



Valleywide SCS Public Outreach Strategy

September 2012

Introduction

Sustainable Communities Strategies in the San Joaquin Valley

The San Joaquin Valley consists of eight distinct counties with shared issues and opportunities related to air and water quality, affordable housing, natural resources and agricultural lands, transportation systems and public health. The eight Valley Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) frequently work together on these and other regional planning issues.

Each MPO is updating their Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which will include a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). In support of these efforts, each MPO is conducting public outreach to meet legislative requirements and to develop effective, implementable plans. During the RTP/SCS planning process, they will conduct significant public outreach in their individual counties to empower residents and stakeholders of this diverse area to understand the land use and transportation planning process for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) as required by state mandates under Senate Bill (SB) 375.

While each county has its own timeline, public participation plan and set of resources and priorities for the RTP/SCS, the eight MPOs have elected to collaborate to develop and implement a Valleywide Public Outreach Strategy. In recognition of their shared interests and collaboration, the MPOs received a Proposition 84 grant to assist with SCS modeling and public outreach.

The purpose of the Valleywide SCS Outreach Strategy is to provide a project identity and consistent messaging for the SCS, while supporting individual county outreach efforts. This strategy describes the approach, target audiences, methods and priorities for Valleywide SCS Outreach.

Roles and Responsibilities

The eight San Joaquin Valley MPOs will be collaborating on the development of the Valleywide Outreach Strategy and advising the consulting team on the project identity, tools and resources to be developed in the course of the project. The Fresno Council of Governments (COG) is the contract manager and will be coordinating communications



between the MPOs and the consultant team. The consultant team will work collaboratively with the MPOs to identify specific project priorities and deliverables.

MIG and InterEthnica (the MIG Team) will develop elements of the outreach strategy that are applicable across the eight-county region. This will include a project identity (or brand) and key messages. The consultant team will also develop templates and tools that can be customized and applied locally as needed by each MPO. The MPOs will be responsible for adapting and tailoring the tools and templates for use in their local communities and for local outreach. The MIG Team will provide periodic, ongoing consultation and strategic advice.

The Valleywide Outreach Strategy will build upon and leverage past and current outreach work. The strategy considers the MPO timelines for SCS plans so that outreach can be successfully completed during critical points in the process and influence decision-making as appropriate (see attached timeline).

Goals

The overarching goals of the Valleywide SCS Outreach Strategy include the following:

- Raise awareness and understanding of the RTP/SCS development
- Clearly articulate the need for this planning process
- Communicate the benefits of completing an SCS
- Build positive perceptions of the process and the MPOs
- Counter misinformation about regional planning efforts and local government
- Build relationships with key community organizations to foster ongoing community involvement
- Gather constructive, meaningful input to shape the SCS scenarios

Public outreach objectives include the following:

- Effectively communicate technical information to multiple audiences
- Create meaningful opportunities for open and inclusive community dialogue
- Provide multiple opportunities and methods for collecting public input
- Encourage participation by a broad cross-section of the regional population
- Target diverse audiences, including hard-to-reach and underserved populations
- Actively engage community interest groups and stakeholders throughout the planning process



Strategy

Approach and Framework

This outreach strategy is based on the idea that individuals typically need three “touch points” to truly engage with a brand or process. This outreach strategy targets key audiences at multiple levels and across platforms to raise awareness of the project, inform them of key project elements and encourage and provide opportunity for meaningful input into the process.

The tiered, multi-objective Valleywide Outreach Strategy is designed to

- Promote a consistent, concise, high-level message about the SCS throughout the eight-county area,
- Identify and reach out to stakeholder groups and community leaders, and
- Leverage staff capacity and provide tools for engaging residents.

The messages, tools and techniques developed during this process will focus on specific needs identified with the MPOs, including engaging underserved and hard-to-reach populations, dealing with organized opposition to regional planning, and implementing creative, out-of-the-box outreach techniques.

Tier 1: High-Level Messaging and Media Buy

The project identity and messaging will help raise awareness of the SCS process across the Valley. The MIG Team will develop a project identity that is culturally sensitive yet relevant across a large geographic area.

The project identity (or brand) will consist of a logo, brand or tagline, and look and feel that will apply to all media spots, workshop materials and other templates provided to MPOs. A graphic standards guide will help staff use these materials in their day-to-day work and outreach efforts.

