

Section 4

Everyday Encounters

The planning chief should be a good listener and “one hell of a communicator. He can’t be a whiner who’s tied down with little things. He has to put his foot down and say, ‘Now, this city can do this and can’t do that,’ and then makes it all come together.”¹

— Joel Richert, former Board of Zoning Appeals member, Roanoke, Virginia

Whether it’s increasing your planning department’s budget, revising a comprehensive plan, gaining broader support for affordable housing, or reaching another goal, being successful requires good and oftentimes persuasive communications through everyday encounters with members of your target audiences. These encounters are the basis for building familiarity and trust, whether in person, on the telephone, via e-mail, informal speeches or formal presentations, or through the press. Keeping in mind your primary messages and being able to readily use them will help you take full advantage of these opportunities.

Developing and using a day-to-day communications plan that is revised at least annually is a good way to stay focused and on track. Such a plan need not be lengthy—two or three pages is sufficient when outlining a set of strategic communication goals and objectives. To be useful, be sure to include all of your discrete communications activities. By working within such a framework, you can achieve synergies that will greatly increase the impact of separate outreach efforts.

Once you have a day-to-day communications plan developed, use it to keep audiences interested and engaged in your planning activities. One way to keep interest is to divide a years-long planning endeavor into intermediate stages and success points. If you are completing a master plan, soliciting public comments on a comprehensive plan for your region, or releasing a report on community trends and conditions, use these occasions to connect with elected and appointed officials, developers, constituents, and other planning stakeholders. Once you have established a relationship and dialogue, you can convey your planning messages.

4.1 Day-to-day communications plan

- **A communications goal.** This is a broad statement directing your efforts. It is typically a sentence, or bullet point or two in length. Use your communica-

tions goal as a filter. For every tactic you are contemplating, ask whether and how it helps you achieve your goal. If it supports your end goal, keep it. If it doesn't advance your effort, amend or discard it.

With limited time and resources, focus on a major goal that will help you achieve several of your desired outcomes, such as ensuring sufficient funding for your planning department or program, building support for a proposed bond initiative or sales tax increase to help implement a plan, getting audiences engaged in updating a comprehensive plan, or marshalling community interest and resources to jump start implementation of a plan.

- **An overview.** This defines your opportunities and challenges, and identifies the organizational strengths and weaknesses that will help or hinder you in achieving your goal. Use no more than a paragraph or two for articulating your key points.
- **Objectives.** These are measurable targets, set within a specific time frame. They identify the key results that must be achieved, such as the organizational aims you want your audiences to know and believe, or the actions you want your audiences to take. Objectives provide focus and direction. They also can define the criteria for monitoring progress.
- **Target audiences and profiles.** This should include both external audiences (city council members, developers, business and citizen association leaders) and internal audiences (planning department staff members and other municipal employees). Although it takes a little more time, it's useful to write brief profiles of your audience members, including relevant interests, motivations, and barriers to desired actions.
- **Messages.** Developing and articulating a set of core messages will help you stay on track. Whenever possible, weave broad planning messages with brand-building APA messages into situation-specific talking points that also include examples, anecdotes, or stories. Using your key messages on a regular basis will help you increase understanding of, and appreciation for, the value of planning.

Messages, whether your own or APA's, should be linked to specific situations and issues. When mapping out a day-to-day communications strategy, consider how planning issues, such as affordable housing, capital improvements, historic preservation, streetscape enhancements, or urban parks can help leverage your communications efforts. Whatever the issue, circumstance, or situation, use these opportunities to refer to your core messages.

Your audiences will more likely remember and respond to your messages and information if they are frequently exposed. Look for communications vehicles and channels that can be turned "on" repeatedly, or that are always open. A government-sponsored cable channel bulletin board, websites, and information kiosks are a few examples. Strive to reach out to your stakeholder audiences at

4.1.1

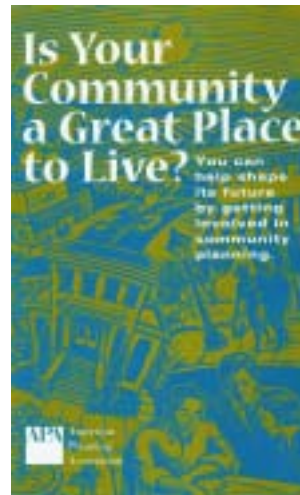
Link messages to specific situations, issues

least once a month. These monthly activities should be included in your communications plan.

