

Public Outreach and Engagement Report

Our agency's approach to public outreach, and our response to community concerns about project impacts, directly affect our ability to fulfill our mission. The SFMTA's interests are best served when stakeholders are well informed about our projects and the public process, and when project managers and project leads consider opportunities to take public input into account.

The SFMTA has hundreds of projects underway at any given time – a wide range of activities that directly affect the lives of residents, businesses and other stakeholders throughout San Francisco. Larger projects can take many years to complete, with significant impacts on neighborhoods. Even smaller projects can involve changes that matter deeply to people.

The SFMTA has made a commitment to public outreach and engagement, beginning with an honest self-assessment of our agency's practices in 2015 when we identified inconsistencies and areas for improvement in our work with the community. This six-month assessment included an analysis of project management processes, a review of calls and letters from the public, surveys and focus groups with stakeholders and staff, and interviews with project managers in other City departments. The assessment revealed that community members are often confused and frustrated by the public process, and that staff members often lacked the tools and training to work effectively with the public. Missteps in working with the community affected the ability to deliver projects and jeopardized relationships with stakeholders.

SFMTA leadership responded by calling for a more consistent approach to outreach and engagement. We researched best practices in the field of public participation, conducted interviews with other transportation agencies and City departments, and surveyed the public. Based on this analysis, the agency established its Public Outreach and Engagement Team Strategy (POETS). The purpose of POETS is to create a consistent approach to outreach and engagement across SFMTA projects, and to strengthen community relationships by promoting transparency and accountability in our work with stakeholders. POETS also provides training and resources to empower staff to meet those standards.

The core elements of POETS are: (1) **Requirements** for outreach and engagement that every project is expected to meet, (2) **Resources** and training to support staff members who are responsible for working with the public, and (3) **Relationships** with our stakeholders to build trust in the community.

Requirements

The essential requirement is that every project that impacts the public must have a public outreach and engagement plan. The plan must be implemented and documented according to standards established by POETS. Each project will have its own webpage on the SFMTA website or be part of an aggregated project webpage, and every public meeting will be posted on the Agency's master calendar. If a needs assessment, which is a mandatory part of the POETS planning process, determines it's appropriate the POET plan must include early outreach to key stakeholders, as well as identify language needs, racial equity considerations, and must plan for implementation that is inclusive, equitable and accessible. Documenting plan implementation

including the stakeholders contacted and any feedback received from the public is also required. These requirements apply to all SFMTA projects that impact the public.

Projects will be monitored to ensure that each has a POETS plan on file. To ensure accountability, planning for public outreach and engagement will be more closely linked to internal procedures for funding and project approvals, and projects must be in compliance in order to advance. Internal review of compliance with the requirements for public outreach and engagement can occur at any time, but is specifically incorporated into processes related to filing a Pre-Development Report, review of funding requests through the Project Integration Committee and the Transportation Capital Committee, review of phase milestones by the Project Management Office, review of project implementation by the Project Delivery Technical Advisory Committee, interdepartmental reviews of proposed street changes by the Transportation Advisory Staff Committee (TASC), engineering public hearings, and development of construction mitigation plans.

Resources

For the past three years, resources have been in place to build skills, confidence and knowledge among staff who currently engage in project outreach. These included a variety of opportunities for education and training, one-on-one support and office hours, a POETS peer group, webinars, and an online resource library. To date, more than 100 staff members have completed a week-long training session on public participation fundamentals.

As POETS expands to include more SFMTA projects, new resources are being developed to further support staff, provide guidance, tools and trainings that increase their abilities and their confidence in conducting public outreach and engagement for their projects. The resources compile information on best practices, share tools and techniques, provide a broader variety of training opportunities and support sharing of information between groups.

