



COUNTY OF MARIN RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

REPORT TITLE: "Public Engagement in Marin: A Pathway to Inclusive Governance"
REPORT DATE: June 15, 2017
RESPONSE BY: County of Marin Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS

- We agree with the finding(s) numbered: **F1-F2, F5, F7, F10-11, F13-15, and F17.**
- We disagree wholly or partially with the finding(s) numbered: **F3 and F8**
- We neither agree nor disagree with the findings numbered: **F4, F6, F9, F12, and F16.**

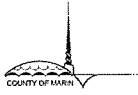
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation(s) numbered **R1-2, R4-12** have been implemented.
- Recommendation numbered **R3** has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

Date: _____

Signed: _____
President, Board of Supervisors

Number of pages attached:



Response to Findings and Recommendations
"Public Engagement in Marin"
June 26, 2017

FINDINGS

F1. Having a formal Public Engagement [PE] Plan or PE Guidelines in place helps foster better and faster community involvement.

Response: Agree.

Public engagement [PE] is a high priority at the County of Marin and is a critical part of our strategic initiatives. Part of the stated vision of the County's 2012 Public Communications Plan (<https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/departments/ad/communications/1201247adattachre p.pdf>) is to increase community engagement. That vision was derived from the County's mission statement, "**encourage meaningful participation in the governance of the County by all**" (<https://www.marincounty.org/depts/bs/boards-and-commissions/member-handbook/marin-county-mission-statement-and-defining-values>), and further reinforced by the County's 2015 5 Year Business Plan (<https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/maringov/board-actions/2015/october/1510132cao5yearplanattach.pdf>).

The formality of these plans has been helpful primarily to ensure consistency and common goals in the County, which has 22 departments with different lines of business.

F2. Not everyone conducts PE in the same way.

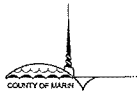
Response: Agree.

PE needs may vary by the size and focus of the department, agency or municipality as well as the size, motivation and beliefs of a specific audience. For example, the ways in which the County's Community Development Agency (CDA) conducts PE varies from how the County's Parks Department engages residents. Strategies and tactics can vary even from program to program within a single, particularly a larger department. Similarly, efforts to engage residents in Novato may vary from those used in West Marin. For engagement to be successful, the agency – or person – tasked with PE must recognize that the make-up of Marin residents is as diverse as Marin County's terrain. Therefore, there really cannot be an effective 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

F3. Agencies perception of the need for PE is in response to a controversy, not an ongoing process.

Response: Disagree.

While the County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies, as noted in response to F1 the County released its Public Communications Plan in 2012 to increase the County's direct communication with residents. Strategy 3 in the plan focuses on developing proactive methods for communicating with the public year-round, whether positive or controversial. Good PE should be frequent. Ongoing communication is required to not only build rapport, familiarity and trust with the audience, but to measure the success of those efforts and refine the approach as needed.



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The County of Marin commits to frequent PE. As some recent examples, we point to our online annual report and video illustrating achievements during the past fiscal year (<https://www.marincounty.org/2016>), a recent video highlighting the successful use of Measure A funds in our Parks Department (<https://youtu.be/jQAt0GRL4Ws>), and a fire Department video expressing thanks from residents of the Oroville fires (<https://youtu.be/X4cTK-A72fl>).

F4. Smaller municipalities do not necessarily have the need, the budget or the will to develop a formal plan.

Response: The County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies. Please see F1 for more information about the County's PE plan.

F5. Larger municipalities recognize the need for a formal PE Plan.

Response: Agree.

While the County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies, a driving force in the creation of the County's 2012 Public Communications Plan was the 2009 Marin County Community Survey. This survey found 65% of residents polled felt that the County was doing a "Fair" to "Very Poor" job of providing information about programs, important decisions, public participation opportunities, services, priorities and other newsworthy items (40% "Fair," 18% "Poor," and 7% "Very Poor."). Further, data from the 2005, 2007 and 2009 community surveys revealed a growing shift in how residents consumed information: moving from traditional newspapers as their sole source of news and incorporating the growing trend of online news and social media.

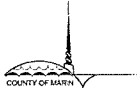
Because of that survey data, the County of Marin devoted staff members to PE and created the Public Communications Plan to provide a framework for increasing the County's PE efforts. As noted in F1, the County restated the need for, and commitment to, ongoing PE in its 2015 5 Year Business Plan.

F6. Some agencies are close to having a PE Plan; it wouldn't take too much effort to formalize one or to develop PE Guidelines.

Response: The County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies. A thorough PE plan requires input from both communication professionals and designated PE staff, but also the leaders of an agency and community members. The process requires time and effort. However, we believe the return on a well-implemented plan can be far greater than the investment.

F7. All Marin agencies agree that PE is important and all are engaged to some degree.

Response: Agree.



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While the County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies, as stated in response to F1, F3, and F5 the County of Marin agrees that PE is an important part of its mission and strategic initiatives.

