



Public Outreach and Engagement

SFMTA

Building relationships and keeping the public informed



The Public Outreach and Engagement Team Strategy (POETS) is the agency's framework for engaging and informing our customers and stakeholders of our policies and projects. POETS was designed to ensure that the SFMTA's stakeholders and the wider community are fully informed, and their interests are considered as the agency carries out its work. The strategy builds strong relationships, ensures that staff have the skills and tools they need and improves coordination within the agency and with our city partners.

The agency's work touches every corner of the city, helping hundreds of thousands of people get where they need to go every day. This work encompasses more than 200 projects underway at any given time, directly affecting the lives of residents, merchants and other stakeholders throughout the city. Larger projects can take many years to complete with significant construction impacts to neighborhoods and local merchants. Smaller projects can involve difficult choices, changes or tradeoffs (in transit schedules, parking spaces, bicycle access, etc.) that those most affected care deeply about. Projects with major impacts generate public interest, concern and sometimes opposition, including significant delays.

Benefits

Outreach and engagement make our work possible, ensure that it meets the needs of San Francisco and upholds our values of equity and trust. The Public Outreach & Engagement Team Strategy (POETS) program keeps the public informed about SFMTA's work and gives those affected a voice in the decision-making process. The foundations of POETS are:

1. Consistent requirements for public outreach and engagement throughout the agency, even when communications staff are not the lead.
2. Comprehensive resources to support staff who work directly with the public.
3. Inclusive practices to increase access and participation for the diverse communities we serve.
4. Development and cultivation of strong relationships with the community.

Project delivery at the SFMTA relies on trained communications staff who can execute this strategy.

SFMTA Board Workshop – February 1-2, 2022

FOR CONSIDERATION:

Providing more resources for outreach and engagement efforts will:

1. Ensure sufficient staffing to conduct engagement from planning to implementation and beyond
2. Provide tools to lower barriers to access and participation, and to ensure we can reach a wide and diverse audience
3. Fund project teams to partner with community-based organizations who are working within the communities we serve

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Quick Builds and Pilots

A key challenge in outreach is helping city partners and community members visualize the project and its impact on their lives and our transportation system. We've found efficient ways to accomplish this through pilots and other iterative design processes that demonstrate what the project will provide for the city.

VISION ZERO QUICK-BUILD PROGRAM

The Vision Zero Quick-Build initiative is an SFMTA effort to implement pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements. It is a key component of San Francisco's 2021 Vision Zero Action Strategy. Quick-build projects are reversible, adjustable traffic safety improvements that can be installed relatively quickly. Unlike major capital projects that may take years to plan and construct, quick-build projects are installed quickly but with evaluation, review and adjustments following implementation.

Community outreach and engagement is a critical part of the quick-build program. Each project conducts outreach consistent with POETS to inform the public and neighboring stakeholders and gather input on design options, with officially noticed Public Hearings to consider proposals prior to approval. Importantly, the SFMTA evaluates all quick-build projects to determine design effectiveness. These findings are reported to the public on the SFMTA website, and because quick-build projects use low-cost materials the SFMTA can adjust the designs based on evaluation findings where needed.

TEMPORARY EMERGENCY TRANSIT LANES PILOT

To reduce delays and crowding on buses, the agency launched a pilot of temporary emergency transit lanes, bolstering the existing system of lanes, to keep Muni and other transit efficient and reliable as automobile traffic ramped up. The pilot lanes covered 11 routes and included the experimental HOV lanes on Lombard and Park Presidio.

POETS staff worked with community-based organizations to ensure traditionally marginalized communities were prioritized in the decision-making. Community-based organizations, stakeholders and neighbors were involved in shaping the framework and process for evaluating and adjusting the emergency transit lanes in real time. Based on public feedback and ongoing monitoring of the temporary transit lanes, the team was able to tweak – or even remove lanes – to meet the needs of the community and Muni customers.

Using data-driven technical evaluation and public outreach, we were able to test and install these lanes in the middle of a global pandemic in order to provide more service with the same number of buses.