Relationships

Relationship-building underlies all the work of POETS. At the project level, every outreach and engagement plan should be designed to keep those affected by our projects informed and engaged – both about the project benefits and impacts, and about the opportunities to provide input and participate in the public process. The POETS District Liaison program is central to this effort. Our Agency's Public Information Officers also serve as District Liaisons and are focused on each of the 11 San Francisco supervisorial districts. In this role the key focus is build a relationship with their assigned district. They attend neighborhood and merchant meetings to gain a better understanding of their issues or concerns related to transportation and the agency. They monitor the local community news, participate in community events that help them keep the community informed of up and coming projects in their area, and essentially act as a conduit for the community to the agency. They connect concerns to the appropriate staff to establish a connection to ensure responsiveness.

Stakeholder engagement has played a key role in the development of POETS and in the creation of the new requirements. Over the past year, SFMTA staff have had many opportunities to hear feedback from the community about our agency's practices. Comments were received by our District Liaisons from individuals throughout the city, at community meetings for specific projects, and in input sessions with representatives of various stakeholder groups. We take this

input seriously, and we have incorporated what we heard from the public into our expectations for planning and implementation at the project level.

Five questions were asked to organize and categorize stakeholder input consistently across groups. The questions included:

- **Project Impacts:** What kinds of project impacts are you most concerned about?
- **Keeping You Informed:** What are the best ways to reach you and the community?
- **Public Participation:** How do you and the community prefer to provide project input?
- **Community Partnerships:** How can we strengthen relationships and partnerships?
- **Project Coordination:** How can we coordinate planning across projects and partners?

Below are major themes that emerged from the input sessions, followed by a summary of comments, quotes and suggestions.

- SFMTA needs to build trust with the community through empathy, consistency, responsiveness and transparency.
- Document the process of outreach and engagement and the comments received.
- Close the feedback loop. Tell us what you did, and how our input affected the project.
- Who are the stakeholders SFMTA is planning for, and how is input weighed?
- Loss of parking is the impact of most concern to merchants and residents.
- Delays, reroutes, and stop changes are the impacts of most concern to transit riders.
- Provide information by District. What are all the projects and their impacts in the area?
- Improve notification signage on the street: size, number, content, timing, location.
- Emphasize human interaction. Build relationships and be responsive to phone calls.
- It's all the City. Community members don't care about department distinctions.

STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

General Comments

- Distrust of MTA. It comes from lack of transparency, lack of empathy, arrogance, inconsistent enforcement of mitigation agreements. There is a generational component (young planners need to learn how to talk to older residents and listen to their concerns).
- Who in the community is considered a stakeholder? Who should be? Are we planning for those who live here now or a future vision?
- How are different voices counted and weighed?
- The agency needs to have people with the right skills working with the community
- More human interaction, less phone tree, more real time responsiveness
- Need to hire more staff for outreach – trained professionals, not engineers/planners. Consultants should do specialized work, not run the meetings.
- What are the consequences of not complying with the POETS requirements?
- SF community is mistrustful, defensive, volatile, with negative voices at hearings
- Bicycle advocates have a trusting and deep relationship with MTA
- Staff needs to be sensitive about how much their projects affect the community

- When there's a management transition, there must be memory about commitments
- Remember that community members are not paid to participate
- Give people a chance to talk at meetings
- Don't shame people publicly
- Know the neighborhood – different approaches work better some places than others
- Transportation Network Companies and delivery services need parking zones that don't reduce customer parking
- Sunken planters are useless features. They take parking and you can fall into them.
- Bus Rapid Transit corridors should have a subway instead
- Where do parking fees go? Do they still go to an off-street parking fund?
- Look to the bike share roll out in NYC – inundation of info + documenting the process
- Need clear guidelines for Residential Parking Permits. Mixed use blocks need them.
- Please: no pilot programs for sliding scale meters, no meters on secondary streets
- Red bus lanes changed the dynamic with the community

Project Impacts

- Loss of parking (permanent and/or during construction + inadequate notification)
- Transit impacts: delays (a big problem if you rely on transit for your job), stop removal, reroutes.
- Construction mitigation – use more viewing areas (vs. orange tape)
- There are direct, indirect and cumulative impacts. Consider them all in deciding the categories of stakeholders who should receive notification.
- Gentrification
- Mobility throughout neighborhoods