F8. There is a disconnect between how agencies rate their PE efforts and how the public views their efforts.

Response: Partially disagree.

While the County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies, the County makes significant effort to reach out to residents in creative and innovative ways in order to engage a large percentage of the population. Rating PE efforts in the public sector can be subjective, since one resident may consider a story in the local newspaper good PE, while another wants to receive a postcard in the mail, see a post on Nextdoor.com, and/or complete an online comment or survey. We utilize various mediums to try to meet these needs.

From the County's perspective, available staff time, financial resources, training and available technology are a few factors that contribute to our ability to successfully conduct PE. With a dedicated communications team, we continue to focus on the most efficient and most cost-effective mediums to engage our residents.

F9. Most agencies believe they are doing a good job of PE.

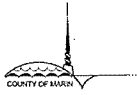
Response: The County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies. As noted in response to F8, the County of Marin believes it is doing a good job of PE with available resources. The County is continually measuring its effectiveness based on feedback and engagement from the public. In addition, the County is continually adapting its practices as Marin resident's communication preferences change and resources allow.

F10. Marinates want to be engaged more.

Response: Agree.

The survey data presented by the Grand Jury in this report indicate that Marin residents want to be more engaged, which we look to as an opportunity. At the same time, the views expressed in the Civic Grand Jury's survey results help to illustrate the complexity of PE and how difficult it is for Marin agencies to have a 100% success rate on engagement efforts. For instance, one Civil Grand Jury survey respondent stated satisfaction with Nextdoor.com outreach efforts while another claimed the Marin Independent Journal is the sole source of County news.

The County continues to monitor its success in reaching and engaging residents, while adjusting its approach as needed based on public feedback.



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F11. The public perceives a need for more and better engagement opportunities, including follow-up.

Response: Agree.

The County of Marin continually refines its communication practices to meet the needs of the public, while also acknowledging that the communication preferences of residents vary and continually evolve as new communication mediums surface. In addition, a resident's level of involvement in a County PE or decision making process greatly depends on that resident's personal investment in that topic or issue.

The County posts the outcome of major policy decisions on its website, including detailed minutes of Board of Supervisors meetings along with a high-level summary. Video and audio recordings are also posted online so residents who cannot attend in person or watch live on the website or on Comcast channel 27 can still review the meeting in its entirety. The live webcast, video and audio features are smartphone friendly so residents can tune-in on the go.

The County is expanding its use of online surveying and public comment collection. A recent example is the online poll conducted by the Community Development Agency around short-term rentals in Marin's coastal community (<http://bit.ly/2eSCXZI>).

As the Grand Jury has found, PE is a two-way street: as the public continues to provide meaningful feedback on current and desired engagement practices, the County will continue to fine-tune its outreach efforts to increase the satisfaction of residents – while also being proactive in its outreach.

F12. Only a few municipalities have an employee dedicated to PE

Response: The County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies. The County of Marin has two employees dedicated to PE at a county-wide level, an organization with 22 departments and over 2,000 employees, and a few County departments have additional staff dedicated to this effort.

F13. Building relationships between civic leaders and community-based organizations contributes to the inclusion of traditionally disenfranchised groups, increasing the amount and quality of PE – and providing support for the agencies.

Response: Agree.

Building relationships is one approach to growing the quality of PE. A number of County departments engage community partners to help inform County officials of neighborhood-specific needs, culturally sensitive considerations, and other issues when planning PE efforts or preparing for a new program or policy decision. In many cases, the involvement of community organizations and opinion leaders amplifies a program's reach and success rate.



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F14. Marin agencies are using various and multiple modes of technology to engage the public, but the public isn't necessarily aware of this.

Response: Agree.

The modes of technology commonly used by the County include: media relations (news releases, inviting reporters to preview or cover important meetings), email (subscription service), social media (Nextdoor, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn), Open Data (<https://data.marincounty.org/>), online surveying and comment forums (<https://www.marincounty.org/openmarin>), online newsroom (<https://www.marincounty.org/news>), traditional mailings and postcards, and leveraging elected officials and community partners to share messages with their networks.

F15. Moving beyond the minimum requirements of The Brown Act is essential for modern day PE.

Response: Agree.

As noted in response to F10, good PE means communicating across multiple communication channels and refining the approach based on public response and feedback. In addition, as noted in the response to F1, it's part of the County of Marin's mission to encourage meaningful participation in government by all. This means – when possible – community workshops, public hearings and pending decisions are announced well in advance of the Brown Act's 72-hour requirement. In addition, the County not only posts this information on its website, but shares updates about these workshops, hearings and decisions via social media channels, news media and its e-mail subscription service. As mentioned in response to F11, full audio and video recordings of major meetings, meeting minutes and summaries of major decisions are posted to, and archived on, the County's website. The Brown Act simply establishes a minimum legal threshold.

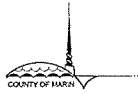
F16. Marin agencies and their public are statistically comparable to the Bay Area in terms of PE satisfaction and involvement levels.

