Creating a Community Engagement Campaign:
Making Sustainable Communities Happen

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Purpose

*Making Sustainable Communities Happen* invites residents, public officials, business owners, planners and developers to think of new ways to create places in which all can thrive as our communities and cities continue to grow.

It is more than simply a PowerPoint presentation. It is a tool citizens use to identify and determine effective ways to create sustainable communities where people want to live and work, now and in the future.

The primary target audience is: residents; workers; community, neighborhood and service organizations; citizen planning and leadership committees; planning, transportation, and community/economic development departments; civic leaders; local business owners; and other organizations and groups involved in community planning and development.

What are Sustainable Communities?

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are places that are attractive, safe and healthy for the environment as well as for the people who live there. A sustainable community has a set of qualities that makes it a *place*, not simply an anonymous cluster of homes, roads and strip malls. Having a broad range of housing choices and affordability is essential to a sustainable community, but so is the substance between the homes and what it offers to the people who live, work, and play there.

Crafting a Community Engagement Campaign

There are 4 essential components in making this community engagement campaign successful.

1. The presentation must show local or familiar examples of attractive, sustainable places where people live and work. People are more open to discussions of *change* - in this case, how to develop and revitalize neighborhoods in ways that differ from conventional community development in the Valley - when they can see examples from places they are familiar with or that can be visited locally, much more so than from examples of cities in different parts of the country. Place identity is an important component in placemaking efforts.

2. The presentation media must be sufficiently adaptable and flexible to accommodate new developments and strategies that may occur over time. Because metropolitan areas are so large and diverse, the media must allow the presentation to be tailored to fit the specific agenda and characteristics of the participating organization or community.

We use several media sources. The campaign's central focus is the PowerPoint presentation (a PDF version of the *Making Sustainable Communities Happen* campaign that the ASU Stardust Center
produced for the Phoenix metropolitan area is available at http://stardust.asu.edu/research_resources/detail.php?id=31. Since only so much information can be presented in 30 minutes and because you want to give people something tangible after the presentation that they can refer back to and show neighbors and colleagues, the PowerPoint is supplemented with an 8-page brochure. The brochure and a web-based list of additional resources provide more detailed description and examples of many of the issues, strategies, action plans, and places briefly profiled in the presentation.

3. The program must have broad sponsorship. To enrich the campaign:

- assemble an advisory panel. The panel must represent a diversity of people, institutions, geographic areas, community organizations, governmental agencies, and industry sectors, both private and non-profit. The panel members provide input and feedback throughout the development of the presentation and also became a conduit for delivering the message;
- develop a diverse set of funding sponsors who become invested in the campaign. For the Phoenix campaign, sponsors come from various industry sectors, including financial, real estate development, arts and culture, health, community development, architecture, and others;
- train a cadre of leaders and speakers who go out and make this presentation to a wide range of organizations and who promote the campaign in the community. Members of this team should come from a diverse background and geographic area in order to insure that each speaker is appropriate for each audience.

4. Effective visual communication can crystallize the issues, ideas and visions, and convey these in a compelling and informative manner to public audiences. Essential to the process are graphic designers skilled in visual information design and communication as well as participatory and collaborative practices. Also, urbanadvantages.com provides a wealth of visual urban design overlay examples that are extremely useful in portraying incremental changes in one’s community. A particular benefit is that the library of examples can be organized by region of the country, allowing one to match the building type/age, street patterns, landscaping and vegetation to one’s general locale.

**Structure of Our Speakers Bureau**

Volunteer speakers come from different areas of metropolitan Phoenix and from different industry sectors. When an organization requests a presentation, we match a speaker with the audience’s interest. For example, if a parks and recreation group requests a presentation, we are able to call upon a speaker with a background in recreational and land use planning. Currently we have over a dozen volunteer speakers and average one presentation a week.

Volunteers attend a 2-hour training session, receive a speakers’ handbook with speaking/preparation tips and extensive background information of the material and examples in the PowerPoint, and are provided with “talking points” to use with the PowerPoint.

At least a week before the presentation, the speaker phones or meets with the organizer of the group to find out more about the nature of the organization, pressing issues or anticipated plans/developments it may be considering, and what the group hopes to accomplish by seeing the presentation. With this preparation, the presentation and group discussion can be tailored to help uncover and address development, policy and/or funding opportunities. The organizer raises these issues, but the speaker/presentation provides a platform of information from which ideas can be generated and debated.
Also knowing more about the organization and its intent helps the speaker tailor the PowerPoint presentation to focus on those types of places and strategies that best reflect the issues or concerns the organization wants to discuss. In this way, the speaker can choose for each audience specific sections of the PowerPoint to present.

To not only track but evaluate the engagement campaign, we send an evaluation form to the organization after the presentation.

