

Participation Tools for Better Community Planning





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Participation Tools for Better Community Planning

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Introduction. Good Tools for Great Communities

The civic infrastructure of our society is equally as important as the physical infrastructure. Community involvement and collaboration plays a crucial role in how we build and develop our communities. Winston Churchill wrote, “We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us.”

In more recent years, The California Endowment, the philanthropic organization sponsoring the update of this guidebook, makes the same point when it comes to our community’s health: “Place Matters. The most important thing we learned through 14 years of initiatives and the thousands of grants made to communities across the state is this: Our health doesn’t begin in a doctor’s office. Where we live, work, learn and play has a profound impact on our health.”

Participation Tools for Better Community Planning provides communities with an overview of public participation tools that can help communities plan for health-promoting land use and transportation. These tools are currently being used successfully

in diverse communities throughout California and the nation to plan for neighborhoods with access to healthy foods, where people can safely walk, bike or ride transit.

These participation tools provide a broad range of strategies to collect information about community values, aspirations and needs, which can then be incorporated into community plans that meaningfully reflect the community’s vision for its future. This guidebook introduces the tools through summary descriptions, examples of how they are being used, and resources for how to access them.

Successful community planning efforts are not limited to the use of a collection of participation tools, but are instead ongoing community ownership of the planning process. These tools are important parts of an effective overall effort, but effective public participation is more than the sum of its parts.

The Local Government Commission has been advocating public participation in the planning process since the adoption of the Ahwahnee Principles for Resource Efficient Communities in 1991. One of its implementation principles states that “plans should be developed through an open process and participants in the process should be provided visual models of all planning proposals.” A few years after the adoption of the Ahwahnee Principles, the LGC published a guidebook on *Participation Tools*

for *Better Land Use Planning: Techniques and Case Studies* — one of the first documents on this topic — which was distributed by the American Planning Association for over ten years.

This new guidebook — *Participation Tools for Better Community Planning* — is funded by The California Endowment and updates the original guide to focus it more specifically on low-income, underserved communities. The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities program (BHC) is in the forefront of community planning that acknowledges the nexus between land use and community health. Examples surveyed in this guide are community planning efforts aligned with the BHC’s objective of health-promoting land use and transportation in low-income and/or ethnically and culturally diverse communities in California, including areas where there are BHC programs at work.

Please note: Many of the resources listed in this guide are only available online, and the guide provides website contacts for the listed organizations. Readers without Internet access are encouraged to contact the Local Government Commission for non-web-based contact information for these and other resources:

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Why It's Worth the Time and Money to Engage Citizens in the Planning Process

Public participation is a cornerstone of democracy, and some attempt at public involvement is critical for almost all civic processes. In addition to ethical considerations for including people in the decisions and actions that affect their lives, there are many practical reasons to engage citizens in the planning process:

Debunk myths and misunderstandings between citizens.

Often planning processes become the battleground of competing values and interests among different citizens. However, community involvement also has the potential for strangers to become neighbors, leading to understanding, trust and respect. This can go a long way toward creating consensus around shared goals and objectives.

Promote an educated citizenry that understands project tradeoffs.

A proactive planning process that includes a well-designed community involvement component allows citizens to understand what is being proposed, assess tradeoffs, and assure that

most people will be happy with the plan and individual projects at buildout. This will also reduce the likelihood of contentious battles before councils and planning commissions.

Ensure that good plans remain intact over time.

City councils, planning commissions, city managers and city planners tend to come and go. Thus, even the best of plans are subject to being dismantled over time. A plan that involves citizens in its creation will have a long-lasting and stable constituency.

Expedite the development process for projects that meet goals of the citizenry.

Projects that are well-designed but haven't included citizen involvement may face public opposition that slows or stops the project. There are considerable costs associated with this for both the city and the developer.

Improve the quality of planning.

Professionals are not the only ones generating good ideas. Conversely, citizens are not necessarily wiser than public officials

and professionals. Programs and projects that are the result of an informed citizenry, guided by professionals, are likely to be superior in the long run.

Enhance the general sense of community and trust in government.

Carrying out a citizen participation process and then ignoring the participants' comments will lead to public mistrust of government and its elected officials. Local governments seeking citizen participation must want and be willing to accept citizen input if they expect the citizenry to have trust in their leadership.

Rick Cole, former Mayor of the City of Pasadena, CA, expresses the true essence of citizen participation: "Out of our effort to have thousands in the community participate came the Seventh Principle of the new general plan: Citizen Participation Will Be a Permanent Part of Achieving a Greater City. This principle has changed government, making it more open, responsive and effective. It has also raised the level of trust among citizens — not in trusting City Hall, but in trusting that they own City Hall."

Successful Community Planning: More than the Sum of Its Tools

To hear perspectives on participation relevant to community planning for health-promoting land use in low-income, ethnically and culturally diverse communities, we held focus groups with organizations and local jurisdictions associated with The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities program. We asked them about the elements and indicators of success for community planning participation efforts they have experienced, and about important considerations in selecting tools for a planning effort.

A sampling of feedback on the elements and indicators of a successful community planning participation effort:

Inclusive Participation. A successful participation effort includes and is accessible to the broad spectrum of community stakeholders, representing the community's full diversity. Equity Planning emphasizes inclusion of marginalized groups, including low-income and ethnically diverse groups, to address existing social inequalities in community planning. Participation is not limited to "just the usual suspects."

An inclusive participation effort accommodates cultural and language-translation needs. To ensure planning consultants can contribute to an accessible, inclusive outreach effort, include a requirement in the request for proposals for experience in culturally similar communities or otherwise demonstrate cultural competence.

Relevance. Successful participation efforts address issues that community stakeholders have identified as important. An understanding of community values, needs and aspirations is critical to a successful planning process.

Clear Purpose and Process. A common understanding among community stakeholders exists from the beginning of the effort's structure, process, purpose and possible outcomes. A common and realistic understanding exists of what the process can achieve given available funding and existing statutes.

A roadmap of the effort's purpose and process is available from the start, and clear communication is maintained throughout. Stakeholders have a clear understanding of how input will be recorded and used. Requests are clear: exactly what is being asked, and why? Actions, results, next steps are clarified and summarized at workshops and meetings throughout the process, with follow-up soon after.

Education. Community stakeholders have accurate and unbiased information to make informed decisions and provide informed input and feedback. Stakeholders have ongoing access to technical assistance or experts to inform their decisions and feedback. They have full understanding of how the planning issue can benefit or harm them, and of the impacts from a spectrum of possible decisions. They have the tools to collect and assess their own information.

Citizen Planners. Community members are recognized as experts in the issues affecting their communities, and have access to the knowledge and tools to use in the planning process to deal with concerns and aspirations of their community.

Results. Plans are fully implemented and on time. Stakeholders see the results of their planning work in timely changes

to their community that address the concerns and aspirations covered in the planning effort. Stakeholders have clear, complete information about realistic outcomes from the planning effort. Results with immediate actionable change can enhance an effort's impetus, energy and enthusiasm. Changes as minor as a requested stop sign at an intersection give participants faith that their participation is effective.

Relationships. Successful community planning efforts strengthen relationships among community stakeholders, including individuals and organizations. They leverage existing relationships to build trust and ensure inclusive participation, effective communication and sustained engagement.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) often have experience and relationships within a community that are essential to inform any planning effort. Communication with and among CBOs before a planning effort starts will inform the process and methods. CBOs can be liaisons between local government staff and the stakeholders that they know and serve.

Established Trust. Successful participation efforts cannot happen without trust. Community members participate in planning efforts to the extent that they trust the organization or entity that organizes it. Communication with and among CBOs before a planning effort starts can strengthen relationships that create trust.

Sustained Engagement. Successful community planning participation efforts are ongoing. Community stakeholder relationships are established before a planning process is initiated, and they don't stop after a plan is adopted. Successful efforts include the means for ongoing community engagement to tackle their concerns and achieve their aspirations.



Youth Participation

When we think about how we want our communities to look in the future, we pursue that vision with the hope that we are creating better communities for our children. “Think of the children” is a common refrain used by elected officials, community advocates and parents during these public discussions. More than that, however, we can also involve youth directly in decision-making about the future today.

Communities have at least two very compelling reasons to involve youth in the planning process, whether it concerns designing a specific site or envisioning a whole city.

Youth are an important constituency. They will enjoy the benefits of today’s planning, or else they will need to deal with the results of misguided decisions. Decisions about where to locate new shops, schools, homes and parks directly affect the quality of children’s lives; and adults need to know how children experience the world around them before land-use choices are made for them.

Youth perceive different barriers than adults because they are so often on foot, bikes or transit. As adults get out of their cars, they begin to see more of the problems — like unsafe parks sidewalks or passages — that youth already experience.

Youth are a vital and contributing community resource. Youth often have fresh ideas about solving planning problems. Children can always imagine new ways to do things, and they can influence their parents’ behavior at the same time.

For example, Ubuntu Green (ubuntugreen.org), a community-based organization in Sacramento, CA, harnessed youthful energy to set up community gardens with connections to local farm stands as a way to provide low-income families with fresh, healthy food. Involving youth in planning can also be an exciting way to educate children.

Here are some resources to learn more about educating and engaging youth in planning for their future.

Blogs and Online Resources

The American Planning Association hosts the online Kids’ Planning Toolbox (blogs.planning.org/kids) and the Resourceszine (planning.org/resourceszine), a searchable database with hundreds of good ideas for involving young people or teaching them about community planning.



Books

“Where Things Are, from Near to Far” (Planetizen Press, 2009) is an entertaining, illustrated guide to urban planning for small children, written by Tim Halbur, former editor of Planetizen.com.

“City Works: Exploring Your Community” (Adria Steinberg and David Stephen, The New Press, 1999). CityWorks, the high school curriculum created at the Rindge School of Technical Arts in Cambridge, MA, describes community-planning tools designed for young people.

Educator Projects

The Academy of Urban Planning (sites.google.com/site/aupcentral) is part of New York City’s public school system,

and helps students obtain the academic and social tools they need to achieve their goals by stimulating their interests in discovery, self-expression and civic engagement.

Youth In Planning (youthinplanning.org/program), in partnership with the Academy of Urban Planning and Hunter College’s Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, offers fellowship positions to high-school students in New York City.

The Chinatown Urban Institute (chinatownurbaninstitute.weebly.com) is a youth empowerment and professional development program offered by the Chinatown Community Development Center in San Francisco. It educates and empowers young leaders ages 18–24 to understand and take action on urban planning issues.

Y-Plan (citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/yplan.html), a project of the Center for Cities and Schools, is an initiative where youth are engaged as stakeholders and participants in local planning projects under the mentorship of university students in urban planning, design and education.

The California Center for Civic Participation (californiacenter.org) works with youth to empower them to be vital participants in decision-making processes at all levels.

Chapter 1.

Settings and Formats

Participation tools surveyed in this guidebook are generally ones that have been identified by Building Healthy Communities partners and organizations aligned with their mission, as achieving outstanding results in planning for health-promoting land use.

They can be applied in a range of settings, from multi-day design charrettes to community planning workshops lasting a few hours to ongoing advisory committee activities.

Two primary settings where these tools are often applied are community planning workshops and advisory committees, which might be hosted by government entities or community-based organizations.

Community Planning Workshops

The community planning workshop is an essential setting for community planning processes, methods and techniques. The workshop is a meeting of community stakeholders to engage in intensive discussion and activity about a specific land use or transportation issue. It allows face-to-face interactive collaboration between a diverse group of stakeholders.

Workshops typically last anywhere from two to six hours, held at publicly accessible locations. Depending on methods used, community planning workshops typically host 25 to 75 participants, and, with good planning, can be organized to manage hundreds of people.

Successful participation efforts are inclusive. Some considerations for designing a fully inclusive workshop setting include:

Know Your Community

A deep understanding of the stakeholder community, through established relationships and community research, is needed for creating a participation effort that is relevant, inclusive and sustained, and to inform the selection and implementation of participation tools that support that effort.

Census data is useful to understand stakeholder demographics, including information about economic disparities and ethnic diversity. A more complete understanding, though, is based on existing relationships with community members and groups.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) often possess experience and relationships within a community essential for any



successful planning effort. Communications with and among CBOs before a planning effort starts can help inform the process and methods used in workshops and other settings.

Values-based Messaging

Values-based messaging draws on a deep understanding of a community and its values to communicate the relevance of a planning effort in fulfilling community aspirations and meeting its needs. Values-based messaging communicates information in a way that is relevant and accessible to community members by framing it in terms of their values. It answers the question, “how does this affect me?”

Communications that rely simply upon technical jargon, such as “streetscape improvements,” “general plan update” or “design

charrette,” may seem inaccessible or irrelevant to many community members.

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program’s outreach for planning a downtown park in Merced, for example, used values-based messaging by asking community members what they felt was needed to provide healthy, outdoor recreation for local youth. The marketing effort also asked kids directly what park amenities they wanted, and would use. Connecting park planning with the broader value of community health helped to communicate its relevance to community members.

The means of delivering the message is just as important. Often personal invitations from trusted community-based organizations are most effective. These organizations have

strong community connections and a good understanding that can help create the most effective ways for reaching the community. Mailed flyers frequently end up in the trash. Digitally savvy communities may benefit from e-mail and text communications.

Learn more about values-based messaging:

- ▶ “Values. Value. Voice. The 3 V’s of Social Purpose Branding.” The Metropolitan Group, 2010. metgroup.com/assets/700_3vsarticlescreen.pdf
- ▶ “Successful Advocacy, A Values-Based Approach.” The Metropolitan Group, 2009. metgroup.com/assets/667_mgadvocacyarticlescreen.pdf
- ▶ “Marketing that Matters: 10 Practices to Profit Your Business and Change the World.” Chip Conley and Eric Friedenwald-Fishman. Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2006.

Translation and Culturally Competent Tools

When residents are most fluent in languages other than English, translation services are necessary to make community-planning efforts fully inclusive of all stakeholders. However, translation is not enough. Tools must accommodate local cultural considerations. Community-based organizations and local leaders are excellent sources of information on how a participation effort and its supporting tools can best meet cultural and translation needs.

