

Community Engagement Action Plan

The City of San Rafael is committed to improving government engagement with the community and transparency. In late 2013, the City Council appointed an ad hoc Council subcommittee to address resident and stakeholder engagement with City issues as well as City government transparency. The subcommittee conducted two surveys and three public meetings to gather information about how people would prefer to engage with the City and perceptions of the City's transparency and outreach efforts. The City has identified the following five primary strategies to improve government engagement and transparency, with suggested action items for each with timeframes and resources required.

1. **Demystify Local Government. Clarify City processes and how to best participate in civic affairs. Better communicate the type of engagement that we are seeking on a given topic and how representative government effectively functions.**

Action Items

- A. Create a centralized online media center on the City website for all communications channels across different departments and topics, including simple sign-ups for topical email alerts. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time, minor budget impact)
- B. Conduct a media blitz about the various ways to get information about City issues and processes. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: minor staff time, minor budget impact)
- C. Use clearer language in naming agenda items and add a summary at the top of lengthy reports. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: minor staff time)
- D. Hold meetings during non-standard working hours on topics where the city is seeking robust community engagement. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: minor staff time)
- E. Add a page to the Community Services Newsletter with a message from the City Manager for citywide issues. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: minor staff time)
- F. Support and enhance educational and engagement opportunities such as Citizen Planning Academy, Citizen Police Academy, community socials, and departmental "Open Houses." (Timeframe: long term / Resources: moderate staff time, minor budget impact)

2. **Engage Earlier. Get the word out early to the community on projects and programs, including items on board and commission agendas, to increase participation prior to City Council meetings and decisions.**

Action Items

- A. Include key forthcoming issues on various Boards' and Commissions' agendas in Snapshot, social media, and other communication mechanisms. (Timeframe: short and long term / Resources: moderate staff time)

- B. Develop consistent and effective communications guidelines for staff to follow on key issues and project, including outreach protocols, correspondence response expectations, and staff training on these guidelines. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: moderate staff time)
- C. Organize staff to regularly visit neighborhood associations and other interested groups. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: high staff time)
- D. Offer a city-staff-written guest column for neighborhood and other newsletters. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: moderate staff time)
- E. Coordinate press releases throughout the City departments, including sending press releases to the Chamber of Commerce, community organizers, schools, neighborhood and homeowners associations, and the Downtown Business Improvement District. Additionally, add RSS feed capability to press release webpages. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: minor staff time)
- F. Consider hiring a Public Information Officer or Communications Coordinator to facilitate communication and outreach to the public on key issues. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: high staff time, moderate budget impact)
- G. Increase number of ad hoc community meetings on topics of critical interest, including creating best practices on when and how to conduct meetings effectively as well as a pre-community meeting checklist. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: high staff time)

3. Hable Español. Improve communication and soliciting feedback from our Spanish-speaking community.

Action Items

- A. Translate more documents and communications into Spanish. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time, moderate budget impact)
- B. Increase media coverage in Spanish language publications, including print, radio, and television. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: moderate staff time)
- C. Install bilingual electronic signage in front of the Albert J. Boro Community Center (Timeframe: short term / Resources: minor staff time, minor budget impact)

4. Enhance Technological Tools. Utilize technology for improved communication, tracking, and online resources and engagement.

Action Items

- A. Create a City NextDoor account to engage with residents online, also including staff training and procedures. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time)

- B. Improve timely handling of citizen complaints and correspondence with standardization of internal procedures and customer relationship management software. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: moderate staff time, minor budget impact)
- C. Add mobile reporting app options for community members to report potholes, graffiti, etc. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: moderate staff time, minor budget impact)
- D. Explore online participation tools for topics and issues in the community. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: high staff time, moderate budget impact)
- E. Increase the City's participation in open data initiatives by releasing public data sets online. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time)
- F. Enhance accuracy and timeliness of information on the City's websites. (Timeframe: long term / Resources: moderate staff time)
- G. Enhance the design and content of the Snapshot email newsletter. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time)

5. Close the Feedback Loop. Communicate better about the engagement process and the feedback that was received. Let people know about decisions and any follow-up actions or next steps.

Action Items

- A. Create an internal Communications Committee with representatives from each department. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time)
- B. Add a community outreach section to all appropriate staff reports to City Council noting feedback received. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: minor staff time)
- C. On a project basis, as issues go before Boards and Commissions, include information about public feedback received. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time)
- D. On a project basis, gather contact information from people offering feedback on an issue (whether in-person, via email, etc.), then communicate decisions at the end of the process. (Timeframe: short term / Resources: moderate staff time)