**Structure of the PowerPoint Presentation**

PowerPoint’s strength is its flexibility and adaptability. In most cases, the entire *Making Sustainable Communities Happen* PowerPoint is not shown, but only those sections that are most relevant to the particular group’s agenda (see section above).

The structure of the PowerPoint for the Valley of the Sun (i.e. metro Phoenix) campaign is organized in this manner:

- **Slide 1:** Introductions. Purpose of the presentation.
- **Slide 2:** Opportunity for audience members to voice what they like about living in their communities and what they would like in the future. Audio-video clips of various people in metro Phoenix talking about what they like about their communities are often used as prompts.
- **Slide 3:** Phoenix is a young city relative to other American cities. And like any young person, now is the time to take stock of where we are, consider where we want to be, and direct our energies to getting there. We need to decide which path to take.
- **Slides 4-17:** Stories of 3 different places in the Valley that are choosing new paths, new ways to grow. Each is a bit different since “one size doesn’t fit all.” They are *not* presented as “best practices” but as three local examples that are developing neighborhoods or communities differently instead of taking the conventional development path. We look at and talk about them to see what lessons we can learn.
- **Slides 18-27:** Shows 8 different strategies for making sustainable communities, most of which have been used by at least two of the previous examples. Images are from these 3 places as well as other places in the Phoenix area. The last strategy – community engagement – is shown in every presentation since it represents what the audience is engaging in. The 8 strategies are:
  - Mix land uses
  - Create a range of housing choices
  - Foster thriving economies
  - Environmentally responsive design
  - Variety of transportation choices
  - Compact development
  - Make places safe
  - Promote healthy living
  - Community engagement from the start
• **Slides 28-39:** Sustainability can start small. It can occur on a block or intersection in one's neighborhood. Three series of urban design overlays show the transition that can occur, step by step, of applying the 8 strategies (above) to neighborhoods, blocks and streets typical of the audience's community.

• **Slides 40-44:** There are 3 reasons why it is important to act now and in this particular community. To be convincing these reasons have to be place-specific. For the Valley of the Sun:

  ➢ We are a desert;
  ➢ We are a young city, mostly constructed after World War II, and we don't have a deep history of building more sustainably like older cities;
  ➢ We are growing in terms of numbers of people and the diversity of people living here, in terms of age, income, culture, occupation, living situation.

• **Slide 45:** It's time to move ahead.

• **Slide 46:** Many members of our community supported this project because they understand that our health and well-being, as individuals and communities, depends on how we grow. Funding sponsors and PowerPoint designers/researchers are listed.

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**People Involved in the Development and Implementation**

*Teresa Brice,* executive director of LISC Phoenix, planted the seed and championed this effort throughout its development and launch. Recognizing that this effort needed to be a collaborative one involving different sectors throughout the Valley, she assembled an advisory panel of 27 members who contributed valuable feedback at every step of its development and implementation. Members of this advisory panel and funding sponsors are listed at the end of the brochure and on the ASU Stardust web site at: http://stardust.asu.edu/research_resources/detail.php?id=31

*Sherry Ahrentzen,* associate director of research of the ASU Stardust Center for Affordable Homes and the Family, orchestrated the development of the multi-faceted campaign, scripted the brochure, and compiled a team of dedicated, resourceful research assistants including *Lisa Dwyer, Andrea Garfinkel-Castro,* and *Samantha Samples.* Architects/designers at the Stardust Center - *Ernesto Fonseca, Daniel Glenn,* and *Nic Smith* - also contributed their talents. *Nan Ellin,* director of the Urban & Metropolitan Studies program at ASU’s College of Public Programs, was instrumental in pulling together the presentation and speakers’ handbook, training speakers and getting the word out. *Mookesh Patel,* director of the Visual Communication Design department at ASU, and research assistant *Seungen Kim* provided not only compelling graphic design but also invaluable advice on enhancing and structuring the PowerPoint and brochure. *Jon Denker* photographed most of the sites seen in the presentation and brochure, sometimes in the most trying of circumstances. And a number of committed individuals - including *Sherry Ahrentzen, Laurel Arndt, Mathew Avrhani, Teresa Brice, Debra Duerr, Lisa Dwyer, Mollyann Garrett, Randy Grant, Jeff Hale, Gen Johnson, Kathryn Lansinki, Jim Larson, Liz Lonetti, Marci Rosenberg,* and others - volunteered as speakers to engage groups, officials and organizations throughout the Valley in thinking about ways to grow sustainable communities in their own neighborhoods.
For More Information

ASU Stardust Center for Affordable Homes and the Family is recognized as a leader in providing assistance and expertise in planning and developing sustainable communities. For more information, please see their web site (stardust.asu.edu) or contact Sherry Ahrentzen, Associate Director of Research, at sherry.ahrentzen@asu.edu.