Workshop Logistics

To be included, stakeholders must be able to show up. Some considerations to make workshops accessible:

- ▶ What are the major community employers, and how does that affect people’s availability? Weeknight meetings accommodate 9-to-5 schedules. Saturday morning workshops might work well in some communities. However, if residents

work in agriculture and the harvest season is on, Saturday mornings and afternoons may not work. Check with local organizations and policymakers about the best times to schedule public workshops.

- ▶ People with children often need childcare to attend community-planning events. This accommodation is critical in places with a high population of small children.
- ▶ How will people get to the event? If car-ownership rates are low, hold the meeting in a neighborhood location within walking distance or on a transit line or arrange for on-demand transit.
- ▶ Locating your event geographically within the community provides context, invests in the location, and accommodates stakeholders’ travel and other needs. Possibilities for accessible locations for community planning workshops might range from public schools to favorite community hangouts, and are limited only by the imagination.

The City of Richmond’s “PlanVan” for its General Plan 2030 is a novel example of how to make community outreach events geographically accessible. The PlanVan was equipped with information and interactive community input activities related to the general plan update process, and staffed by city planners and other technical experts. It operated as a mobile workshop that circulated to schools and other community locations throughout Richmond during the planning process.

Food and Refreshments


Events with advertised food and refreshments typically draw a bigger crowd. Provide snacks or a light meal as a courtesy to participants at events held near mealtime. Conflicts with a family’s mealtimes often interfere with people’s ability and desire to attend events. Providing food also sends a strong welcome signal and sense of the tone and goals of the meeting.



Edelmira, Age 17, Stockton, CA

PhotoVoice
Advocating for healthier communities through the lens and voices of youth

Central California REGIONAL OBESITY PREVENTION PROGRAM
The California Endowment



For this picture we have a playground in great condition that is locked and fenced. If children would like to go there they can't they would have to go find another playground or park that is farther away from where they live. This can be a problem because instead of the families walking to the park they have to drive a far distance, but this can become an obstacle for some families or children.

This fast food place is an example of the many other places there is available around this neighborhood. We try to prevent obesity by informing everyone how eating fast food on a daily basis can affect your health drastically. Many families are in such rush that they decide to go there for dinner, and we can change this by having more fruit and vegetables at home and in close by markets

This side walk is not only wide, but should keep pedestrians from walking into the street where they can put themselves into danger. This waste is in the way causing people to around it, or they might even trip over it. As part of this community I would recommend that we all work together to prevent this waste from getting to all the side walks. We can report this or take turns in cleaning this unsafe areas. We need to start now and work all together as one to set an example for the community.

Considerations for Accessible Participation Tools

Tools that allow visual or tactile information, input and feedback are often easily accessible in communities where different languages are spoken, for youth participation, or even where literacy rates are low.


Interactive planning uses tactile and visual techniques that enable participants to translate conceptual planning ideas into physical forms, and learn about the value of planning and design in shaping how we live. Many of the tools and techniques described in this guidebook can be used to engage residents in an interactive way. An example of a tool that is highly interactive and that more communities are starting to use is PhotoVoice.

PhotoVoice (photovoice.org) is a tool for visual communication, where participants represent their community or point of view by taking photos, discussing them together, developing narratives to go with their photos, and conducting outreach or other action.

Jacqueline, Age 16, Stockton, CA

PhotoVoice
Advocating for healthier communities through the lens and voices of youth

Central California REGIONAL OBESITY PREVENTION PROGRAM
The California Endowment



I see a hazard. There are cars parked on the sidewalk. This is a challenge to being healthy and active. This affects my life because it is annoying when I see cars and I cant even pass through with my bike. People do not obey the laws because you cannot park your car on the sidewalk. We can report them to the police officers. I feel bad because they don't allow others to walk by safely.

I see graffiti on many of our park tables. The tagging gives a negative effect to the park. I would not want to play in this park. This challenge exists because of gang members. We can report taggers to the police. I feel angry that people tag on our beautiful equipment and they make it ugly.

I see an old, rusty, and unsanitary water faucet. It is a challenge because we cant drink water at the park when we are thirsty. This affects my life because I am always playing in the park and I am always thirsty. The park maintenance staff are not taking proper care of our parks. We can petition to get a new water fountain. I feel disgusted because there must be a lot of parasites and diseases on this fountain.

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program engaged youth in using the PhotoVoice technique to address healthy environments in their communities ([visit ccopp.org/Photovoice.html](http://ccopp.org/Photovoice.html) for a gallery of the youth's findings). Youth documented assets and challenges related to supporting or inhibiting access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity. They presented their findings at community forums of elected officials, city planners, teachers, doctors and other stakeholders. They also mobilized the development of community gardens where there were none and more walkable neighborhoods with traffic-calming measures.

Advisory Committees

Community advisory committees are a representative group of stakeholders who advise a planning effort throughout the process. An inclusive participation effort must be broad-based, but an advisory committee can provide specific project expertise and focused steering for an effort.

Advisory committees meet regularly during the planning process; develop an in-depth knowledge of the project and related issues; share expertise, interests, concerns and perspectives; and work to identify common interests. They can provide consensus recommendations to public-hearing bodies based on an understanding of broad-based public input and project issues. Committees are often appointed by elected officials, and are variously called stakeholder advisory groups, citizen's advisory boards and task forces.

Advisory committee members may represent such community organizations as neighborhood groups, business and professional associations, advocacy groups and faith-based institutions. These committees typically consist of at least 10 members. A committee much larger than that can be difficult to organize. Most advisory committee members are volunteers. However, if a time commitment of more than 5–10 hours a week is expected of them, it may be advisable to find stipend funding for them.

To ensure that membership is representative, make sure that all stakeholder groups are able to participate, including hard-to-reach or typically underrepresented populations such as low-income and ethnically diverse groups. Ensuring that representatives of trusted networks or organizations within these populations are



included on the committee can help ensure that it is truly representative of the planning effort's community. The considerations for creating an inclusive community workshop setting — including values-based messaging, culturally competent tools and other considerations — also apply to an inclusive advisory committee setting.

Purpose and Process

To help the advisory committee accomplish its goals, ensure that members have a common understanding of its purpose and process from the start. Parameters to clarify include a decision-making process for its recommendations, a realistic timeline, and any other markers to guide the committee in reaching its objectives. Establishing a timeline at the start — including a meeting schedule and milestone dates — will also help confirm a shared understanding of the process.

The best decision-making process depends upon the advisory committee's purpose. Simple, recorded input might be sufficient to address straightforward, non-controversial planning issues. Alternatively, interest-based negotiation (see the Facilitated Meetings and Groups section, page 16) might be more appro-

priate for more controversial or complex planning issues. The decision-making process may require the advisory committee to elect a chair and alternate chair within the group, or may require selecting a facilitator.

Part of the committee's function is to develop an in-depth knowledge of the project and related issues that may not be practicable for the entire community of stakeholders to develop. Assigning technical experts to inform the committee throughout the planning effort helps ensure that members have the convenient, ongoing access to the information they need to advise the process. Technical experts who are involved throughout the process develop a better understanding of the effort, and can provide more relevant information.

Technical experts might be traffic engineers provided by the local jurisdiction, urban planners and designers, economic development specialists, or other professionals with valuable expertise. For ongoing, consistent access, technical experts should be available at all committee meetings to provide information, answer questions or follow up with additional information.



Visualizing a people-friendly, transit-oriented future for Oakland's International Boulevard.

Advising Oakland's International Boulevard Transit-Oriented Development Plan

A Community Advisory Committee was essential to stakeholder collaboration for the City of Oakland's International Boulevard Transit-Oriented Development Plan. International Boulevard is a major transit corridor in the East San Francisco Bay Area, and the regional planning agency had prioritized the area for further transit investments along this major corridor.

Despite having such great access to transit, however, the corridor was plagued with high crime rates, blight, poor air quality, unsafe walking conditions, and limited access to fresh food.

Organized community stakeholders created a plan for more pedestrian-friendly land uses and urban design, intended to address challenges, attract more capital investment, and maximize anticipated transit investments.

Major organizers included Transform (a member of the Great Communities Collaborative which promotes affordable, walkable communities and sustainable transportation) and Oakland Community Organizations (a federation of congregations, schools and community organizations, representing over 40,000 Oakland families).

The effort's Community Advisory Committee provided strategic input, advising the project organizing team, municipal staff and technical consultants. It also provided the overall vision and direction for the corridor and key implementation actions.

The advisory committee conducted outreach and publicity for the effort's community workshops, and organized focus groups to obtain further input on the plan's direction. They brainstormed issues and visions for the corridor, provided feedback on plan concepts and drafts, and provided feedback on community workshop formats and presentations.

The committee consisted of 17 appointed members representing sub-areas of the corridor, including representatives from Oakland Community Organizations and other community-based groups.

Ultimately, the advisory committee served as a liaison to area residents. The collaboration of representative stakeholders strengthened community relationships, and leveraged them to plan for a safer, healthier and more transit-supportive corridor.

The Oakland City Council accepted the International Boulevard TOD Plan in 2011. The plan has earned a Grassroots Initiative Award of Merit from the California Chapter of the American Planning Association. The California Strategic Growth Council has awarded the City almost \$1 million in funding to implement the policies articulated within the plan.

Chapter 2.

Processes and Methods

Participation tools surveyed in this guidebook are generally ones that have been identified by Building Healthy Communities partners and organizations aligned with their mission, as achieving outstanding results in planning for health-promoting land use.

They can be accomplished through a series of community planning workshops, or used in an ongoing advisory committee setting. Some can be completed after one or two events in a short period of time involving a single local jurisdiction while others might require months and involve an entire region.

These processes and methods often depend on sponsorship and support from the local government or regional entities like the council of governments or metropolitan planning organization.

Community Visioning

Community visioning brings together a wide and representative range of community members to establish a common practical vision for their shared future. These exercises establish vision statements, which are informed by a community's values and visions for their community, along with existing community assets, opportunities and needs. As part of the process, vision statements are translated into action plans and implementation measures.

Vision statements and other visioning outcomes must clearly represent community values and vision. However, visioning is a community conversation about its future, and is not limited only to creating a vision statement, action plan or implementation measures.

Vision statements help answer the community's overarching question of "Where do we want to be?" by a specified time — for example, 10–25 years down the road. A community vision statement created early on in a community planning effort will provide focus and direction for the effort, and it may be refined and improved throughout the process.

A visioning process at the regional level is important to planning and growth management that engages citizens, and provides for cohesive, orderly regional growth to meet stakeholder visions, values, needs and aspirations. Visioning at the regional level is often associated with Scenario Planning.

Regional planning is often administered by metropolitan planning organizations, regional councils of government, or nonprofit community development organizations with a regional focus.

To obtain more information about regional planning efforts throughout California, locate the metropolitan planning organizations or council of governments for each region (available at calcog.org).

Visioning at the regional level is an essential part of successful regional planning, and it is important for local community stakeholders to be aware of regional processes, methods and opportunities for participation. The process description below, however, is more relevant to community-level local planning.

Community Visioning Process

Community visioning consists of a range of processes, methods and techniques in workshop and advisory committee settings. These tools help community members to collaborate in identifying values and visions about critical issues and future possibilities for the growth and development of a community. Processes, methods and techniques used during the visioning process include facilitated meetings, focus groups, design charrettes, participatory mapping, guided tours, interactive planning, brainstorming and surveys.

Community values and visions are translated into a vision statement through processes and methods of community collaboration. The visioning process includes development of goals and strategies based on the vision statement, as well as information about existing and projected conditions. Finally, the visioning process includes developing action plans with implementation measures, and plan implementation and monitoring.

Community Vision Statements

Creating a vision statement or other description of a community's vision at the start of a community planning effort will help guide the effort's direction. It may be refined and improved throughout the effort. Visioning is not limited to creating a

vision statement, action plan or implementation measures. Nevertheless, it is important that a starting vision statement meaningfully reflect community values, visions, needs and aspirations.

It is important to identify a fully collaborative community process or methods to construct a vision statement, action plan and implementation measures. Processes and methods, which recognize stakeholders as the experts on the issues affecting their communities and draw on this expertise to collaboratively create a vision statement, can foster sustained engagement. (For more information and assistance with collaborative processes, see the Facilitated Meetings and Groups section, page 16.)

A concise example of a community vision statement might read: "Our City shall be a cohesive, compact city with a small-town feeling surrounded by and containing farmland, greenbelts, natural habitats, and reserves. Our City shall be a community with a strong, vital, pedestrian-oriented and dynamic downtown area, and safe and well-designed neighborhoods."

A vision statement, with its associated goals, strategies and an action plan, helps guide community growth and development, and may be used to guide the development of planning documents such as a general plan review, a comprehensive plan update or a specific plan.

Implementation and Scope

To ensure the implementation of the vision and associated action plan and implementation measures, visioning processes can establish a set of performance standards to measure progress toward achieving the vision's goals. For example, part of a vision might state, "Our neighborhoods will be designed to meet the daily needs of residents."

Its corresponding performance standard might be the number of residential units within a quarter-mile walking distance of a neighborhood shopping area. Using measurable standards, communities can test whether their visions are becoming a reality.

Depending on scope, different visioning processes may last anywhere from several days to several months to more than a year. A narrower scope might address a very specific issue, or apply to a smaller geographic area. A larger scope would include visioning for a general plan or regional plan.

The City of Richmond General Plan Health and Wellness Element

In California, the City of Richmond's Community Health and Wellness General Plan Element used a community vision for a healthy and environmentally sustainable city to frame its goals and policies to direct future community growth and development. The California Endowment awarded Richmond a grant to include the element in its general plan update process, in response to community health concerns ranging from environmental contamination resulting from the city's industrial past to pedestrian and bicycle injuries and a lack of pedestrian and other physical-activity options.

