

Plan Bay Area 2050: Digital Alternatives for Round 2 Public Engagement

Subject: Overview of digital alternatives to in-person public engagement activities for Plan Bay Area 2050's second round of engagement (spring/summer 2020), which focuses on obtaining public and stakeholder input on the Plan's Draft Blueprint.

Background: As the Bay Area contends with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that requires residents to maintain physical distancing, MTC/ABAG staff are seeking alternatives for planned in-person public engagement activities originally envisioned for spring/summer 2020. While COVID-19 has created severe challenges for many Bay Area residents, we are seeking to not only maintain but expand our level of public engagement during this difficult time. By leveraging a suite of digital approaches – which may allow us to better reach under-represented groups that have historically faced barriers to participation – we are striving to reach a broader audience of Bay Area residents than ever before.

Last summer, staff presented the Plan Bay Area 2050 public engagement strategy to the MTC Planning and ABAG Administrative Committees, which highlighted a variety of formats for in-person workshops for the Plan's second round. As a reminder, Plan Bay Area engagement is conducted in three phases or rounds, which correspond to key milestones in the Plan. Currently, the Plan is in its second round, which will culminate in the release of the Plan's Draft Blueprint. The proposed activities for this round had involved a variety of in-person options, including open house-style workshops, focus groups and meetings. Because of the recent limitations to public gatherings and the uncertainty surrounding the timing of shelter-in-place orders, staff have created a suite of newly-adapted digital engagement tactics that will supersede previously proposed activities for 2020, outlined in Attachment A. While the means of conducting the public engagement will be different, we will be seeking feedback on the same critical milestone – the release of the Draft Blueprint – as well as input on how to refine it further in the Final Blueprint phase.

Importantly, considerations about the public outreach requirement in Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) guide the ability to count digital engagement toward the in-person requirement¹. However, we do anticipate that the public health emergency will continue this summer and that restrictions on in-person gatherings will require MTC and ABAG to hold digital workshops to ensure the health and safety of the public. We are monitoring the situation closely, however, and will reassess the situation if things change.

Next Steps: Staff will use the input from Round 2 public engagement to inform strategy revisions for the Plan Bay Area 2050 Final Blueprint. Staff will return to this committee with a consolidated report on the results of the Round 2 public engagement in September 2020.

¹ SB 375 requires three in-person workshops for counties with more than 500,000 people (Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Sonoma) and one in-person workshop for counties with fewer than 500,000 people (Marin, Napa, Solano).

Recommendation: Information

Attachments: Attachment A: Digital Alternatives for Plan Bay Area 2050 Public Engagement



Therese W. McMillan

A T T A C H M E N T A

Digital Alternatives for Plan Bay Area 2050 Public Engagement

Due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and associated limitations to public gatherings, staff has developed a revised Plan Bay Area 2050 Round 2 public engagement approach, focusing on a suite of digital engagement tactics. The engagement will focus on the Plan's Draft Blueprint, slated for release this summer, as MTC/ABAG consider any further refinements for the Final Blueprint this fall. Details of the digital engagement tactics are outlined below, separated into three timeframes.

1. Preparation: Spring 2020

a. Digital Promotion of Plan Bay Area 2050's Draft Blueprint

The MTC/ABAG social media team have created a digital promotion campaign for the Plan's Draft Blueprint. Similar to the successful promotion of the Plan's first round of engagement, the campaign will promote key aspects of the Draft Blueprint online to the Plan's target audience. The digital promotion campaign will include the following two components, with the campaign debuting in early July and concluding in mid-August.

- i. Interactive campaign on Draft Blueprint's outcomes: Creation of an interactive promotional campaign to be used specifically for social media channels and the Plan Bay Area 2050 website, paired with interactive elements (e.g., video, survey). This campaign is aimed at increasing the Plan's participant base and getting key input from its target audience; and
- ii. Promotional campaign for Digital Workshops on Draft Blueprint's outcomes: Creation of a campaign that will promote the digital workshops to be held via Zoom (more on digital workshops in Round 2: July and August timeframe below).

b. Animated Video

The video will be used to explain the strategies from the Draft Blueprint and will be used as an educational piece for the public. The video is scheduled to be released in mid-to-late June and will be promoted via our social media channels.