- **Materials.** The number of ways to promote planning messages is practically limitless. Some examples are department brochures, annual reports, citizen planning guides, plan summaries, and special reports based on newly compiled city data developed as part of a comprehensive or other planning effort. Also consider staff reports and memos, department letterhead and envelopes, utility bills, department mailings, logos, banners, mouse pads, posters, pins, T-shirts, folders, banners, signs, table-top displays, commemorative plaques, calendars, and fact sheets.

Another mainstay in the planner's communications toolkit is the newsletter, either in printed or electronic format. Newsletters can be designed around a theme, "breaking news," a special planning process or project, or as a basic primer about planning. Newsletters are most effective if published at regular intervals. If the city or county where you serve has its own newsletter, then provide stories, facts, anecdotes, and other useful information about planning for each issue.

- **Photographs.** Incorporating photographs and pictures into your communication efforts is critical. For more about using pictures, see Section 2.
- **Activities.** These should clearly support your objectives, and be built on the set of core messages you have developed as part of your communications plan. Possibilities for spreading your message include hearings; charrettes; press conferences; letters to the editor; briefings; neighborhood and downtown walking tours; speaking engagements to service, civic, business, environmental, neighborhood, and faith-based organizations; community and neighborhood fairs; open houses; media tours; and breakfast meetings. Participating in activities is necessary to be effective in conveying messages.
- **Websites.** Your department's or agency's website is a valuable communication tool and an important venue



Printed materials, such as brochures, are useful in helping convey planning messages.

4.1.2

The ways to promote planning messages are practically limitless



Puget Sound Regional Council

One of the collaborative planning meetings held to develop the Puget Sound "Destination 2030" transportation plan.

to highlight the expertise, activities, and efforts of your department, firm, or organization. Consider including staff photos and biographies, descriptions of services, and notices about upcoming events and meetings. Your page or site may be the first introduction someone has to you and your department, whether an elected official, developer, or engaged citizen, so make sure the content is current, informative, and engaging. For more ideas about effective communications through websites, see Section 9, E-Communications.

- **Timeline.** A calendar of activities over a 6-month to 12-month period.

For a sample day-to-day communications plan, see Section 10 (Appendices).

4.2 Inter-department communications

Since the work of a city planning office touches nearly every department within a city or county government, investing time to ensure your colleagues understand how plans and planning can help them in their jobs will help build broad support within government for planning. “The thing you have to realize,” says Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Planning Director John Dugan, AICP, “is that a comprehensive plan is...just not the Planning Department’s plan. It also belongs to police, to parks, to other city departments and residents. We all need to work together to put it into play.”²

4.2.1

Informal conversations between planners and staff members of other departments are important

Several factors can influence inter-department communications including the location of the planning department and workplace culture. “In many cities, the office space that planners occupy is located in obscure and out-of-the-way places—often in basements, attics and annexes—far away from the offices and meeting rooms where official decisions are actually made,”

notes author Gene Bunnell, AICP. “In Westminster, Colorado, the offices planners occupy are located on the second floor of city hall, right across from the city manager’s office, thereby encouraging frequent and informal communication.”³



City of Westminster

Westminster city hall, where the planning department is located next to the city manager’s office, helping facilitate informal communications between staff members of the two offices.

Besides office location, there are numerous opportunities for planning department staff in Westminster to work with employees from other city departments and offices. This has been accomplished, Bunnell continues, through the Development Review Committee, an ad hoc group made up of the city manager, assistant city manager, director of the Department of Community Development, and the planners, managers, or engineers involved with the projects under discussion. The Review

Committee, which meets weekly and has continued for more than 25 years, studies development proposals, discusses issues, and sets policy direction. Westminster also has structured the community development office to include both planners and engineers so as to help them understand and respect each other's perspectives.⁴

Implementing the Southside neighborhood revitalization plan in the late 1990s in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina, involved \$5 million and the efforts of 20 city departments. The culmination of years of focus, public participation, and plan-making now depended on bringing together a team of municipal employees who were used to working autonomously. A new style and culture of how city staff members would work and communicate with each other was needed if implementation of the Southside plan was to succeed.