Many of these concerns are directly related to the community development topics governed by general plans. The vision for the Richmond Health and Wellness Element guides development for healthy, active living. It includes pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods with an array of neighborhood services, schools and medical facilities that can be comfortably reached by walking, bicycling or public transit. It also encourages healthy food choices provided by nearby produce markets, full-service grocery stores, urban produce stands and farmers markets; and parks and recreation facilities to provide safe places for social interaction and support active lifestyles.



The visioning process for the element consisted of input from multiple advisory groups, workshops and focus groups for the overall general plan update effort. A series of community workshops hosted hundreds of community members in planning activities including mapping exercises and facilitated small groups, to provide input on visions, goals and policies for future development.

Notably, community outreach included the novel Richmond "Plan Van," which operated as a mobile community planning workshop. The PlanVan was used to disseminate information to residents so that they could provide informed input into the planning process. It also featured a variety of activities such as community planning games, drawings and questionnaires.

The City established a Technical Advisory Group to provide technical input on the Health and Wellness Element, as part of the California Endowment's grant process. The advisory group consisted of experts in community health and the built environment, including representatives from academia, government and nonprofit sectors. It worked with community organizations, including the Richmond Equitable Development Initiative (REDI)



— a collaborative of advocacy, research and grassroots community based environmental and social justice organizations — to help inform key issue areas in crafting a vision, goals and policies for the Health and Wellness Element.

The Richmond General Plan is one of the first in the country to include a comprehensive element dedicated to health and wellness. The element is an innovative approach to strengthen the links between new trends in compact community design, sustainability, walkability, smart growth and improvements in community health.

For more information about the element, visit the Richmond General Plan website at cityofrichmondgeneralplan.org or PolicyLink, the organization that administered the grant, at policylink.org.

The West Fresno Community Vision Plan

The West Fresno Community Vision Plan illustrates a shorter process, where one purpose was to begin to create a vision to inform, and provide focus and direction for, planning for a more walkable, livable, economically viable community. This effort

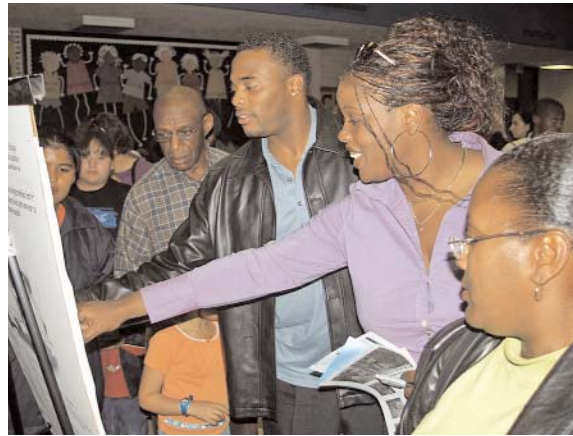


was prompted by concerns about community safety, and deteriorating pedestrian and other local infrastructure.

Organizers included the Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development, the Fresno Council of Governments, Caltrans, Walkable Communities, Inc., and the Local Government Commission.

The process resulted in a vision description, including a statement and supporting graphics, with action and implementation recommendations. The process lasted almost a week, and included focus groups, school visits and a design charrette. Focus groups helped identify community hopes and challenges, which guided the charrette's methods and activities.

The design charrette included a "visions and values" exercise, a guided tour, participatory mapping, and community member trainings on pedestrian design principles. The visions and values exercise used brainstorming techniques and a facilitated process to generate, organize and refine community values and priorities. The mapping exercise generated plan concepts for a livable community, including safety, public space and a vibrant economy with village-scale business and housing environments.



The resulting vision description included a vision statement and supporting graphics for "Village Centers and Neighborhoods" – a key element of the plan. The vision statement describes village centers with central public space, a pedestrian environment encouraging casual meetings that strengthen community bonds, housing for a variety of incomes, and a range of closely spaced goods and services within walking distance from residential areas.

After the City adopted it, the vision plan received an award from the California Chapter of the American Planning Association in 2005, for planning in a large jurisdiction. To see the plan: lgc.org/reports/fresno/Fresno_Vision_Plan_Ir.pdf

For More Information

Valley Vision, a network of people and organizations dedicated to the social, environmental and economic health of the Sacramento region (valleyvision.org), helped organize the Sacramento Region Blueprint Project, a landmark regional planning project and visioning effort. They provide collaborative planning, objective problem solving, and impartial research and

information for sound decision-making. They are a good source of information about visioning at the regional level.

"Asset Building and Community Development," by Gary Green and Anna Haines (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2012), contains a useful section on visioning, addressing processes and methods. The authors, with Stephen Halebsky, also wrote "Building Our Future – A guide to community visioning" (University of Wisconsin Extension – Cooperative Extension, 2000, learningstore.uwex.edu), a practical guide to community visioning processes and methods.

"The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook." Derek Okubo (Denver: National Civic League, 2000).

The strategic planning process informs visioning methods for community planning. For more information on methods relevant to visioning, check out these books by John Bryson, McKnight Presidential Professor of Planning and Public Affairs and Interim Associate Dean of the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota:

- "Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations" (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).
- "Creating Your Strategic Plan" (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011; written with Farnum Alston).
- "Technology of Participation." (ToP) methods can be helpful in initial creation of vision statements, and are associated with the Institute of Cultural Affairs, which you can visit online at ica-usa.org. The ToP Consensus Workshop Method is briefly described in "The Change Handbook," by Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, and Steven Cadey (San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers, 2007).
- See the list in the Facilitated Meetings and Groups section, page 16, for resources about facilitating methods used within the visioning process.

Facilitated Meetings and Groups

Facilitation involves using a person who doesn't have a direct stake in the outcome to help different groups resolve complex issues. A facilitated process can be sponsored by an agency or organization to resolve a complicated, multi-party conflict, such as a project in an environmentally sensitive area.

A facilitator can fill various roles, based on the reasons stakeholders have been brought together. At a minimum, a facilitator is a neutral and trusted person who ensures that discussions are respectful, organized and productive. The facilitator uses several meeting management techniques to help guide the discussions and ensure that all participants have an equal and secure opportunity to communicate their perspectives.

In addition to the task of managing a meeting, an appropriately trained and experienced facilitator can also take a more advanced role of helping participants discuss and resolve problems through collaborative, interest-based methods.

In a facilitated group process, community stakeholders — and often city/county staff — participate in an effort to find a mutually acceptable solution, or identify common needs, goals and opportunities. A diversity of community viewpoints is sought to ensure a full airing of all relevant issues. In community planning, facilitated processes have been used successfully to resolve tough land-use decisions, and helped define mutually acceptable solutions to previously gridlocked situations.

Facilitation invites or identifies someone seen as fair by all the parties to help the group engage in constructive problem-solving. The facilitator can be a consultant, an elected official, a staff



member, or even a member of the participating group, as long as the individual has facilitation skills and the group's trust. The facilitator guides the process and helps the group move toward agreement.

Facilitators use a variety of meeting management techniques:

- Help develop and adhere to ground rules to keep communication focused and productive in achieving meeting/group objectives.
- Monitor group progress and timekeeping.
- Focus on the needs and aspirations of participants, and steering them from personal positions and feelings about topics and/or others in the group.
- Ensure everybody has the opportunity to speak.
- Ensure that all concerns are fully addressed.
- Identify themes and areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Guide the group's brainstorming activities.
- Record the group's discussion.
- Encourage collaboration.

Success in a facilitated process is usually attained when:

- There is a broad participation by all parties with a major interest in the issue.
- Each participant helps define the problem, as well as opportunities and assets.
- All participants share responsibility for educating one another about their perceptions and concerns about the situation.
- A full range of alternatives are considered.
- All participants share responsibility for developing solutions and implementation strategies.

Facilitated processes bring together a range of stakeholders to find common ground, design feasible solutions, and work together to identify common visions and opportunities — and define and solve problems. Unlike many conventional decision-making patterns that foster rivalry between different groups, facilitation is used to resolve conflict, and save valuable time and energy by acknowledging the validity of each party's concerns.

It allows participants to reach a solution that — while not always the first choice of each party involved — can nevertheless be agreed to by all involved. These solutions are usually more durable than the first choices of each party because the solutions reflect the interests of all parties involved.

Interest-based negotiation is a problem-solving method that can inform effective facilitation. This process of negotiation to solve problems aims at satisfying mutual needs, rather than one party's positions at the expense of other needs. It focuses on needs and issues to be resolved, rather than positions or personalities, and looks for win-win solutions.

The book “Getting to Yes” is a classic primer on interest-based negotiation, and is recommended reading for anyone attempting facilitation at any level.

Guides such as “The Facilitator’s Fieldbook” and “The Skilled Facilitator” provide comprehensive references to methods and techniques to support facilitation efforts.

Another tool that can inform effective facilitation is Nonviolent Communication (NVC), based on nonviolent principles and effective in addressing controversial issues without judgment or blame. Like interest-based negotiation, it approaches deliberation in terms of needs. NVC is a particularly effective tool in interest-based negotiation.

For More Information

- Common Ground Center for Cooperative Solutions: extension.ucdavis.edu/commonground
- The Center for Collaborative Policy: csus.edu/ccp
- International Association of Facilitators: iaf-world.org
- International Association for Public Participation: iap2.org
- The Institute of Cultural Affairs: ica-usa.org
- Justice, Thomas, and David W. Jamieson, Ph.D. “The Facilitator’s Fieldbook.” New York, NY: AMACOM Books, 2012.
- Schwartz, Roger. “The Skilled Facilitator.” San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- Fisher, Roger and William Ury. “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement.”
- “Without Giving In.” New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991.
- The Center for Nonviolent Communication: cnvc.org
- Rosenberg, Marshall. “Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life.” San Diego, CA: Puddledancer Press, 2003.

Facilitating the Sacramento Area Water Forum

The power of multi-interest and multi-party collaborative facilitated processes in local planning efforts is exemplified by the Sacramento Area Water Forum, which accomplished the rare feat of creating agreement between environmentalists, business interests and water suppliers.

In total, more than 40 stakeholder organizations signed onto the Water Forum agreement in 2000. Stakeholder organizations included major area environmental groups, land developers, trade industries, taxpayer leagues, realtor organizations, water purveyors and other diverse interests.

The City and County of Sacramento created the Water Forum in the early 1990s, in response to decades of litigious battles over the American River’s water supply. At the Forum’s start, two major droughts cut back regional water supply, and the area’s water table had been drastically lowered due to over-reliance on groundwater.

The lower American River is one of the Sacramento area’s major assets, providing important habitat, water supply, a critical floodway and a regional recreational parkway. Environmental organizations and other stakeholders fought to improve water conservation and defend this valuable natural resource.

Water Forum organizers from the City and County chose to use a consensus process to resolve their ongoing conflicts. With a multi-interest mediator and facilitator from the CSU-Sacramento Center for Collaborative Policy (formerly the Center for Public Dispute Resolution), they embarked on a process with the primary goal of formulating an area-wide plan to provide safe and reliable water supply in a manner that protects the environment.

Forum organizers – and all of the stakeholder organizations – agreed to use interest-based negotiation to reach a consensus. In interest-based negotiation, the negotiating parties agree to focus on their needs or “interests,” rather than their wants or “positions.” All parties in an interest-based negotiation also agree to consider the process in terms of what serves not only their interests but also the interests of other parties.

For the Water Forum, this process included five phases: assessment, organization, education, negotiation and implementation.

The first three phases allowed the facilitator to lay the groundwork for the negotiation process that followed. They included conducting interviews with key leaders, identifying the key stakeholder organizations, establishing a framework with ground rules and a structure for the decision-making process, and educating participants in the basics of interest-based negotiation.

The Water Forum facilitator drafted a “Road Map” memorandum that outlined a plan for the remainder of the process, based on input and feedback during the organization and education phases. The plan incorporated the decision-making structure, ground rules and other strategies. The steering committee approved the document, and the negotiation phase began.

The negotiation phase lasted over five years, and was fraught with setbacks. However, the Water Forum ultimately arrived at a framework for the agreement’s objectives of both providing a safe, reliable water supply for the region’s economic health and planned development to 2030, and preserving the fishery, wildlife, recreational and aesthetic values of the lower American River.

Water Forum participants and staff conducted a series of briefings for stakeholder organizations, the public and interested government agencies. Stakeholder representatives presented the framework to their organizations, with instructions to request that their boards review and comment on the preliminary recommendations, and pass a resolution that endorsed the general direction of the process and authorized their representatives to continue developing the final recommendations.

The final Water Forum agreement included seven elements to achieve its objectives, ranging from increased surface water diversions to American River habitat restoration. By the spring of 2000, all of the stakeholder organizations had signed onto the agreement.

Of the seven elements in the final agreement, one of the most important for prolonging the power of the facilitated process is the Water Forum Successor Effort. Responsible for overseeing and monitoring the agreement's implementation, it has provided a mechanism to address future disputes and needs as they arise.

A good indicator of a successful participation effort, the Water Forum Successor Effort still actively fulfills its role by engaging all stakeholders over a decade after the agreement was signed.

Learn more about the Water Forum: The description of this project is condensed from a case study and staff communications from the Center for Collaborative Policy and the Sacramento Area Water Forum (waterforum.org). For more details: "The Sacramento Area Water Forum: A Case Study" (by Sarah Connick, Sustainable Conservation, San Francisco, 2006), escholarship.org/uc/item/8fn9d21c

Design Charrettes

A design charrette is an intensive collaborative effort held over several days that brings together concerned residents, stakeholders and technical experts to develop a detailed plan for a specified part of town.

Charrettes can be as short as three days for projects that cover a small area and are relatively straightforward, and up to three weeks for a larger, more complex area. A longer process also allows for the preparation of more detailed designs.

Charrettes benefit from the focused, concentrated effort of intense design. The back-and-forth iterative process with residents and local government staff also helps create consensus and builds support for the plan.

Preparation for the charrette meetings usually takes two to four months to define the problem, gather the relevant information, and conduct outreach to stakeholder groups and the community. The fundamental idea is to bring together all the key people with all the pertinent information to “get the plans right the first time.”