2. Round 2: May and June 2020 Timeframe

a. Statistically Valid Telephone Poll

The poll has been a key public engagement component for the past several Plans, providing useful data to the Commission and ABAG Board about various Plan elements. This Plan's poll will ask the Bay Area public about the 25 Blueprint strategies approved for study in February 2020, all of which aim to make the Bay Area more affordable, connected, diverse, healthy and vibrant by the year 2050. The results of the poll will provide key data to assist the Commission and ABAG Board in refining the Final Blueprint, which is slated for

approval in fall 2020. Work on the poll is underway with plans to go into the field in July.

b. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs): Digital Focus Groups

In lieu of the planned in-person focus groups for the CBOs, staff conducted focus groups in a digital format. The focus groups have served as listening sessions for the participants, who provided input on ways to improve or alter the Draft Blueprint's strategies in advance of the Final Blueprint. The focus groups have included a presentation and an open discussion session that sought input on current challenges as well as strategies that would help address these challenges.

In order to lessen obstacles for CBO participants to participate digitally, staff provided both a webinar and conference call option. Staff scheduled seven focus groups, six of which occurred in the month of May. The final focus group will be held in mid-June. These focus groups have been very successful as participants have been able to provide input on transportation, housing, environmental and economic issues that affect them, while also providing input on the strategies in the Draft Blueprint.

c. Webinars and Coffee Conversations (ongoing)

Since the launch of Plan Bay Area 2050 last fall, staff have successfully used webinars as a tool to disseminate key information and engage partners and stakeholders. The webinars have continued to provide information on elements of the Draft Blueprint and serve as important tool to seek input from partners, stakeholders and informed members of the public.

Coffee Conversations bring together partners, stakeholders, private sector business groups and/or members of the public with MTC/ABAG staff in a casual and intimate setting, potentially over a cup of coffee. During shelter-in-place, staff converted these in-person meetings to a digital format, holding a coffee conversation in May with a focused discussion on the topic of climate resilience. *The event proved to be a success, attracting approximately 40 members of the public. We hope to hold more Coffee Conversations over the next few months.*

3. Round 2: Mid-July through Mid-August 2020 Timeframe

a. Digital Open House Workshops

In lieu of the Senate Bill 375-mandated in-person open house-style workshops, staff are proposing to conduct digital open house workshops. Using the Zoom platform, staff will hold online workshops using presentations and information sharing, surveys and comments via the Question and Answer function. These workshops will provide detailed information on the Draft Blueprint and pose key questions on the Blueprint's outcomes. The use of breakout rooms will allow for in-depth discussions between participants and staff, in particular about ways to strengthen the Final Blueprint this fall. The workshop will end with a wrap-up and a survey requesting final input.

Staff anticipates that this format will attract more participants than traditional in-person workshops, enabling detailed input from a diverse group of participants. The digital workshops will be held at different times of the day and different days of the week to ensure maximum participation. To enable participation from limited English proficient residents, Zoom has a language interpreter function that facilitates on-the-spot interpretation. As such, Spanish and Cantonese/Mandarin interpreters will be provided using this function. Input collected from the digital workshops will inform the Final Blueprint.

b. Digital Tribal Summit

The in-person tribal summit also will be conducted digitally via Zoom. Information on Plan Bay Area 2050 and the Transportation Improvement Program, along with an update from Caltrans, will be presented via a digital workshop format. The size of the group will lend itself to facilitated verbal comments/questions session. Government-to-government consultation will also be available via Zoom or phone. The summit will be scheduled in late July or early August.

c. Non-Digital Engagement

While the vast majority of Bay Area residents have access to either a smartphone or an internet connection at home, we realize that the digital engagement cannot rely on a “one size fits all” approach. In order to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate, staff is working on a suite of non-digital communication options that will both educate and seek input on the Draft Blueprint from targeted members of the public. Options include:

- Detachable mail-in survey or comment card in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese
- Text/SMS platforms for engaging CBO communities (dependent on cost)
- Voicemail to be used as a “listening line” where people can leave comments
- Outreach toolkit on the Blueprint, for partners to use in newsletters and other promotion

Working with CBOs and members of the Policy Advisory Council, staff will target those who have limited internet access to ensure everyone who is interested has an opportunity to provide input this summer.