We will develop messages for target audiences that clearly articulate in plain language

- What* the Sustainable Communities Strategy is,
- Why* it is important to the future of the region, and
- How* stakeholders can influence the planning process.

These messages will be integrated into a variety of materials and products, including media spots, talking points for elected officials and FAQs in all of the languages commonly spoken in the Central Valley.

A combination of print, radio and online media spots will be developed for region-wide distribution across a variety of mainstream and ethnic media outlets. The media buy will



be used to raise awareness of the project, build positive perceptions of local government work and encourage stakeholder participation in the RTP/SCS development.

The MIG Team will develop and present a recommendation to the MPOs on the most cost-effective media buy package, based on the regional media market and target audiences.

The project identity, key messages and media spots will be developed in consultation with MPO staff. These will be based on input gathered at the project kick-off meeting and from responses to a branding questionnaire. The projects will be designed to invoke positive perceptions of a constructive process and avoid negative connotations or controversial topics and images.

Communications and messaging tools including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Talking Points for elected officials and staff have been identified as priority resources and will be developed in September under Task 2 of the contract.

The MPOs have identified the need for a video that describes and defines the SCS in the context of the RTP and regional planning. The MIG team will produce a short video that can be shared on the MPOs' and partners' websites and used for the media spots.

Tier 2: Community-Based, Grassroots and Grasstops Outreach

The Valley MPOs are seeking participation from a wide range of interest groups in the development of the RTP/SCS. These may include landowners, transportation advocates, and neighborhood associations. The MPOs also agree on the importance of targeting hard-to-reach or traditionally under-served communities so that they may have an active role in this planning effort and to ensure that suitable impact and opportunities will result from the plan. This includes low-income, ethnic minority, disabled, and other populations.

A successful outreach effort will enable people with different backgrounds to work together in sharing information and in leading participants to gain confidence and trust in the RTP/SCS process. Effective strategies for reaching a diverse cross-section of the San Joaquin Valley population include both grasstops and grassroots strategies.

“Grasstops” strategies use trusted community leaders from diverse cultural backgrounds to act as trusted, informed ambassadors for the planning process. These may include directors of CBOs, environmental justice activists and other community leaders. Bilingual leaders and activists are particularly adept at serving as liaisons to minority populations and at accessing established communications networks.



“Grassroots” strategies engage any interested individual to provide input into the planning process and to share and disseminate project information with others.

Many MPOs in the San Joaquin Valley have had recent success working with public agency, non-profit or other organizations to engage residents in public processes. The MIG Team will offer strategic outreach assistance as needed to support MPOs in their efforts to access community leaders and organizations. This may include:

- Techniques to identify and contact groups with relevant missions,
- Strategies to engage leaders to serve as gatekeepers to target populations,
- Methods to most effectively gather input from these groups, and
- Ways to communicate the value of participating in the SCS process.

Tier 3: Creative and Innovative Outreach Tools

The Valleywide Outreach Strategy is designed to leverage staff capabilities and build upon outreach successes and existing relationships. The MIG Team will develop a suite of creative, low-cost outreach tools that can be used by local staff throughout the public involvement process. This set of simple, easy-to-use tools can be used as a “menu” from which MPO staff can choose depending on the outreach opportunity. It will emphasize creative techniques to capture the public’s attention as well as tools that can be adapted and scaled to gather input in many settings and with different time constraints. The MIG Team will also recommend online and interactive engagement tools, including social media, for information dissemination and data gathering as needed.

Several tools can be packaged in an Outreach Toolkit, a simple but effective “meeting-on-the-go” resource. Facilitator guides and recording tools can help support MPO staff and other project champions in collecting input and facilitating discussions in a variety of settings.

Outreach tools for in-person or “high-touch” outreach opportunities may include the following:

- Workbooks or worksheets
- Card games
- Voting or dot exercises
- Event tabling materials including prize wheels, coloring stations, large maps and displays
- Print and large-print questionnaires
- Comment forms
- Discussion guides

Electronic, “high-tech” tools and methods may include:

- Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts, policies and practice guides



- Keypad and web-based polling
- Online questionnaires or surveys
- Online planning games or voting exercises
- Crowd-sourcing / online submission platforms
- Videos

Other materials to be developed by MIG for customization and use by MPOs for outreach activities, workshops and project communications may include the following:

- Press release template and sample content
- Newsletter, e-Newsletter and e-blast template and sample content
- Newspaper ads
- Meeting flyer
- Fact sheets
- Meeting agendas and workshop design
- Power Point Presentation template
- FAQ
- Talking Points
- Facilitation tips
- Directional signs
- Sign-in sheets

All materials will be provided electronically to MPOs so that they can be modified, customized, updated and posted to MPO and partner websites.