Depending on the project, the key people might include, but are not limited to local planning, public works and economic development staff, elected officials, nearby residents, property owners and businesses, school officials, emergency responders, public interest groups, environmental organizations and health officials.

The Charrette Process

The first day of a charrette typically features a kickoff workshop in which general data is presented. Key players – a mayor or other public official – introduce the process, and a facilitator



then invites everybody to share their input through a variety of exercises. Participants often provide input through exercises that help identify their vision for the area as well as the values of the community. A presentation on how other communities have addressed similar issues helps expand the residents’ knowledge and vocabulary. In subsequent days, the charrette team holds meetings with small stakeholder groups and conducts a design workshop and facilitated walking tours of the project area.

The centerpiece of the workshop is a design table exercise during which residents work in small groups of up to eight people to write down and draw their concerns and ideas on large aerial photos of the project area.

The following days involve small teams of design professionals reviewing the community’s comments and sketching and rendering basic design plans. Informal open studios and “pin-ups” are often held between community meetings to create more opportunities for community members to provide comment and feedback.

A closing workshop is held at the conclusion of the charrette process to present the design solutions that have been, and are



being prepared. What the community sees at that stage is no surprise – it’s a shared vision based on residents’ input that everybody now owns.

Charrettes are sometimes organized and funded by a real estate developer that wants to develop plans for a new residential neighborhood. Depending on the issues to be addressed and the complexity of the project, the consultant design team might include one or more facilitators, urban designers, traffic engineers, civil engineers, architects, landscape architects and economists.

Pertinent and accurate information will also depend on the area and topics to be addressed but might encompass traffic volumes, crash data, road widths, zoning codes, utility easements, environmental constraints, demographics, market studies, political analyses and geographic data.

Charrettes Are Solution-Oriented

Charrettes address and solve problems in a brief period of time and can result in comprehensive, physical plans for a defined area. According to the experts, three factors can ruin the charrette process:



1. A client has not bought into the idea, and uses the charrette primarily to generate publicity.
2. A key constituent is not included.
3. Relevant information is not available, or inaccurate data is used.

Successful charrettes guarantee quick decisions because they involve all the right people with all the right information. They ensure action because issues are addressed through detailed design, because stakeholders who approve and implement the work are involved in preparing the plan, and because participants commit to the plan's goals and actions.

The charrette's final product can be a detailed representation of all project plans, including public-works drawings, plans for public spaces, housing types, wetlands and drainage plans, unit mixes for the financiers, and detailed codes. A truly effective charrette forges consensus by involving each player in plan design and implementation.

Costs of design charrettes range dramatically, depending upon the depth and scope of work provided. Key cost factors can include the products created during the process and reproduc-



tion costs. Another key cost is the number of consultants needed, along with their travel, food and lodging.

For More Information

- National Charrette Institute: charretteinstitute.org
- Local Government Commission: lgc.org
- Walkable and Livable Communities Institute: walklive.org

Designing a Plan to Improve Neighborhood Connections in Baldwin Park

Baldwin Park is a predominantly Latino, mid-sized community northeast of Los Angeles with more than 20 public schools and a Metrolink regional passenger rail station, but lacking some of the pedestrian infrastructure and amenities to accommodate these assets. The community is crisscrossed by a series of major thoroughfares, with higher traffic speeds, and missing sidewalks and bicycle lanes that make it difficult to walk or ride a bike to schools, stores and other destinations.

The City of Baldwin Park partnered with nonprofit organizations dedicated to healthy environments to organize a design charrette so that community members could collaborate to identify ways



to make the community more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Its partners included the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, the Local Government Commission and Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities.

The charrette was a multi-day process that included educational workshops, focus groups and walkability assessments. Prior to the charrette, the project team held small meetings with stakeholder groups to get focused community feedback on mobility and safety concerns. The team conducted five "Smart Streets" neighborhood workshops in English and Spanish, covering pedestrian and bicycle safety topics, and obtaining feedback on concerns. Focus groups represented a variety of interests, including schools, businesses, residents and high-school students.

Participants expressed concerns about children walking safely to school, the lack of pedestrian access to amenities such as recreational facilities and civic centers, and general pedestrian safety, comfort and convenience.

To kick off the charrette, the project team hosted an evening workshop at a community center, following the local Harvest Festival, with live music, refreshments and childcare. Over 200

residents participated. All events were conducted in both English and Spanish. The mayor welcomed participants and introduced the project, providing background on the City's goals to improve safety and non-vehicular mobility in the community.

The project team led participants through two exercises to start the workshop. The first asked participants to write down their long-term vision for the city's future. Several of these statements, which described a vibrant, walkable future, were read out loud and helped set the positive tone for the event.

Participants were then engaged in a "values exercise" – to write down five reasons why they valued Baldwin Park. Each value was written on a separate sticky note. Following a presentation on creating healthy, complete streets that accommodate all users, their notes were arranged on the wall by like values.

This exercise helped establish an awareness that most residents held many things in common, and that the differences that would emerge in the discussions to follow could be worked out.

At the end of the evening, participants were led through a brainstorming and prioritization exercise to prioritize identified needs and aspirations by using a sticky dot technique (see the "Techniques for Timely Results" chapter, page 44). Participants identified priorities for pedestrian improvements, including enhanced crosswalks, street lighting, wider sidewalks, more park space, better street signals near schools, and a true downtown with retail amenities closer to where people live.

Two days later, stakeholders met for a walkability assessment (see the Guided Tours section, page 34) of two areas around downtown Baldwin Park, along major corridors and near schools. These walking tours allowed residents and the project team to observe existing street conditions, including design,

walkability, traffic patterns, intersections and crossings, sidewalk conditions, transit stops and other streetscape features. During the walks, participants shared concerns and discussed ideas for resolving some of the problems.

Upon their return to the workshop site, the project team talked about the priorities identified at the previous workshop. This presentation, which included examples of complete streets, streets that simultaneously accommodate pedestrian, bicycles and motor vehicles in safety and comfort, provided participants with knowledge and tools that they could use to find and implement solutions.

Participants then gathered in groups of eight at tables with large aerial photos of the major corridors. For the next 90 minutes they were able to point out problems or recommend solutions through participatory mapping. At the end of the workshop, each table group shared its observations with the rest of the participants.

Using the results of the charrette exercises, the project team conducted in-depth site investigations to review existing conditions and community concerns identified through the participation exercises.

Based on all of the input received from community members and leaders and during site visits, the project team then developed an initial set of recommendations with accompanying visuals and diagrams. These results were shared with city staff and honed for presentation at the charrette's closing event a few nights later.

The closing event featured dinner and a mariachi concert at City Hall, where the project team made a presentation, in English and Spanish, to 125 elected officials, city staff, residents and

other community leaders. They reviewed key findings from the community input, and shared the team's recommendations, including visuals of potential changes. They then opened the floor for participant questions, ideas and reactions.

As the last item, they conducted one last prioritization exercise – a straw poll of participants – to further refine priorities for pedestrian and bike improvements.

Recommendations included "complete streets" policies to provide safe, comfortable pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on streets throughout Baldwin Park. Design recommendations included wider sidewalks, tree shading and bicycle lanes, lane reductions (from four or five lanes to three lanes) on streets with lower traffic volumes, and crosswalk markings, visibility and signalization. They also recommended reduced vehicle speeds, and roundabouts at select intersections to slow down traffic and make it easier for people to cross the street.

The project team focused on safety concerns in areas around schools with recommendations to provide ongoing education and encouragement to parents and their children about safer travel to school, and improved crossing-guard training.

The team also emphasized pedestrian and bicycle access to transit facilities, with suggestions for specific physical improvements prioritized by charrette participants, more transit-stop shelters with posted schedules, and secure bicycle facilities nearby.

The project team assisted City representatives with identifying funding for the recommendations, including state and federal transportation funding, grants and other assistance programs. Recommended improvements are underway.

Participatory Budgeting

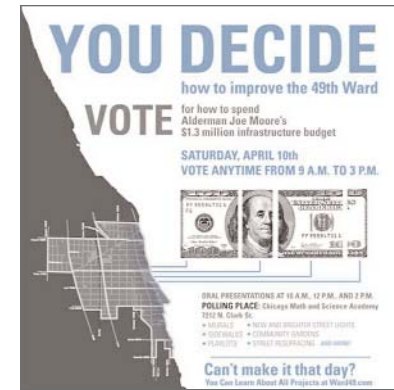
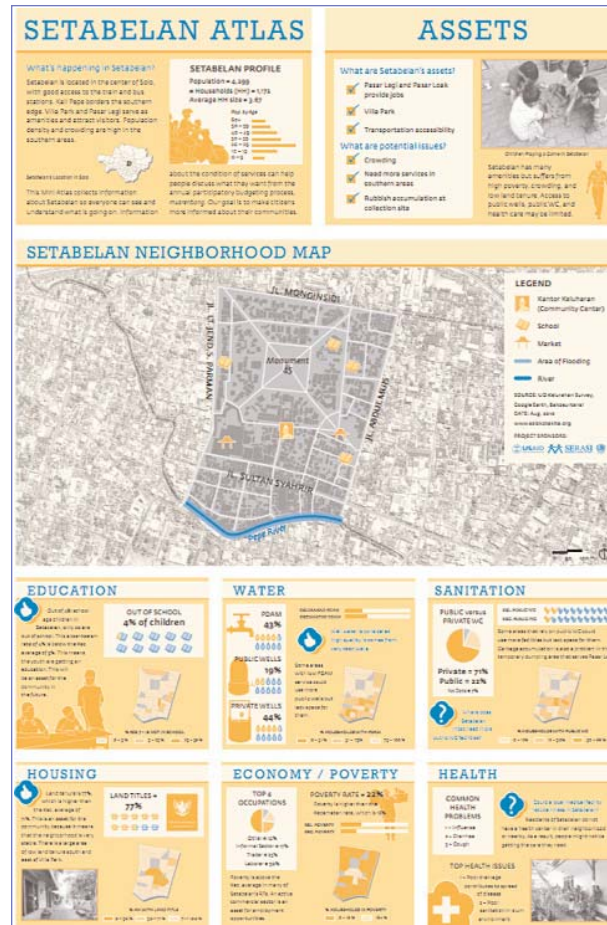
Fiscal budgeting is fundamental to making any community plan work. Policy choices from community planning efforts, such as increased park space or improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, must have a source of funding. By helping users to prioritize expenditures according to available funding, participatory budgeting methods can assist community planning efforts where government funding is required to meet stakeholder needs and aspirations.

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process where community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It is an alternative to conventional public budgeting, which is conducted solely by elected officials and government staff.

The basic process is as follows:

- Stakeholders brainstorm spending ideas. When participatory budgeting is incorporated into community planning efforts, stakeholders might identify spending needs associated with ideas generated during the community planning process.
- Volunteer budget delegates develop proposals based on these ideas.
- Stakeholders vote on proposals.
- Government agencies implement the top projects.

For example, if community members identify recreation spaces as a high priority, their delegates might develop a proposal for a community greenbelt system. The residents would then vote on this option and other proposals. If they approve the greenbelt, the city pays to develop it.



Participatory budgeting incorporates a range of participation methods and techniques. The City of Vallejo, CA (pbvallejo.org), is using a series of public assemblies to brainstorm spending ideas, and also provides an online platform for community members to submit ideas online, using Mindmixer (see the Virtual Participation section, page 25).

For More Information

The Participatory Budgeting Project (participatorybudgeting.org) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering communities to make informed, democratic and fair decisions about public spending and revenue, by providing technical and other assistance in developing and administering the participatory budgeting process. Their website provides information on methods, implementation, history and case studies.

Scenario Planning

Land-use and transportation scenario planning is a process where potential development outcomes are generated with scenario modeling software and projections based on community input, as well as land use, demographic, economic and other data. Community stakeholders express their needs and aspirations for future land uses, and that information is entered as data into the modeling program to help generate a range of development scenarios for stakeholders to deliberate.

Scenario planning is often used at the regional level, though it is important for local community stakeholders to be aware of the process, methods and opportunities for engagement.

The modeling software facilitates land-use, transportation, economic and other projections. These projections are based on available information about adopted land use and other policies, as well as economic, demographic and other data.

The “base case” scenario projects what will happen in future years if current practices and patterns of development are continued. Other scenarios can demonstrate tradeoffs with projections of economic and land-use conditions based on stakeholder input about alternative practices and patterns of development.

Scenarios educate stakeholders about the tradeoffs associated with given decisions. For example, if some stakeholders prefer semi-rural residential land-use patterns, this preference might be entered as data associated with larger residential lot sizes. This scenario would demonstrate the resulting land-use patterns and the various tradeoffs. For example, while semi-rural areas



with large residential lots can accommodate a certain amount of population growth and preserve some open space, the land consumed by these larger lots could prevent the community from preserving the larger commercial lots that might be needed for economically viable agricultural production.

A scenario might take the form of a land-use map depicting projected growth, with associated data and documents, 3D visualizations of projected growth and other relevant elements. Scenario planning can be conducted where community members provide input in a workshop setting through participatory mapping or other methods, and/or online.

Geographic Information Systems

Scenario planning requires the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which can be costly, although most land-use planning agencies have some access to GIS and may be able to share these capabilities with community organizations and other government agencies in scenario-planning efforts.

GIS is designed to digitally capture, store, manage and present geographical data, and can be incorporated into community planning participation tools. It associates data with geographic features, and supports analysis and presentation of data that can facilitate and inform the community planning process.

GIS requires significant user training, and can be costly because it requires not only purchase of GIS software, but access to geographic maps referenced by latitude and longitude.

Some Participation Tools that Enable Scenario Planning

CommunityViz (placeways.com) and MetroQuest (metroquest.com) are software tools accessible to users online or loaded onto computers that can be used at public workshops. Small-group breakouts can accommodate computer use at workshops, or facilitators can guide the discussion and presentation of the mapping and future outcomes based on policy choices. The software “shows” you the implications of different plans and choices through maps and 3D visualization.