Capital Programs & Construction (CP&C) Projects

Capital Programs & Construction projects are generally multi-agency, multi-year projects and can be very impactful to communities. These complex efforts often involve city partners like the SFPUC and Public Works. This is because replacing aging water, sewer and paving along with transportation projects is efficient for the city; however, is very impactful to communities. The Geary Boulevard Improvement Project and Taraval Segment B are prime examples.

The POETs program provides a structure for teams to follow to ensure we are engaging with the community through the various construction phases: planning, design, contracting, pre-construction and construction

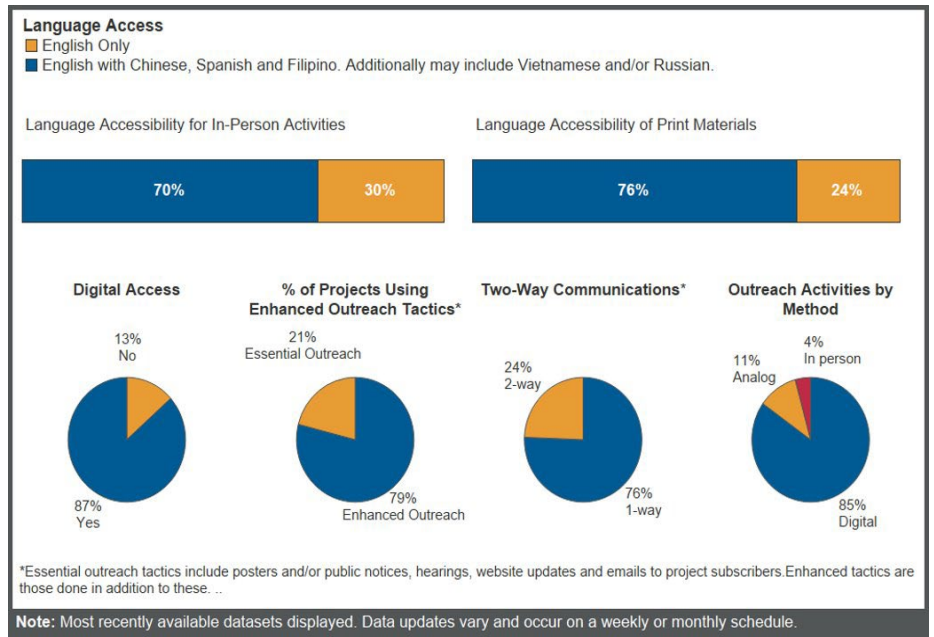
We rely on proven strategies and tactics:

- Engagement that starts early and continues at a frequent pace.
- Construction Mitigation Program
 - Funds set aside to support merchants with marketing their businesses while construction is happening
 - Beachside Taraval is a good example of a marketing program that we helped them with. The merchants now own this program/creative
- Engagement through all phases, such as:
 - Working with communities on planning construction including choice of staging areas, accommodating needs of schools and houses of worship and other very specific needs.
 - Modifying traffic patterns to accommodate construction and community needs.

Future of SFMTA Engagement

While we continually strive for improvement, our outreach and engagement efforts have changed greatly as a result of the pandemic. To ensure that we reach a more diverse audience with limited in-person activities, we have expanded our methods to increase digital and in-language communications. Some of these tactics will be incorporated into future outreach to engage with our customers in their preferred language and to meet our customers and stakeholders where they are.

- Increase in translated materials
- Use more digital tools



Outreach through Equity

To ensure our outreach is culturally competent we rely on our diverse and experienced POETS team. Our outreach staff understand or come from the various cultures represented throughout the city or from the San Francisco communities themselves. Because we hire for these skills, our translated materials use clearer and more meaningful language. It also means that when our POETS team works directly with community members, whether to help customers during a Muni service change or to gather feedback on a new project, they work effectively to reduce barriers, put customers at ease and build trust

These communications professionals are supported by robust engagement training as well as ongoing opportunities, such as a recent multi-week Interpreter training program offered by the Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs.