Keeping You Informed

- Think District-wide and contextually. Have a website in different languages with maps showing all projects and timelines in the District. Are you planning for entire neighborhoods or block-by-block? What is the timing and interaction of projects?
- Street Notification: multiple large signs with large print, in line of sight for people of different heights, posted on opposite sides of the pole, before decisions are made
- Information by website. It is currently not up to date and inadequate: basic info, staff contact, how to provide input or appeal
- Document the outreach process and those you engaged
- Need a better distribution list by district; need to actively pursue opt-in, like Planning
- More human beings; face to face is best
- Need people on staff with cultural/linguistic competence, who understand specific communities and how to reach people. Takes more time but essential.
- Meet regularly with major stakeholders to keep them informed (monthly, quarterly, annually). Cover MTA functional areas, citywide overview, broader themes, major issues.

- Keep us informed during inactive periods. Don't come back after a year or more and assume anyone remembers your project or plan.
- Reach out to surrounding neighborhoods, not just those in the immediate vicinity. Legally required notifications are not always sufficient. Use common sense.
- 311: Use this more effectively. Have a timely, human response. It's frustrating now.
- GovDelivery email updates
- Use door hangers, mailers
- Use the weekend advisory
- Communicate route alternatives during disruptions through signage, bus alerts, etc.
- Information by text
- Information while you're on the bus or train
- Information in-person at pop-ups
- Phone calls
- "Take one" cards
- Put ads on apps that people use to get around
- Use organizations to reach the community
- Notices and handouts should be short and easy to read
- Lead with benefits before getting to the pain – like sales, know your audience
- Good recent outreach and use of committees to address issues during construction
- MTAB needs to be better informed about the public voices that aren't in the room at the public hearing. Staff should document the process and the comments received.
- Process of getting a public hearing notice has become too difficult
- Give more notification about service changes, closures, etc.
- Use more wayfinding signage
- Notification should say what you can do if you oppose a decision or action
- Reach out to people without Internet access – libraries, free newspapers, multilingual publications, etc.
- Reach out to renters as well as property owners
- Reach out to owners of businesses with drivers who deliver to the project neighborhood
- Mailers are not enough, especially to schools. Follow up in person to make sure people received and understood the notification.
- Take a programmatic approach to outreach. Be consistent across projects and over time.
- Acknowledge previous work that was done, even if years have passed since then

Public Participation

- Close the feedback loop. How was public input used in the final project/plan?
- Document the process and those you reached out to. This provides accountability and protects staff and the agency in case of resistance to final decisions.
- Public hearing is not enough engagement. Agency needs to work with the community, be more proactive prior to the hearing. Engineering hearings are not at a convenient time (10am), and it doesn't seem like public input can have an influence at that point.
- Use visuals, physical installations and field trips to understand projects

- Use town halls or small group dialogue (where people speak) to balance open houses (where staff speak)
- Be transparent about SFMTA’s contract relationships. When private entities perform services that impact the public (e.g., bus shelter design or cleaning), the public should be able to weigh in and it needs to be equitable. If MTA leases public property to private interests (TNCs, valets, car share, bike share, etc.) it can affect available parking.
- BOS aides need access to the SFMTA Board of Directors
- Be transparent about how much weight is put on input from different stakeholders
- Follow up with stakeholders about how decisions were made and input was weighed through an app
- No town halls, more open houses with engagement and public input
- Demonstrate what a new feature would look like, with staff riding on transit
- Record people’s opinions on video, not just written comments or a survey
- Use listening booths
- Engage the media so they can interview participants and staff for a balanced story
- District Liaisons are good, but they need more authority to be able to take community concerns back to the agency and address them
- Use in-person pop-ups – opportunities to participate beyond meetings
- Use a project website to get public feedback, not just provide info
- Listen to the community in planning for residential parking permits – we have detailed knowledge and expertise on our neighborhoods
- Hold meetings after work hours
- Show current opportunities to participate on MTA projects at every MTA meeting
- Survey people at meetings – what is your input, how can we keep you informed, how do you prefer to participate?
- Don’t necessarily need more outreach, but a more strategic approach with a clear timeline and safe spaces to give input
- Don’t engage people too early because staff might not be ready, and it can draw out the process and drain people’s energy