City of Greensboro

Implementation of the Southside revitalization plan in Greensboro, North Carolina, involved planners working with 20 city departments.

4.2.2

Team approach critical to implementing Greensboro, North Carolina, plan

A consultant was retained to help create a strategy and plan for carrying out the project, recalls Sue Schwartz, FAICP, chief of neighborhood planning for Greensboro's housing and development department. The consultant then brought the department staff together for a two-day retreat. From there a one-on-one outreach effort was undertaken by Housing and Community Development to get individual point persons on board from each of the other city departments that would be involved. These individuals became part of an inter-departmental team that would lead the implementation effort.

Weekly staff meetings were held to keep everyone informed. A computer software program also was used to create a timeline and identify critical tasks, milestones, and deadlines. "It was pretty basic stuff," Schwartz says, yet a challenge since it marked the first time the city had undertaken a project of this size. "Little victories were important."

Acting as a mentor and coach, the consultant also helped team members keep things in perspective, talk through issues, and, when necessary, served as a devil's advocate. Looking back, Schwartz says the process came down to basic project management steps. It also brought about fundamental changes to the way Greensboro city departments work and interact with each other, enabling them now to manage even larger projects and programs.

4.3 Dollar value of planning

"Planning is the last thing—not the first thing—that a community should cut from the local budget. Planning, when done well, produces value and benefits that far exceed its costs."⁵

— Gene Bunnell

How much is spent on a per capita basis for planning in your community? In all likelihood, it is a fraction of what is spent for police and fire protection or other municipal services. *Making Places Special* author Bunnell found the public expenditures per capita for planning in the 10 communities he profiled ranged between \$4.34 and \$35, with the average being \$9.04.⁶

The positive economic returns from revitalizing a deteriorating waterfront, business district, or neighborhood often are attributed to the development that occurs, not the plan that inspired and guided the development. Similarly, development that requires the collaboration of planners, developers, elected officials, and others doesn't begin generating new taxes for the community until construction is completed. For these reasons, it's important that planners talk about the economic contributions that result from good plans and planning, including the creation of long-term value and higher returns on both public and private investments.

There are many ways to describe the value and benefits of good planning—reduced capital expenditures, tax savings, increased property values, and so forth. Examples, particularly from advocates of smart growth, abound:

4.3.1

**New Jersey
plan would save
taxpayers
millions annually**

- An economic assessment of the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan found that implementing the plan over a 20-year period would reduce road, water, and sewer infrastructure costs in the state by \$2.3 billion or \$115 million a year; reduce fiscal deficits to municipalities, counties, and school districts as a result of new growth and development by \$160 million a year; save 113,000 acres of agricultural and environmentally fragile land; and increase the property tax base of urban communities 6.5 times more than what would occur if the plan were not implemented.⁷

4.3.2

**Boosting Rhode
Island tax revenues
through planning**

- A study for Grow Smart Rhode Island estimated that urban decay and suburban sprawl will cost state taxpayers \$1.43 billion between 2000 and 2020, or an average of \$71.6 million a year compared to growth and development that is more compact and directed toward existing urban centers. Over half of that cost, \$782 million, involves lost tax revenues to the state's five urban core areas—Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.⁸

4.3.3

**Billions in savings
from Chicago
Metropolis 2020**

- Implementing the strategies outlined in the Chicago Metropolis 2020 plan, which received APA's Daniel Burnham National Planning Award in 2004, would reduce the cost of new streets, and water and sewer services by \$3.7 billion. Adopting other strategies in the plan would keep 300 square miles of open space undeveloped, and nearly double the number of new households (37 percent) in the region residing within a half-mile of a transit station.⁹

Another way to discuss the value of planning involves describing the dollar value of new investment associated with plan implementation.