Translation and Interpretation

To successfully reach the diverse communities of the Valley, all SCS program collateral must be translated. Translations should be adjusted so that the level of education and dialect of the end-user is considered in order to afford the highest possible level of comprehension. This can be accomplished by engaging a reviewer from the local community to assure that the target audience will understand and trust the information.

As resources allow, online materials and websites should be translated. Informational phone lines should also include in-language recordings and options for the users to receive and relay information. This can be accomplished by setting up a phone tree or message center. A cost-effective in-language campaign and interpretation can be provided by engaging the services of a local bilingual resident who is trained to deliver program-specific information. These bilingual outreach staffers can also work as program spokespersons to deliver messages to ethnic media and participate in media interviews in their native language.



Key Messages

Using input from MPO staff and strategic communications best practices, a set of project key messages will be developed. The key messages will communicate the benefits of the SCS for local government and residents and how it builds upon and leverages other regional planning efforts. Key messages are used to develop talking points and other written materials (such as MPO newsletter articles) to reinforce the project identity and high-level messages.

The key messages will be organized into five categories or “messages pillars”. The following are potential message categories:

- Expanding housing and transportation choices
- Strengthening the Valley economy
- Preserving and protecting natural resources, farmland and open spaces
- Ensuring the value of public funds and attracting funding
- Improving our communities and quality of life
- Promoting public health, air quality and social equity



Target Audiences and Outreach Methods

The following table identifies key target audiences for RTP/SCS outreach and recommended methods. It is not intended as a comprehensive list of outreach techniques.

AUDIENCE	OUTREACH OBJECTIVES	OUTREACH METHODS
General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear information about SCS and public involvement opportunities • Exchange information related to the SCS and key issues • Collect input to determine the preferred SCS scenario 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Media Buy • Community Workshops • Public Hearings • Community Events
Community-Based, Advocacy and Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange information related to the SCS and key issues • Collect input to determine the preferred SCS scenario • Build partnerships for ongoing engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Community Workshops • Public Hearings • Advisory Committees or Working Groups • Speakers bureau / presentations
Ethnic Minorities and Under-Represented Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange information related to the SCS and key issues • Collect input to determine the preferred SCS scenario • Ensure participation of traditionally under-represented groups • Build partnerships for ongoing engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Media / Ethnic Media buy • Government-to-government tribal consultations • Co-sponsored or hosted workshops • Speakers bureau / presentations
Businesses and other Private Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange information related to the SCS and key issues • Collect input to determine the preferred SCS scenario 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Advisory Committees or Working Groups • Speakers bureau / presentations



Evaluation and Monitoring

All tools and templates will be designed to facilitate the documentation of outreach efforts as well as collection and analysis of input. This will allow for efficient use of staff time and easy reporting for legal purposes. Timely, easy-to-understand summary reports contribute to transparency and build trust in the public process. These strategies also ensure that a variety of viewpoints are represented and reported, even if some groups or viewpoints dominate a particular event. Evaluation and documentation also maintains and grows stakeholder lists and informs and improves future outreach programs, including RTP/SCS updates.

Periodic evaluation of efforts and results will allow for adjustments to the outreach strategy to ensure efficient methods are used, and an appropriate representation or cross-section of the Valley population is reached. The MIG Team will hold a mid-course evaluation via conference call or WebEx with MPO staff to discuss successes and challenges, and recommend adjustments to the outreach strategy as needed.

Implementation Timeline

The majority of San Joaquin Valley MPOs are required to complete their SCS by the end of 2013, and several have already begun RTP or SCS outreach. Recognizing this, the proposed timeline for developing the project identity, priority tools (including FAQs and talking points) and media spots has been accelerated. The MIG Team will provide ongoing consultation throughout the duration of the project. A preliminary proposed timeline is shown in the matrix attached to this document.