Community Partnerships

- Real engagement, compassion, empathy is what people want
- Work with advocacy groups to build relationships and champions for projects
- Engage those who ride transit and bicycles. This is a missed opportunity to get more support for projects.
- Provide food and make it fun. Pancake breakfast.
- Major stakeholders should have more direct access to leadership

Project Coordination

- Don’t talk about the “City Family” – perception is you’re taking care of your own

- Talk to us about all the projects that affect us at once, not project by project. How do they relate to one another, what are the impacts, how is mitigation coordinated?
- Approach the community with more plain speak, less bureaucratic and technical
- Coordinate with private developments in the neighborhood & be aware of their impacts
- Be transparent about how decisions that affect parking are made
- Empower MTA to work with other divisions and departments
- Overlapping projects in a neighborhood can cause problems and project delay

Suggested Actions

- Continue doing outreach and using committees to address construction issues
- Send email by District asking for opt-in on various topics; tabling at stops to get opt-in
- Hold a Maintenance Summit – Bring the different agencies together to say how all the parts work together
- Come back to District Councils annually to follow up on projects and build relationships
- Hold an annual lunch session with Supervisor aides and MTA District Liaisons
- Consider community ambassadors – contract with CBOs and people who live in the community
- Consider an on-transit ambassador program to engage and support riders (involve fare inspectors)
- Create an internal document that guides decision making to minimize transit impacts. It outlines strategies and reasons for decisions. Examples: use existing rights of way, provide substitute buses, try to work on nights and weekends. Post the document on the website to help the public understand the process and what you're doing.
- Create a master list of stakeholders at the citywide, District and neighborhood level. Review the list in addition to those immediately impacted by a project. Some people/groups want to know everything that is happening, or most of what's happening in a given project category or geographic area. They should always be notified about certain kinds of projects (e.g., big corridor projects or major policy or fare changes).
- At every MTA meeting, have a piece of paper that shows upcoming public participation opportunities on this project. On the reverse, show opportunities to participate on other projects that might interest you. Always have a sign-in sheet and ask people how they want to stay informed.
- Hold an occasional public forum to address major MTA issues and themes. Let people talk about the topic, document their input and follow up with them. Report on major incidents and how they were addressed.
- Hold a monthly staff get together to make sure everyone is aware of agency-wide news and other projects that might affect theirs.
- Consider permit parking reserved for businesses and their employees
- Laminate posters for the rainy season

Quotes

- “Nobody cares if it’s MTA or PUC or DPW. It’s the City.”
- “To us it’s the City. It doesn’t matter what agency.”
- “You must have one Town Hall for every Open House.”
- “Face to face is best.”
- “We’re not paid to be at the meeting, but it is costing us.”
- “It’s the agency’s responsibility to put the right people with the right skills in front of the public.”
- “Whose time matters more – those in the neighborhood or those who ride through the neighborhood?”
- “Reduce the pain by having everyone talk to us at once, not project by project.”
- “You can’t expect engineers and planners to be savvy about public outreach. Some have the talent to work with the public, some do not. Some could be great with proper training.”
- “It feels like Urban Planning means building ON you instead of WITH you right now.”
- “Why ask for our feedback if you don’t use it?”
- “Take time to address impacts. Do it right, not quickly.”
- “Not having information is the worst. ‘There’s no service this week but we forgot to put up a sign.’”
- “We can’t plan for alternatives without good information.”
- “311 is great overall but the MTA piece seems broken.”
- “There are two types of MTA staff – those who are running away and those who are so focused on the opposition that they’re not thinking about the people who would benefit from the project and could be your champions.”
- “Reach out and listen to people, don’t just ‘educate’ them.”

Starting in July 2018, the agency will launch the next phase of program development – new Public Outreach and Engagement Requirements and updated guidance for developing Public Outreach and Engagement Plans for projects.