Bringing together leaders from the Planning Department, Redevelopment Agency, and Mayor's Office of Housing, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom held a news conference where he called "for a 'renaissance of housing construction' in downtown San Francisco and South of Market, saying the city is on the verge of approving three major neighborhood plans that could create 11,000 new housing units."



San Francisco Planning Department

Implementation of a land-use plan for the Rincon Hill neighborhood, shown here, is part of a larger San Francisco redevelopment effort that will generate more than \$3.2 billion in new construction.

"Newsom said proposals for Rincon Hill and the Transbay Terminal and Mid-Market redevelopment districts would also generate \$3.2 billion in construction and create 18,000 jobs."¹⁰

4.4 Dispelling myths, misinformation

Fear of change to a neighborhood or community often is one of the underlying causes of misinformation about plans or projects involving increased density, infill development, smart growth, workforce housing, and other issues. Debate and controversy often shape discussions about these topics, especially when there is a specific development proposal or site plan upon which critics are focused. In such instances, an important part of a planner's communication efforts is separating myth from fact.

Fact sheets, based on credible and authoritative sources of information, are one way to counter misleading and inaccurate information. State and national reports and studies are often useful and authoritative sources of information. To be most effective at the local level, include facts, information, and examples from your community. To help planners and others counter mistaken ideas about affordable housing in California, for example, the California Planning Roundtable and California Department of Housing and Community Development published a 12-page report, "Myths and Facts About Affordable and High Density Housing," in 2002. (Website link: <http://www.cproundtable.org/cprwww/docs/mythsnfacts.pdf>)

Workshops or conferences are another way to address sensitive issues and promote better understanding among different stakeholders or audiences. Planners and city officials in Albuquerque, New Mexico, did this in November 2004 to address compact growth. This is "not about whether we're going to grow, whether we're going to have density, but how we're going to achieve those things," Mayor Martin Chavez said at the conference.¹¹

Whatever the communications opportunity—speaking engagement, public meeting, workshop, charrette, media interview, printed newsletter, website, or other venue—have facts, figures, and examples on hand that can be used to counter-act mistaken information or ideas.

4.4.1

California Planning Roundtable report dispels housing myths

4.5 Information campaigns

4.5.1

Information campaigns can be designed for different purposes

“Burnham’s work [1909 Chicago Plan] became an instant legacy not only because of its inspirational vision...but also because it was followed up with an aggressive public awareness campaign...[that was] unprecedented.”¹²

— Heather Smith

An information campaign can be a valuable tool when undertaking an extensive planning effort. Campaigns can be designed to address any number of needs or issues, such as increasing audience awareness and understanding about a particular issue. This was the goal of a \$1 million television, radio, and print advertising campaign launched in February 2005 by Housing Illinois, a coalition of housing advocates including the City of Chicago, financial institutions, and foundations. (For more information, visit <http://www.housingillinois.org>.)

Another goal may be to generate meaningful public involvement in a comprehensive planning process, something planners in Anchorage, Alaska, did when producing their “Anchorage 2020” plan. Recognized with APA’s 2001 National Planning Award for Public Education, the outreach effort involved citizen work groups, community surveys, newspaper inserts, public forums, open houses, town meetings, and public hearings.

Information campaigns also can be designed to motivate residents to take action, such as voting in support of a favorable planning measure or initiative. The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, undertook such an effort in 1998 in order to



City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County

Logo for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg communications and public participation program developed to help secure funding to implement the area’s 2025 Transit/Land-Use Plan.

secure a long-term source of funds for implementing its 2025 Transit/Land-Use Plan. For a copy of the communications plan developed for Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, see Section 10, Appendices.

As with any effective communications effort, information campaigns need to be well thought out and have clearly defined goals and objectives. Adequate funding, proper timing, support of political leaders, and following through on commitments or promises also are important. If any of these elements are missing, the campaign is likely to falter.

