draft media release announcing project completion (requires approval by SFMTA Media Relations)
- Field post-construction evaluation survey with key stakeholders
- Prepare a Public Outreach and Engagement report comparing pre and post project findings; develop a case study if appropriate
- Maintain connections with community and stakeholders
- Utilize SFMTA Alerts to continue updating stakeholders on project improvement
- Perform Project Evaluation



SFMTA.COM