I-PLACE3S (places.energy.ca.gov/places/demo) provides a web-based platform for scenario planning that the California Energy Commission helped to develop.

The I-PLACE3S model was instrumental in the Sacramento Region Blueprint Project from 2002 to 2004, a planning effort that informed the 2008 Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act (Senate Bill 375). SB 375 requires that regional transportation planning agencies throughout California create land use and transportation plans that can demonstrate, through scenario modeling, that they support greenhouse gas reduction targets by reducing vehicle miles traveled.

For more information about I-PLACE3S and the Blueprint Project (sacregionblueprint.org), visit the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (sacog.org), the Sacramento region's transportation planning agency.

INDEX is an integrated suite of GIS-based computer and web-based scenario planning tools for neighborhoods, communities and regions, developed by Criterion Planners (crit.com). It has been used in scenario-planning efforts ranging from regional land-use planning to modeling alternative transit-station area plans.

Financial costs of commercial tools listed here vary; contact purveyors for more details. Please note that commercial products and purveyors listed in this guide are not an endorsement, but simply a listing of options.

YouChoose Bay Area: A Silicon Valley Community Foundation initiative

In this planning process, development scenarios for low density, baseline, walkable neighborhoods and high infill options are identified.

Virtual Participation

While not a substitute for face-to-face, interactive community engagement, online participation tools do allow stakeholders to provide input and feedback to a community planning effort from the comfort and privacy of their own home.

Although online tools help reduce public workshop obstacles related to timing, transportation and childcare, the digital divide is a considerable barrier to online participation. They are recommended only for communities where widespread Internet access, through personal computers or smart phones, is certain.

Even in those communities, an alternative participation venue for those without access, such as public computers, should be available when using online tools. These tools are typically designed to be intuitive and easy to learn.

In communities where Internet access is standard, online technologies provide an excellent complement to face-to-face interactive community participation tools.

Online participation tools are for-profit services unless otherwise noted. However, buying access to them can often be less expensive than holding a community workshop in a physical space, after taking into account the cost of facilities, catering, materials and staff time. Once purchased, stakeholder access to these tools is free of charge. So, if an agency sponsoring a planning effort buys a subscription to a tool, or pays to join it can



A Crowdfire website for encouraging and enabling public participation in the Civic Area Ideas Competition for Boulder, CO.

customize the tool to its specific purpose, and stakeholders can then access it for free to provide input and feedback.

Web-conferencing and audio-conferencing tools allow real-time collaboration, where users can join in at any time. A good tool will require minimal or no technical support, and conferencing can be set up in minutes. They can enable presentation of electronic materials on screen. Some standard tools with varying

capabilities include GoToMeeting.com, GoToWebinar.com, ReadyTalk.com and Webex.com.

MindMixer.com is an online public participation tool where stakeholders can submit ideas for general online discussion, vote or provide other feedback on ideas submitted by other users, and see data on user feedback on submitted ideas – all on their own schedule.

Surveys are a useful supplement to some broader participation tools such as community workshops, and are often integrated into the process of some tools such as Health Impact Assessments.

Paper and phone surveys can require tens of hours to collect, confirm and compile results.

SurveyMonkey.com is a free online survey software and questionnaire tool, although users can pay to access additional features, including unlimited questions and responses, enhanced security, custom design and enhanced reporting.

Applications like Nextdoor.com and LocalData (fastcodesign.com) are designed to foster community conversation around community issues.

LocalData allows users to report on conditions in their community, like sidewalk gaps or abandoned properties, and has other capabilities like questionnaire functionalities.

Nextdoor is neighborhood-oriented social media; and social media, including Facebook and Twitter, are fun ways to generate discussion and get qualitative feedback on community issues.

Crowdbrite.com uses place-based visualization tools with professionals and the public, both online and in-person to find solutions to complex problems. Crowdbrite works with personal computers, tablets and mobile phones, allowing users to add virtual sticky notes, pictures, video links and ideas to maps, simulations and other community planning tools.

Because Crowdbrite allows users to provide input and feedback on digital maps, it enables a form of participatory mapping online. Through sticky notes and other brainstorming techniques, it can also facilitate the visioning process.

Crowdbrite adds some capabilities to these tools by allowing sticky notes to hold not only text, but also photos, videos, metrics, comments and other information, and by generating organized information from the sticky notes in the form of reports, spreadsheets, and marked maps or other graphics. It also supports a feedback loop by facilitating comments on comments, enabling quick response to user questions and concerns.

Importantly, Crowdbrite can be used in face-to-face, interactive community planning workshops, if loaded onto personal computers available for participant use. Small-group breakouts are ideal for Crowdbrite use at public workshops. Facilitators can record small-group input and feedback on Crowdbrite, and share them at the end of the workshop.

Crowdbrite has been used in numerous planning efforts, including the California Economic Summit, a project of the California Stewardship Network and California Forward (caeconomy.org), and Mobility 2035: Lake Tahoe Regional Transportation Plan Update, the regional transportation planning effort for the Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization (tahoempo.org)

Health Impact Assessments

The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a flexible, multi-part process to determine the public health impacts of proposed decisions, including community land-use plans and projects. This process obtains public input and feedback, which helps guide the HIA, evaluate potential health impacts, and make recommendations to improve decisions.

An HIA can help decision-makers make informed decisions. It is also useful in understanding community stakeholders' concerns about the potential health effects of proposed decisions, and educating them about a proposal.

Completed HIAs generally result in a report that documents the process and findings, and a concrete set of recommendations to improve a decision to mitigate any identified health impacts.

The HIA complements environmental reviews of land-use plans and projects conducted under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and equivalent state statutes, such as the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Where statutes require consideration and analysis of the health effects of decisions reviewed, the HIA can be integrated into the environmental review process to meet requirements for a health-effects analysis.

The HIA can also be conducted in parallel to an environmental review, but outside the formal process if the HIAs scope is beyond what is typically included in environmental review.

Any community stakeholder concerned about the potential health impacts of a proposed plan or project can initiate an HIA. This includes public health practitioners, community groups and

advocacy organizations, responsible public agencies or policy-makers. HIAs help decision-makers make informed decisions, and educates community stakeholders. HIAs are carried out prospectively – before a community plan or decision is made – and can be completed at the start of the planning process.

The HIA process is designed to engage and empower community stakeholders, build relationships and collaborations, and forge consensus around decisions. The process consists of six parts:

- 1. Screening** – determining whether an HIA is needed, feasible and relevant. Stakeholder participation potential: collaboration in identifying possible projects or selection criteria.
- 2. Scoping** – determining which health impacts to evaluate, the evaluation methodology, and the work plan. Stakeholder participation potential: identifying priority community health issues and methods to evaluate impacts.
- 3. Assessment** – using data, research and analysis to determine the magnitude and direction of potential health impacts. Deliverables include a profile of existing health conditions and an evaluation of potential health impacts. Stakeholder participation potential: providing relevant information through surveys, interviews and focus groups; assisting in research, such as gathering and organizing community data.
- 4. Recommendations** – providing strategic recommendations to manage the impacts and improve health conditions. Stakeholder participation potential: prioritizing impacts and identifying recommendations.
- 5. Reporting and Communication** – sharing the results and recommendations. Stakeholder participation potential: writing, reviewing and editing findings; publicly

presenting findings to the media, community organizations, elected officials and other decision-makers.

- 6. Monitoring** – tracking how the HIA affects decision-making and its outcomes. Stakeholder participation potential: implementing advocacy plans, holding decision-makers accountable for long-term results.

All phases of the HIA require oversight to organize and coordinate the process, and ensure stakeholders are informed and engaged. The HIA process should have oversight from a representative steering committee of affected stakeholders.

Committee roles and responsibilities include developing an agreement for the conduct and oversight of the HIA process, oversight and coordination, determining how the HIA will be used, and developing and implementing a resulting advocacy plan.

Stakeholder representatives could include community and advocacy organization representatives, agency officials (public health, planning, city administration, transportation, advocates), experts and consultants, elected officials, project or policy proponents, and other stakeholders such as unaffiliated residents and property owners.

The cost of an HIA can range from \$30,000 to \$150,000, depending on its scope, methods, stakeholder involvement, regulatory requirements and other factors. HIA funding assistance may be available through grants from charitable foundations and state or federal programs.

More information about funding is available through Human Impact Partners, an organization specializing in assisting communities with using the HIA to help create healthy places and policies.

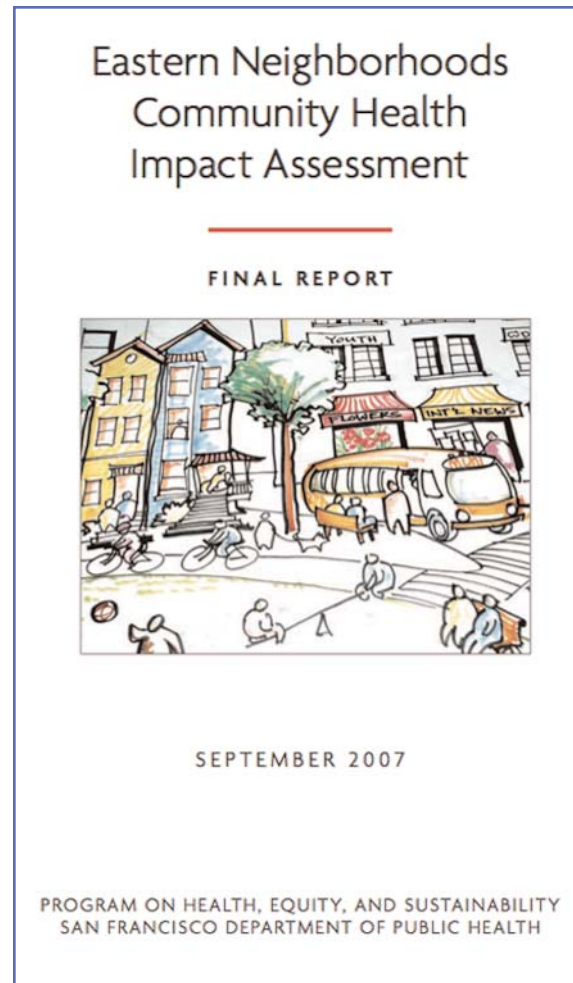
Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment

One of the most successful examples of an HIA process is the Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment (ENCHIA, sfphes.org/ENCHIA.htm). The ENCHIA process assessed the health impacts of a proposed re-zoning and community planning process in San Francisco's Eastern Neighborhoods.

The City of San Francisco launched a community planning process, focusing on rezoning its Eastern Neighborhoods – the Mission, South of Market, Potrero Hill, Bayview/Hunters Point and others – to address land-use conflicts resulting from the lack of neighborhood plans to drive cohesive development. Public health officials were concerned about the rapid growth of housing demand in San Francisco which often resulted in a lack of affordable housing, evictions and overcrowding. At the same time, light-industrial businesses were being forced to relocate out of the city, taking blue-collar jobs with them.

The City rezoned many light industrial areas for market rate residential uses, but without guiding neighborhood plans, there were limited opportunities for community members to participate in decision-making processes that affected them, rather than just react to possible negative impacts of proposed development projects.

After the City released Eastern Neighborhoods rezoning options, community stakeholders organized to address concerns with the project's environmental review under CEQA. Assessment of many social and economic impacts was not required under CEQA, and community stakeholders had significant concerns about these impacts, including direct health effects such as displacement, stress and noise, and indirect effects on health assets



such as jobs, infrastructure and housing. In response, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) proposed to conduct an HIA parallel to the rezoning's accompanying land-use planning and environmental review processes.

ENCHIA was facilitated and staffed by SFDPH, and guided by a multi-stakeholder Community Council with more than 20

community-based and other organizations representing diverse interests for economic and neighborhood development, environmental justice, homelessness, open space, property owners and small businesses.

ENCHIA resulted in the inclusion of health-protective language into the Eastern Neighborhoods Area Plans; a comprehensive health analysis of the plans during their environmental review process; and new city legislation that requires air-quality and noise mitigations for sensitive land uses.

It also led to the creation of the Healthy Development Measurement Tool, a comprehensive set of evaluation and planning tools that bring health considerations into urban development. The tool was recently relaunched as the Sustainable Communities Index (sustainablef.org).

The ENCHIA project faced many challenges, including a lengthy timeline and some participant attrition, stakeholder demands for SFDPH advocacy (despite limited SFDPH power within the City planning process), and other difficulties intrinsic to any political process.

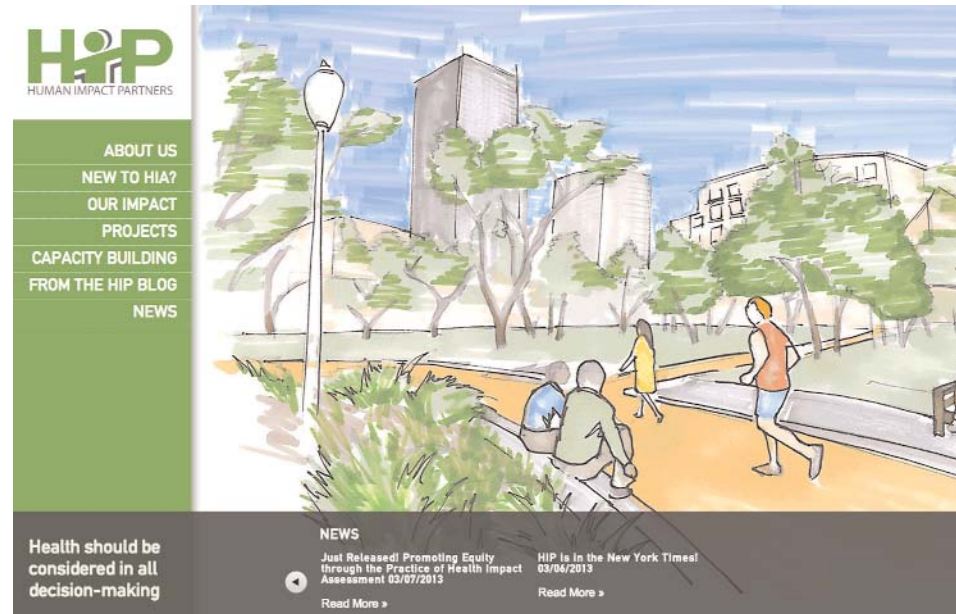
Overall, however, ENCHIA boasts considerable net successes. It increased community awareness about the connection between health and land use. It also fostered strategic relationships between SFDPH and diverse neighborhood and advocacy organizations.