4.5.2

Thousands engaged through ‘Complete Communities’ initiative in Oregon

The board of commissioners for fast-growing Clackamas County, located on the outskirts of Portland, Oregon, decided an information and public outreach campaign was the best way to engage residents about issues involving county growth. Hiring a consultant, the county launched an ambitious 18-month effort in 1999 that involved thousands of residents in discussions about common and unique community values, what makes communities complete, and future policy decisions and actions.¹³

The effort, known as Complete Communities for Clackamas County, received APA’s 2002 National Planning Award for Public Education. Although it was initiated by the commissioners and funded by the county (\$387,000), implementation was citizen-

driven. A steering committee with 60 residents worked with the consultants to refine the outreach strategy, identify potential partners, and provide volunteer facilitators and organizers.

During 2000 and 2001, volunteers facilitated or attended more than 100 meetings, festivals, county fairs, and other events. Special efforts were taken to involve Hispanic residents, the largest minority group in the county (5 percent of the population), and youths. The effort also included questionnaires mailed to every household in the county, a scientific telephone survey, door-to-door outreach, and focus groups.

Other campaign elements included a media kit (including a news release, county map, issue papers, fact sheets, and “perceptionnaire”); monthly news releases or news updates; regular coverage in the county’s newsletter, Citizen News; production of three special video programs that aired on the local government access cable channel; a special website that provided current information and encouraged participation; and two community congresses, large public meetings involving about 140 participants each, where recommendations were drafted on a number of issues including environmental quality, education, and public safety. The second community congress was broadcast live on cable television to more than 100,000 households in the county and 350,000 households in the region.¹⁴

As part of its follow-up to Complete Communities and recommendations by citizens that they have a stronger role in decisions that affect them, the county developed a second phase called Completing Connections. During this phase, two more community congresses were held and three pilot communities were selected to help develop governance models for unincorporated areas. In August 2005 the county adopted a hamlet and village ordinance that was patterned after models developed in the pilot communities with public participation.¹⁵

(For a copy of the public and media relations report for Complete Communities, visit <http://www.co.clackamas.or.us/community/finalreport/media.htm>.)

City officials in Pembroke Pines, Florida, also undertook an information campaign but to address a different challenge: in less than two months, gather enough voter support to ensure passage of a \$100 million bond referendum.



City of Pembroke Pines

Leading the way was Mayor Frank Ortis who kicked off the effort with an evening meeting for homeowner association presidents. He rallied the 200 people who attended, asking them to be ambassadors for the referendum.¹⁶

The mayor and other officials from Pembroke Pines, Florida, were joined by two citizen organizations and others that helped gain support for a \$100 million bond referendum. Voters approved the measure.

4.5.3 Information and outreach help Florida community pass \$100 million bond

Earlier that same day the city had issued its first news release about the upcoming vote, including a list of projects and capital improvements to be financed by the bonds.

Mayor Ortis spent the next month speaking with residents about the improvements and amenities the bonds would finance, including a new community center, soccer fields, and road repairs. Three weeks before the March 8 vote, the city spent approximately \$50,000 to produce and mail an information brochure to every household. Six public meetings also were held to explain how the bond revenues would be used and to answer questions.

Complementing the city's efforts were two nongovernment groups: Building Our Future Committee led by former state legislator Fred Lippman and Vote Yes for Pembroke Pines' Future led by Broward County Clerk of Courts Howard Forman. The groups solicited donations, printed and distributed brochures, and sponsored radio and newspaper ads in support of passing the bonds.¹⁷

Service clubs and individuals also played an important role in generating voter support. The West Pines Optimist Club executive board, for example, sent e-mail messages to 2,000 likely voters asking for their support. Local football commissioner Vincent Grippa also sent e-mails, reaching some 500 families with children involved in team sports. He noted that the bonds "would pay for shade covering on bleachers, playgrounds and a building at Chapel Trail where football players and cheerleaders could store their equipment."¹⁸

This targeted outreach helped offset efforts of opponents who argued against the measure because taxes on homes and other real property would rise in order to pay back the bonds. Voters going to the polls approved the bond proposal by a 52-47 percent margin. For a copy of a communications plan based on Pembroke Pines' referendum see Section 10, Appendices, Pembroke Pines Plan.

4.5.4

Service clubs and individuals played an important role in getting voter support for the bonds.

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