Through a consensus process, ENCHIA also created and mobilized the community around the Healthy Development Measurement Tool, which incorporated the values of environmental stewardship, sustainable transportation, public safety, public infrastructure and access to goods and services, adequate and healthy housing, a healthy economy, and community participation.

The final report, “Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment,” contains more information about the project. Written by the SFDPH’s Lili Farhang and Rajiv Bhatia, it was published in 2007 by the SFDPH Program on Health, Equity and Sustainability.

For More Information

- ▶ Human Impact Partners (humanimpact.org) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming the places and public policies that people need to live healthy lives. Their primary tool is the HIA. Through training, technical assistance and research, they assist organizations and public agencies who work with low-income communities to understand the health effects of current or proposed projects and policies. They also help communities use this information to take action. Their website contains comprehensive information on HIAs, including how to do them, potential uses, and possible sources of funding.
- ▶ “A Health Impact Assessment Toolkit: A Handbook to Conducting HIA.” Third Edition. Human Impact Partners, February 2001.
- ▶ “Guidance and Best Practices for Stakeholder Participation in Health Impact Assessments – Version 1.0.” Prepared by the Stakeholder Participation Working Group of the 2010 HIA of the Americas Workshop, March 2012.
- ▶ The SFDPH Program on Health, Equity and Sustainability (sfphes.org/resources/hia-tools) currently offers HIA Trainings for under \$1,000. The course provides current and future HIA practitioners with experience using available procedures, regulations and tools to implement an HIA.



Chapter 3.

Shorter Methods

Shorter methods of engaging residents in the planning process can often be accomplished within one community planning workshop setting, and can support more sustained processes and methods. The informed selection of shorter methods can be critical to the ultimate effectiveness of the process.

For considerations in selecting methods and techniques for the community planning workshop setting, see the Community Planning Workshops section, page 5.

Participatory Mapping

Participatory mapping engages community members in geographic mapping of their community's assets, needs, opportunities and other considerations to inform the community planning process. Community assets that can be geographically mapped might be schools, parks, popular gathering places or other sites with cultural significance. Community needs that could be mapped might entail a lack of sidewalks, unsafe street crossings or other infrastructure needs. Mappable opportunities might be a desired route to school, park or stores, or an ideal location for a grocery store that provides neighborhood access to fresh, healthy food.

A common form of participatory mapping involves a large aerial map of a community for workshop participants to write or draw on with magic markers. These maps might include labels for street names, school locations and other features that help participants locate themselves, and can inform the particular purpose of the mapping activity.

Participants might also mark maps with sticky dots, color-coded to represent different needs, assets or preferences. They can also use pre-made cut-outs, from sticky construction paper or other materials, to represent different land uses and features such as retail stores, parks, residential neighborhoods and transit centers. For example, areas perceived as pedestrian hazards might be marked with red dots, while perceived community assets such as favorite meeting places get green dots.

A community workshop might divide a large group into smaller breakout groups, each with their own map to mark; or it might



provide map stations that participants can circulate to, with a different map at each station. The maximum group size recommended per map is eight people.

Map dimensions might be anywhere from 2 to 4 feet, depending on available facilities, table sizes and group sizes. If an aerial photomap is not available, other maps such as conventional street maps might suffice, however, the aerial photomaps provide helpful visual reference for users to identify where sites are located. Local government community planning divisions, regional councils of governments, or metropolitan planning organizations can often generate these photomaps for community use.

Online participation tools can allow a form of participatory mapping (see the Virtual Participation section, page 25). However, lower-technology tools such as magic markers or other physical marking tools allow face-to-face participation, and are likely more accessible in low-income communities.

Participatory mapping workshops require a facilitator with technical expertise in the topic. This person might be an urban designer, a community planner or a professional facilitator.



The facilitator introduces the workshop with a clear explanation or review of purpose, including how the results will be used and how the workshop supports the larger planning process. The facilitator provides an explanation of the activity, with a review of the map(s) and instructions for marking. The facilitator keeps track of time, answers participant questions, and generally meets participant needs for providing input throughout the activity.

Participatory mapping can be a low-resource, low-cost venture when physical maps and marking devices are used. The required equipment includes:

- ▶ Maps for each group or mapping station.
- ▶ Markers such as magic markers, sticky dots, sticky notes, or even construction paper cut-outs.
- ▶ Tables to seat 6-8 people around each map (also recommended for circulating map stations).

Participants get to hear what their neighbors think at the end of the workshop when each table reports back to the larger workshop group.



Photomaps with participant markings, with a written summary and analysis, can be presented to policymakers, and included in final reports or plans. Alternatively, results can be entered into GIS if it is available, to easily generate reports on mapping results.

Participatory mapping is ideal for planning topics related to geographic conditions, including land uses and transportation. It presents geographic information, and community input and feedback, as a visual in the final product of the marked map.

It provides a highly interactive and hands-on way for stakeholders to provide input and feedback. The interactive method and visual presentation, especially when combined with written summary and analysis, enriches stakeholder understanding and awareness of the planning topic and process.

Participatory mapping is one of the activities that can be conducted at a community workshop or design charrette. It can also be combined with walkability assessments (see the Guided



Tours section, page 34), so that participants can work together to map barriers and opportunities for walking, bicycling and traffic calming, which they have identified during a guided walking tour of their community.

For More Information

- The Local Government Commission's Center for Livable Communities: lgc.org/freepub/community_design/participation_tools/landuse_mapping.html
- "Stakeholder Engagement Strategies for Participatory Mapping." National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, 2009. csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/_/pdf/participatory-mapping.pdf
- The National Park Service's guide to group mapping: nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/Toolbox/gatinfo_mapping.htm
- PolicyLink's community mapping toolkit: policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNJrE/b.5136917/k.AB67/Community_Mapping.htm



Participatory Mapping: Making Safe and Healthy Community Connections in Round Valley

Community members in the Round Valley Indian Tribes Reservation and the nearby town of Covelo used participatory mapping as part of their planning process for improving active transportation options in their community, and creating a revitalization strategy for the town center.

Acting on growing evidence of a link between the built environment and health, including the connection between walkable communities and active living, public health leaders at the Round Valley Indian Health Center played a primary role in initiating the planning process and partnering with the Mendocino Council of Governments and the Local Government Commission to obtain an Environmental Justice Planning grant from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

The Round Valley planning process aimed to provide for safe bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian connections between com-

munity destinations, and create a town center plan for Covelo, located in the center of Round Valley.

Round Valley is a remote location in Mendocino County, with Highway 162 serving as the only paved link to the world beyond. Roadways connecting the reservation and Covelo have relatively low traffic volumes, but it is dangerous to walk and bike between community destinations because there are few sidewalks, paths and shoulders to support safe pedestrian, wheelchair, bike or equestrian travel. Covelo has some sidewalks, but they are not continuous, and many are in disrepair.

At initial workshops and focus groups during the design charrette, community members identified a trail system and a complete sidewalk system for downtown Covelo as a high-priority improvement for the Valley. Many community members don't drive or have access to a vehicle, and/or prefer to walk, bike or ride horses, and identified non-motorized safety as a major concern.

A trail system between Valley destinations could address concerns about pedestrian and bicycle safety and convenience, allow for safe recreation, and promote physical exercise and public health. Trails could also support local tourism by offering walking, bicycling and equestrian routes that connect to desirable scenic and recreational destinations in Round Valley and beyond.

Participatory mapping exercises enabled community members to map their ideas for the trail system. Exercises were informed by a walkability assessment of the community, and training from experts on trail and community design.

Marking the aerial maps, community members identified key community destinations that were missing bicycle and pedestrian connections, including connections between public schools,



Tribal housing, the Tribes' economic development center and downtown Covelo. They located convenient sites for bicycle/pedestrian crossings to connect destinations across Highway 162 as well as wider shoulders or parallel trails for riding on or near the road.

As a lower priority, they mapped their ideas for scenic trail loops and recreational uses. They marked maps with their ideas for comfortable and convenient trail-design features, including varying levels of trails, ranging from informal trails to fully paved and marked trails.

By providing input and feedback from the mapping exercises and other elements of the participation effort, community members advised and guided project organizers and staff in creating a conceptual trail plan for Round Valley, including goals, benefits, design options and preferences.



The Trail Plan provides a vision for what the desired trail system might look like and basic steps to help the local community implement it with the support of county, regional and state government agencies.

Following this community-driven planning effort, Caltrans provided funding for three additional studies – a Project Study Report for Highway 162, a Non-Motorized Needs Assessment and an Engineered Feasibility Study. These technical studies, surveys and engineered plans are based on input from tribal staff, council and community members, and are construction-ready documents that will help Round Valley and Covelo achieve their trail system and pedestrian improvements.

Guided Tours

Guided tours are pre-established excursions through a neighborhood or downtown that acquaint participants with existing conditions and can be used to address potential enhancements of an area. A guided tour brings together a diverse group of community members to increase awareness of a project area, solicit their input and reactions to proposed changes, and eventually arrive at agreed-upon solutions.

Tours can be used to stimulate discussions of critical issues, such as the planning and development of a controversial project area or the redevelopment of a city into a more pedestrian-oriented community. Walkability assessments are tours designed specifically to assess the pedestrian environment of a street, school area or neighborhood.

These tours allow participants to actually see the areas under discussion. A group leader, usually a facilitator who is familiar with the project area, prepares a route that will allow participants to look at a variety of places that are representative of the larger area. The facilitator guides the group, asks participants to discuss things that work and don't work, and provides suggestions for how the environment could be improved for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.

Tours may be conducted on foot or by bike. When a large area needs to be covered, a shuttle bus or car may be useful to get more quickly to all of the tour's destinations.

In some cases, tour guidebooks can be provided to map the route, offer written information about sites under consideration, and pose thought-provoking questions about the area.

The tour may include many stops along the way, but usually no more than ten. At each stop, the leader provides additional background information about the site and asks participants to analyze the site.

Participants discuss their impressions about the site's opportunities and constraints while on the walk or in tour guidebooks. If several groups are participating in the tour, comments can be shared when the larger group reassembles. Participants evaluate a full range of factors, including the area's environment, safety and comfort.

After the tour, the group leader summarizes the impressions from the workshop and comments from participants. The summary represents the views, ideas and comments of all community members involved in the activity, and may be used to inform the planning effort, and the development of community and other plans.

Walkability Assessments

Walkability assessments usually follow a slightly different format than other guided tours because they have the very specific purpose of identifying barriers and opportunities for pedestrian friendliness. They are also a great venue for discussing land uses along a street or corridor, and for identifying assets there.

These assessments consist of a community walking tour, where an expert in designing for pedestrians guides participants in reviewing the area's walking conditions, and using their findings to discuss solutions for safer, more comfortable pedestrian travel.

Participants can use a walkability checklist to guide their findings. This is more supportive of the specific focus of walkability assessments than the guidebooks used in more general guided tours. Factors influencing walking conditions include the social,



natural and built environment. Findings might include sidewalk conditions, street lighting, traffic speeds, topography, and the presence of trash or unleashed dogs.

The tour leader documents and summarizes findings, often using photos or video recording in addition to a verbal or written summary. The summary represents participants' observations and comments, and can inform community plan documents.



The South Merced Martin Luther King, Jr. Way Revitalization Plan

The City of Merced used a walkability assessment and walkable community workshop, in combination with other methods, to help in its public outreach efforts with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Way Revitalization Plan that was funded by a Caltrans Environmental Justice Grant in 2009-10. The educational component of both activities helped inform the overall effort.

As a result of the community workshop, three of the residents who attended the event applied to be on the Citizens Advisory Committee.

For the walkability assessment and community workshop (facilitated by the Local Government Commission), the City of Merced partnered with the Merced County Association of Governments and Golden Valley Health Center.

The corridor is a primary gateway to Merced, but was characterized by aging buildings, strip commercial land uses, deteriorating infrastructure, and lack of aesthetic street features.

Many low-income residents living near the corridor don't own cars and walk or bike to get around. In spite of this, the area, which is a heavily traversed truck route, did not have a complete sidewalk system or bicycle facilities. Mothers pushing strollers, and senior citizens walking along the highway shoulder at rush hour, were a common sight.

The City embarked on its Martin Luther King, Jr. Way Revitalization Plan to improve these conditions and organized a variety of events where stakeholders could inform the corridor's improvement, identifying pedestrian and bicycle needs, as well as assets and opportunities. Plan organizers hosted booths at fairs, block parties and other community events for input and feedback;

and visited with stakeholder groups, including neighborhood, business and community organizations.

Plan organizers asked stakeholders to complete questionnaires at these events, and visited the project area over several days, asking pedestrians and bicyclists there to complete questionnaires. A citizen's advisory committee collaborated in establishing implementation initiatives based on public input and technical assistance information. Some of them also volunteered their time to walk the project area, and ask pedestrians and bicyclists to complete the questionnaires.

The "Walkable Community Workshop," facilitated by Local Government Commission staff, included a walkability assessment that occurred early in the process, where its educational component could be most helpful. During the walkability assessment, an expert in designing for pedestrians guided participants in reviewing walking conditions in the area.



A 40-minute presentation on how to improve conditions for walking and bicycling was delivered before the walking tour. The last 90 minutes of the workshop included a design table exercise in which residents and stakeholders wrote their comments and ideas on aerial photos of the corridor, which helped direct future improvements.

These events helped educate some advisory committee members and other stakeholders about pedestrian and bicycle design principles, and ways to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles in safety and comfort along the corridor.

The workshop and assessment provided an on-site venue for stakeholders to identify what works, what doesn't, and how to improve conditions for pedestrians along the corridor. Participants identified specific short- and long-term actions



to improve community walkability, and areas that could use improved specific infrastructure features. The facilitator provided bilingual translation throughout the workshop.

The walkability assessment and workshop provided important input from residents to ensure that the revitalization plan – adopted by the Merced City Council in February 2012 – contained specific recommendations to make pedestrian and bicycle transportation safe, comfortable and convenient throughout the corridor. Less than a year after its adoption, some of the plan's sidewalk and safe crossing improvements are already being installed.

For More Information

- ▶ Walkability Assessment Providers: The Walkable and Livable Communities Institute (walklive.org) and the Local



Government Commission (lgc.org) both provide four-hour Walkable Community Workshops that include a walkability assessment, a community workshop and participatory mapping exercise for local jurisdictions and community-based organizations.

- ▶ Safe Routes to School (SRTS): SRTS assists communities in creating safe walking routes for children to public schools, and encourages more children to walk and bike to school. SRTS programs use some walkability assessment methods and techniques to assess the conditions on the route to school. The National Center for Safe Routes to School (saferoutesinfo.org) has information about walking/bike tours and audits.
- ▶ Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center: pedbikeinfo.org
- ▶ America Walks: americawalks.org

Focus Groups

A focus group — a small group of people guided by a facilitator to provide feedback on a given topic — has applications throughout social-science research and marketing campaigns as well as in community planning. It is an ideal tool to use when community interview information is needed for feedback on a very specific topic, and interaction among participants would be more informative than individual interviews.

Ideally, focus groups are as representative a sample as possible of the affected community and stakeholders — typically with between 10-12 participants. One way to help achieve a relatively representative sample is to pick representatives for stakeholder groups affected by the process. For example, select representatives from each neighborhood association in the community area or community-based organizations in the area dealing with a particular planning topic.

Focus-group sessions typically last about two hours. Results can be recorded in writing, on a flip chart, or even through audio/video recording. Participants are typically seated in a circular or horseshoe configuration, or around a table, to facilitate group interaction. Because of their small size and minimal required resources, focus groups are often a cost-effective, time-efficient tool for obtaining community feedback.



Facilitators demonstrate neutrality, keep the group's discussion focused, and ensure that everybody is able to speak (for resources on group facilitation, see the resources in the Facilitated Meetings and Groups section, page 16).

Facilitators prepare questions in advance, but allow for flexibility during the discussion — questions serve as a guide rather than a script. To gather the most valuable responses, these questions are open-ended rather than “yes” or “no” questions. Rapport is established by also beginning with questions that might be easier for participants to answer.

Focus groups are ideal for clarifying existing community input information, such as ambiguous survey data, or to obtain more specific community perspectives on themes emerging from a larger forum. However, focus groups are not the best tool to use when quantitative or fully representative feedback is needed.



Focus groups are also useful in informing the design of a planning process for legally mandated plans such as general plans, by providing community feedback on community concerns, needs and desires to be addressed during the planning process.

Improving the Sense of Place in Orick

The community of Orick in Northern California used focus groups to obtain very specific, technical feedback that complemented a charrette process. Its Community Service District and Economic Development Corporation sponsored a planning effort to improve State Route 101 through downtown Orick, and enhance its sense of place as a gateway community to nearby Redwood National and State Parks.

The community used a four-day charrette process — which they called a “design fair” — for community members to collaborate in a fun, informal setting to make recommendations for improving their community.

Prior to the design fair events, several focus groups were conducted with community service providers, including staff from Caltrans, Humboldt County's Departments of Economic Development, Public Works and Planning, and Redwood State and National Parks, as well as with residents and other local stakeholders. The focus group with service providers allowed for a more focused, technical level of stakeholder input.

Other focus groups with downtown business and property owners enabled stakeholders to speak openly about issues specific to the business climate and future development.

Input from the superintendents of Redwood State and National Parks, who attended one of the focus groups, was also key to understanding the nature of a gateway community: While the parks support the community, the community in turn supports the parks by providing off-site concessions and services not feasible within park boundaries.

Since many of the service providers had traveled from out of the area to attend the focus group, a walkability assessment of the project area was held immediately afterwards to encourage further participation in design-fair events.

The charrette process also encouraged more community-design oriented input, while the focus groups allowed for feedback on other issues, such as encouraging economic development, and how Orick can better work with Redwood State and National Parks, Caltrans and the County to achieve its goals.

To learn more about using focus groups for better community planning, check out this classic and accessible primer: "Focus Groups: A Practical Guide For Applied Research," 4th edition, by R.A. Krueger and M.A. Casey. New York: SAGE, 2008.



3D Visualization

3D visualization allows stakeholders to see the potential results of planning, development and design projects through computer modeling and photographic imaging. This valuable technique allows all stakeholders to see differences in design styles and development patterns, and allows decision-makers to evaluate the potential impact of proposed developments.

3D visualization involves taking a picture of a street and then digitally adding, subtracting, or reorganizing the elements of the picture to evaluate various possibilities. For example, you could take a photo of a section of a typical commercial-strip development, and then manipulate the image to remove signage, widen sidewalks, add trees and awnings, and place apartments with latticed balconies on top of ground-floor retail stores.

Whatever design and development alternatives are desired may be added or subtracted from the image to help stakeholders visualize how different design scenarios would appear.

3D visualization technology allows many factors to be comprehensively assessed and evaluated, including variables such as proposed building and street designs, building heights, street layout, housing options, landscaping and other design features.

Because it is difficult for the average person to visualize how a proposed plan is going to look simply by reviewing typical 2-dimensional plans, visualization technology allows community members and policymakers to understand more accurately what a proposed development will really look like.



Results from visualization exercises can also help settle complex planning issues and guide design and planning activities in the future by showing before-and-after images of proposed projects.

As a mechanism to improve public communications about local planning and development issues, computer simulation can be used to help:

- ▶ Create design guidelines.
- ▶ Evaluate controversial proposals by creating images of the alternatives.
- ▶ Analyze urban-design qualities before formal discussion begins on an actual proposal.
- ▶ Develop choices about the appearance of a project.

The main advantage of computer simulation is that realistic and accurate depictions of proposed developments are made from eye-level.

Some urban design consultants can develop these photographic visualizations. Two graphic design firms that specialize in them are Urban Advantage (urban-advantage.com) and Clairvoyant Graphics (clairvoyantgraphics.com).

A “before” photo on the left, with three visions of the same road on the right – adding a sidewalk, median landscaping, a bike lane (including a change of color), and finally a canopy of trees.

Interactive Planning

Interactive planning taps into the public's memories and emotions of place through building models for a community's built environment from found, recycled objects. Because interactive planning uses tactile and visual techniques to enable participants to translate conceptual planning ideas into physical forms, it is an accessible way for people to participate in community planning, regardless of their technical knowledge, language skills or age.

"Building" an urban solution is more accessible to many people than talking about it. Community planning methods involving building blocks or models have been used for a long time, but, in recent years, the Place It! project has refined and promoted this approach.

Place It! encourages communities around the world to be engaged in the urban planning process, and re-imagine their physical form. Interactive planning facilitates communication and fosters relationships between stakeholders, and uses two principal methods — interactive models or workshops.

Interactive models help people visualize their community and stimulate dialogue. To begin the exercise, a facilitator creates a physical, reduced-scale conceptual model of a community that includes streets, cultural landmarks, parks and natural features. The model is portable and can be placed at various locations. It is designed to create a reaction from the public. Much like art, people can conceptually project themselves into the model.



During the activity, the facilitator leads participants through a 5-10 minute exercise where they build their solutions to various problems in their neighborhood by moving small buildings or objects within the model.

Objects in the model may be placed and replaced as participants wish, and this method creates a greater understanding of how built environments are imagined, created and experienced.

Stakeholders become physical participants in the creation and evolution of their built environment. Participants can be interviewed during the activity, and moves recorded, for a record of input and feedback to inform the planning process.

The workshop method requires hundreds of small non-representative objects — often donated, found or purchased at thrift stores, they may include blocks, bottles, knobs and fasteners — to build models, construction paper to use as a base for their individual models, and enough tables and chairs to have four to five people at a table. Larger groups may require more people at a table, and a facilitator assigned to each table.

The workshop facilitator begins with a question to get people thinking, or to address a community aspiration or need. For example: How would you design a place for street vendors in your community? What is your ideal city? What would encourage/allow you to walk in your community? The facilitator reassures the participants there are no limitations, and wrong or right answers. There doesn't need to be prior discussion or education on the topic.

Participants have 15-20 minutes to build a solution using their hands, minds, and thousands of small colorful, tactile objects. These objects are intended to trigger their connections to the built environment by helping them self reflect and articulate their solution. Once the time is up, the builders share their ideas through a one-minute, urban narrative/presentation to the larger group.

The final steps in the workshop are collaboration and synthesis. Participants divide into small groups to pool their ideas to create a new model, which incorporates the best ideas from each individual model. Results are shared and recorded through a large-group discussion at the end of the workshop.

Interactive planning methods have been used nationwide, as well as in Europe and at the United Nations Habitat-organized World Urban Forum in Brazil. Workshops typically cost under \$500, while interactive models typically run less than \$1,000.



Small Models, Big Ideas for Southern California

Place It! created the Long Beach Urban Utopia Project – the world’s largest interactive city diorama, an 80 square-foot scale model of Long Beach – for community members to model their own vision of the city’s future. The model was placed on a see-through platform, and could be viewed from above and below.

The project was hosted at a local art gallery, and implemented independently of the local planning department. Community members could visit the model anytime during gallery hours. Diverse groups, including school children, homemakers and business owners, were able to work together to create community amenities, redesign parking, and reposition buildings.

An art project sponsored by the Museum of Latin American Art and the Long Beach Council for the Arts, it nevertheless demonstrates the potential of interactive planning methods to create community collaboration around urban design.

Planning the Future of Our Streets in Pasadena was an interactive planning workshop that enabled community members to



create their own model of the perfect street. The event, sponsored by organizations representing local media, architects and community activists, began with an introduction by the mayor and educational presentations about the history and importance of pedestrian planning in the area – focusing on why more people don’t choose to walk to nearby destinations.

Participants were asked to design their ideal street and sidewalk in 20 minutes, based on their personal experiences, using the interactive planning materials of tactile objects and construction paper. Participants were given rough criteria: How do they use the streets? What is the feel of the street? And what should the street look like? There were no scales, maps or pictures, and no



wrong or right answers. The only requirement was that they create a 3-dimensional model with the objects.

After the exercise, participants shared their models with the larger group. Results were synthesized and recorded, and are informing Pasadena’s walkability planning process. This effort was sponsored by Southern California Public Radio and Los Angeles Streetsblog.

For More Information

- Place It! (placeit.org) is a project of the Latino Urban Forum, founded in 1999 by a group of urban planners and architects to establish a venue to address urban issues affecting Latino communities.
- “The City as Play” video: vimeo.com/11583278

Visual Preference Surveys

Developed by A. Nelessen Associates, the Visual Preference Survey™ (VPS™) enables community members to evaluate physical images of natural and built environments. Tools like the VPS™ have been in use for a long time, but the VPS™ has refined and disseminated the method.

The VPS™ involves asking participants to view and evaluate a series of between 180 and 240 slides. These photos depict a wide variety of streetscapes, land uses and densities, site designs, roadways, building types, civic and public spaces, parking lots, parks and recreation areas, sidewalks, landscapes and open spaces. Participants view each slide and assign it a score according to their gut reaction to the image – whether they like it and whether they feel it is appropriate to their community.

Scoring is based on a scale of -10 to +10, with zero being neutral. For example, if a person likes the image a lot, the score may be +8; if they mildly dislike it, the score may be -3. Scores for all those viewing the slides are aggregated, and the average and mean are determined.

The results represent the collective opinion of survey participants. Knowing the results, community members can analyze each image to determine what elements contribute to both the positive and negative ratings. Issues such as style, texture and landscaping are among the many characteristics reviewed.

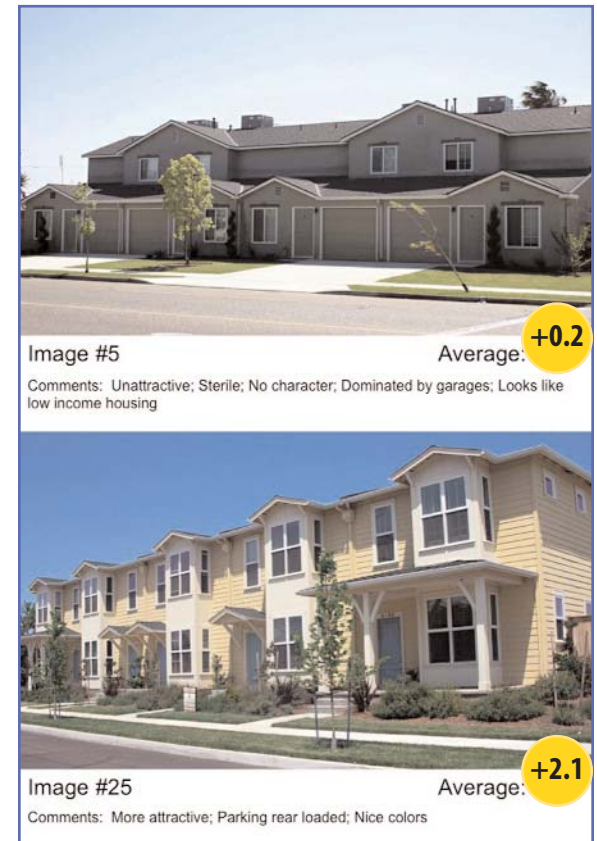
As an educational tool, this method supplies valuable community input to the planning process by helping people define what they like and dislike about what they see around them. The method heightens community awareness about the tradeoffs



inherent in design and land use planning decisions. As a participatory device, the VPS™ enables community members to develop a common vision of the physical characteristics they would like to see in the future design of their community and informs them about the possibilities. It educates participants about design options and is often useful in overcoming fears about compact, mixed-use development.

Results from the VPS™ may be used to develop a Visual Plan, which summarizes what community members have stated are the most important issues related to planning and design in their community. The Visual Plan identifies options for future development and elaborates upon workable solutions to current problems. As a practical, working document, it may be used in guiding plan review, preparing a specific plan, or developing design guidelines.

The Local Government Commission has developed a simplified version of the VPS™ called the Community Image Survey (CIS), which consists of 40 to 60 slide images arranged in pairs with contrasting examples from a community's built and natural environment. The CIS can be used in a workshop setting to get



input from the community and engage people in a discussion about different development options. The survey is typically administered at the start of the workshop so that, while other activities take place, the facilitator can enter the results into a spreadsheet to determine the median score for each image.

Several hours later, the images can be shown again as pairs and with the median scores recorded for each image. Participants are asked to discuss what they liked or disliked about each image. The discussion that takes place not only provides useful input to policymakers but also helps residents better understand what they like and why they like it.

The LGC can prepare and administer a Community Image Survey tailored to a community's characteristics and needs; train local staff on how to prepare and administer a survey; and/or give advice on assembling and administering a survey.

Gualala Downtown Streetscape Plan

The Mendocino County community of Gualala, which boasts the California Coastal Highway as its main roadway, used a visual preference method as part of its Downtown Streetscape Plan to help address barriers to pedestrian travel and other circulation issues. The community's proximity to the coast is a major asset, but the presence of a highway right through the middle of town and limited pedestrian infrastructure was a barrier to pedestrian access.

Mendocino County is famous for its off-beat, quirky coastal communities; and while residents wanted safer, more comfortable pedestrian routes, there was suspicion of a perceived generic character associated with conventional curb, gutter and sidewalk construction.

"People do not come to Gualala because it is like every other suburb in California or because it is a Carmel...Let's not approve

Gualala DOWNTOWN DESIGN PLAN - Phase II

WORKSHOP 1- Visual Preference Survey Results


Which Sidewalk material do you prefer?
Stabilized natural soil (compacted, drains, same color as native soil, easy to maintain, includes an edger)



Which Crosswalk material do you prefer?
Stamped asphalt (with reflective qualities)
Does not conform to Town Plan crosswalk paver



Should there be pedestrian refuge islands on Hwy. 1? (at crossings, also traffic calming)
16 yes/ 15 no



Which street furniture material do you prefer?
Made with recycled material and metal. 2nd choice was a tie between concrete and wood.



Which transit stop style do you prefer?
Rural wood with weather protection.



a generic streetscape project that threatens to turn Gualala into Everytown, USA," voiced a stakeholder at one of the public comment periods.

Environmental concerns and buildout configurations along the coast also limit the width of the public right-of-way available for pedestrian and other transportation improvements.


Public engagement for the Mendocino Council of Governments' Gualala Downtown Streetscape Plan included a visual preference survey method to demonstrate a range of options for pedestrian travel improvements.

The resulting plan calls for a continuous network of pedestrian paths throughout the project area where none exist now, and new crosswalks. Pedestrian paths will reflect the "rural, casual,


Gualala DOWNTOWN DESIGN PLAN - Phase II

WORKSHOP 1- Visual Preference Survey Results


Which style of bulb-outs do you prefer?
Combination of plantings, furniture and native grasses




Should at-grade lights be used on pathways?
In limited areas
(An additional idea that was presented, but not in CAP)




Which bollard material do you prefer?
 (at crossings only, wood, concrete, or metal)
Wood



Which street light poles do you prefer at intersections?
Wood. (rural type, downcast, solar)



Are bioswales appropriate on Hwy. 1?
Yes



coastal town character," without conventional curb, gutter and sidewalk configurations. Instead, pedestrian paths will be separated from the highway with garden strips with native plantings or bioswales, and include treatments so that they resemble native soils. Street lighting is called for only in select locations, to assure night sky protection, and solar-powered street lamps are encouraged.

To view the Downtown Streetscape Plan: mendocinocog.org

For More Information

- A. Nelessen Associates, Inc.: anelessen.com
- Local Government Commission: lgc.org/whatwedo/cis/index.html

Chapter 4.

Techniques for Timely Results

The following techniques require less time investment than others, and are a great complement to more comprehensive methods when timely results are appropriate.

Among other benefits, these techniques can inform the process by letting participants see explicitly and often instantly what their fellow community members are thinking.

Asking for Feedback

Workshop polls and voting techniques can provide instant, quantifiable stakeholder input results, which can inform the planning project, and also educate participants about other community stakeholders' concerns and aspirations.

Questionnaires are also a flexible way of providing feedback. Techniques where users can provide feedback anonymously may encourage participants to answer more honestly than they would if their answers were public, and also prevents a crowd psychology bias, where users' answers are influenced by others' answers.

These techniques cannot replace interactive participation methods, and answers are typically limited to choices given. They can, however, supplement the community planning workshop input and feedback with quick, quantifiable results. Here are a few techniques:

Hand-Raising — Absolutely the quickest, most cost-conscious technique for workshop polling, hand-raising provides quick, visible results. However, it's not readily quantifiable if there are more than about 30 workshop participants; and doing it more than about once or twice during a workshop can become tedious. It can also be difficult to use this technique to obtain information about topics that are multi-dimensional. Because hand-raising is instant, some degree of crowd psychology bias can be avoided.

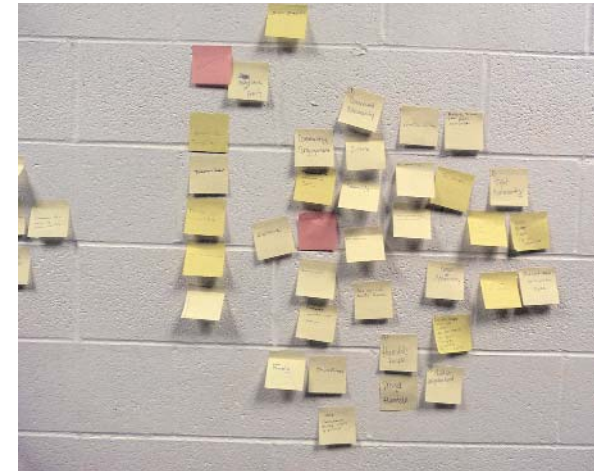
Sticky Dots — Sticky dot polling provides quick, visible results for minimal cost, and results can be photographed or saved after the workshop for reference. In sticky dot polling, answer choices,



options or alternatives are presented on large poster boards, or posted on a wall, and participants are given dots to place on their preferred answer choice. In a workshop setting, the list of options or issues can be developed through a quick brainstorming process in which participants are asked to identify options, issues or potential solutions.

Examples of answer choices, options or alternatives include policy priorities such as access to healthy food, active communities, or recommendations for sidewalk and other infrastructure improvements.

Sticky dot polling can help prioritize policy choices in a number of ways. Policies might be prioritized by how many users place sticky dots on a given policy choice. Alternatively, users can be given many more dots than policy choices, with an equal number of dots for each user, so that they can place as many dots as they wish on a given policy choice, to communicate the perceived importance of that choice.



Asking participants to spread the dots over several choices (no "double-dotting") makes them identify more than one solution.

Dot polling is also a good way to get single-issue residents to think about the bigger picture issues.

Results are quantifiable, and they are also quickly and visibly evident to workshop participants. Large clusters of dots around popular choices give participants graphical information about community input and feedback.

Card Polling — Card polling, alternatively, can help participants choose between sets of policy options or alternatives. Like sticky dot polling, card polling provides quick, visible results for minimal cost, and results can be photographed or saved after the workshop for reference.

In card polling, questions about the planning topic are written on a surface such as poster boards or butcher paper posted to a wall. Participants are given cards that will stick to the surface and are color-coded with different answers for each question.

Participants place selected cards near questions written on the surface.

Card polling is helpful when sets of policy options are mutually exclusive – for example, land-use alternatives for general plans. Different colors for each answer might represent different policy alternatives. For simpler questions, such as gauging satisfaction with transit service in a given area, colors might be red, yellow and green to represent negative, neutral and positive responses.

Again, results are quickly and visibly evident to workshop participants. Large clusters of cards around popular choices give participants graphical information about community input and feedback. Large clusters of red cards might indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with local transit service.

Audience Response Systems – Audience Response

Systems are also known as Personal Response Systems or, more informally, hand-held clicker systems. These are systems where workshop participants use wireless “clickers” to answer multiple choice questions presented on a screen, and collective answers appear on the screen almost immediately.

Collective answers can appear in a variety of forms, including a listing of the number of clicks per answer choice. Systems can be plugged into most standard presentation software, such as PowerPoint. Answers can be given anonymously, and are quantifiable and instantly visible.

One drawback is the systems’ cost. Systems for purchase or even rent can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars, depending on the number of clickers needed. However, some local jurisdictions, metropolitan planning organizations and regional councils of governments may have systems that can be borrowed or rented by local planning departments or community-based organizations.



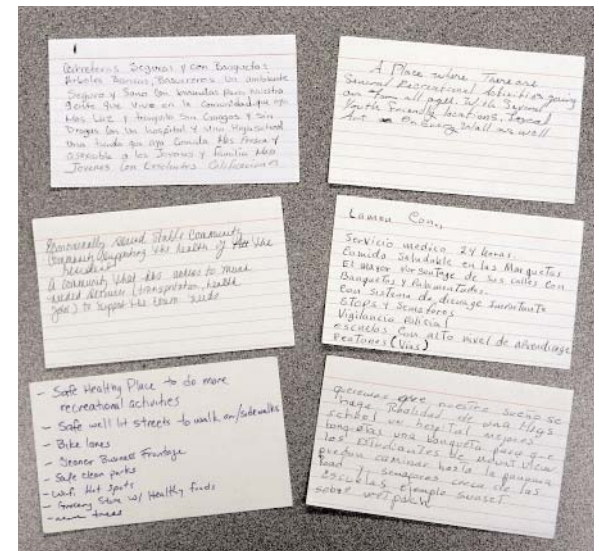
Questionnaires – Response sheets or comment cards provided at the end of the workshop can help collect additional input that respondents may not have thought of, or felt they had an opportunity for, during the workshop.

The benefits of this technique are that it is anonymous, and also allows commentary beyond a finite number of choices. It is also low-tech and low-cost.

The drawback is that written results are time-consuming to record, and results are not readily visible and quantifiable during the community workshop. Participants might also not be willing to hang around at the end of a workshop to complete a questionnaire, especially if it’s not a very short one.

The City of Merced, for example, used questionnaires’ low-tech, low-cost flexibility by walking their planning project area and asking pedestrians for feedback on pedestrian and other conditions (see the Guided Tours section, page 34).

For any of these techniques, remember to make questions user-friendly. Use clear, unambiguous language without jargon or acronyms. Try to keep language neutral to avoid biasing responses (for example, avoid qualifiers).



Avoid double-barreled questions – multiple questions combined into one. An example would be “How do you rate our city’s garbage collection service and parking enforcement services?” Respondents may rate the two services differently, and this question should actually be two questions, one assessing trash collection, and the other assessing parking enforcement.



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is useful for generating ideas in response to given questions or problems, and valuable in community visioning processes, community advisory committees, and facilitated meetings and groups, as well as with other public participation tools. It uses the group's collective intellectual resources by allowing participants to generate ideas without stopping for discussion, evaluation, or judgment.

Brainstorming typically works best with a maximum of 10 to 15 people, seated in a circle.

Recording ideas so that the entire group can see them enables discussion of the ideas at a later time. Ideas can be generated verbally in a group, and recorded on a flip chart by one or more of the participants, or a group facilitator.

Ideas generated verbally can take a number of forms, including “popcorn,” where ideas are called out randomly; and “round robin,” where participants take turns sharing ideas until they have no more ideas or run out of time.

Alternatively, participants might record their own ideas on sticky notes, and place them to a wall to share and possibly organize afterwards. The interaction of generating ideas verbally may spark creativity. Conversely, recording ideas separately on sticky notes may avoid crowd psychology, where ideas are influenced by others' ideas.

Another way to generate ideas might be to ask participants to write their responses separately, and then share verbally with the larger group.

The most important tenet is to allow all ideas to be generated without judgment, evaluation, discussion or lengthy description. Record all ideas. Ideas generated can be prioritized, evaluated, and/or refined later.

Improving Neighborhood Connections in Coachella

The City of Coachella's design charrette process for “Improving Neighborhood Connections along Coachella's Harrison Street Corridor” is a good example of using techniques for timely results in combination, so that participants collaborate to identify a set of community values and priorities.

The values and priorities identified were used to provide focus and direction for the charrette. Charrette organizers used brainstorming techniques to facilitate community members in generating values and priorities, and used sticky dot and sticky note techniques to facilitate community members in organizing those values and priorities into cohesive sets.

After the introduction, participants were provided sticky notes and index cards, and asked to write simple statements about what they value in Coachella.



Results were grouped into similar statement clusters, and there was a remarkable convergence in the community about what they value most in Coachella and would like to foster. They identified values and visions such as environment and climate, economic health, services and amenities, education and community.

A facilitator also led participants in a group brainstorming exercise on improvement priorities for the corridor, writing their contributions on a flip chart. After the exercise, the flip-chart pages were taped to a wall, and participants were each given a half-dozen colored sticky dots to use as votes for the issues



they felt were the most important in Coachella and the Harrison Street corridor.

The one rule was no “double dotting” – with their allotment of six dots, each participant must find six different issues about which they felt strongly. After everyone had voted, it was clear that the priority was improvements to pedestrian facilities, such as pedestrian crossings, sidewalk repair and signalization, throughout the corridor.

The values and priorities served as a basis for discussion during charrette activities that followed, including mapping exercises, walking assessments and group discussions.



The values and priorities also helped inform the charrette results, including recommendations for urban design treatments that will boost economic activity, provide living units where residents’ daily needs can be met nearby, and create “nodes of activity” that will be gathering points for the entire community; and specific street-design recommendations with an emphasis on school sites, pedestrian and bicycle connections.

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