Response: The County of Marin cannot agree or disagree with findings regarding other agencies and their public. Based on observation and communication with other County counterparts, however, Marin County utilizes many of the same communication forums and means of communication as other counties.

F17. PE is a two-way street, requiring vigilance on the part of the public as well as the agencies who serve them.

Response: Agree.

As mentioned in responses to F11 and F15, while the County actively engages with residents, we invite residents to reciprocate, whether in meeting attendance, submitting public comment, or providing feedback on communication preferences to ensure that we are communicating with as many residents as effectively as possible.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marin County Civil Grand Jury recommends the following:

R1. Each agency without a formal PE Plan should develop either a PE Plan or PE Guidelines tailored to the needs of their public and publish the results.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

The County's the County's 2012 Public Communications Plan is available at the following link:
<https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/departments/ad/communications/1201247adattachrep.pdf>

R2. Each agency should obtain input from the public in the planning and design or update of its plan/guidelines.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

In addition to leveraging data from the 2005, 2007 and 2009 Community Surveys, the County of Marin conducted informal surveys and interviews with community leaders during the development of its 2012 Public Communication Plan. The research conducted to help develop the 2012 Public Communications plan is outlined on Pages 6-10 of the 2012 Public Communications Plan further outline the research conducted to help develop the plan:
<https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/departments/ad/communications/1201247adattachrep.pdf>

R3. Agency managers should regularly share their PE Plans and "lessons learned" with their counterparts in other Marin agencies.

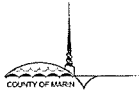
Response: This recommendation has not been implemented, but will be in the future.

An effort is underway to form a group of staff members across Marin cities, towns, and the County, with some dedicated PE responsibilities for their jurisdiction, to share best practices.

R4. Each agency should provide early and ample opportunity for PE in the form of proactive engagement in order to ensure that the public is aware of all their PE opportunities.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

As noted in response to F15, when possible, the County of Marin announces community workshops, public hearings and pending decisions well in advance of the Brown Act's 72-hour requirement. When crafting communications for these announcements, PE staff take great care to ensure the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" (especially for PE purposes) are addressed.



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R5. Post-engagement, each agency should follow-up with the public, informing them of the results of the projects and issues.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

As noted in response to F11 and F15, minutes of the Board of Supervisors and special districts (e.g., Open Space District) meetings are posted on the County's website, along with video and audio recordings of the full meeting. In addition, the County Administrator's office issues an abbreviated review of key decisions made at the meeting and shares those on the County's website, via social media, and to subscribers of the County's email service.

R6. Each agency should create an easy-to-find area on their website dedicated to describing current community issues and explaining how the public can get involved.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

The County's website (marincounty.org) has a search function that allows visitors to find a desired topic quickly. In addition, there are pages accessible from the home page that cover latest news (<https://www.marincounty.org/news>), board of supervisors meetings, topics and activities (<https://www.marincounty.org/depts/bs>) and a calendar (<https://www.marincounty.org/main/calendar>) of upcoming public meetings.

R7. Each agency should make PE a required responsibility of at least one staff person and publicize that responsibility.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

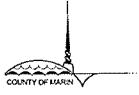
The information about the County's Communication efforts, as well as contact information for the Public Information Officer and the Public Information Specialist, is available on marincounty.org/CAO.

R8. Each agency should offer regular PE professional development to its staff.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

As part of the 2012 Public Communications Plan, a group called the Public Information Team (PIT Crew) was formed for both PE-dedicated staff and any staff member interested in learning more about PE. Monthly PIT Crew meetings cover "best practices" for a variety of communication and PE practices, including media relations, social media, video filming and editing, planning and publicizing public meetings, etc. In addition, meetings feature guest speakers from communication entities like CMCM, the Marin Independent Journal, Patch.com. Handouts and training materials shared at PIT Crew meetings are archived on the County's employee intranet system and made available to all employees.

PE staff participates in workshops and trainings provided by the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO), the City County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA), California Specialized Training Institute, and other groups focused on government communications and PE.



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Over the past 5 years, both CAPIO and 3CMA have honored the County of Marin multiple times for its communication tactics, including informative videos and the Identity Style Guide. In 2017, Health and Human Services Department's ¡Viva Marin! publication (marincounty.org/vivamarin) claimed awards from both organizations.

R9. Each agency should develop meaningful and ongoing partnerships with their local community-based organizations.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

As noted in response to F13, for example, a number of County departments engage community partners to help inform County officials of neighborhood-specific needs, culturally sensitive considerations, and other issues when planning PE efforts or preparing for a new program or policy decision. In many cases, the involvement of community organizations and opinion leaders amplifies a program's reach and success rate.

A notable success is the recent ¡Viva Marin! publication (issued November 2016, available at marincounty.org/vivamarin). The report was spearheaded by the County of Marin but involved many Marin-based community organizations, educators, advocates and opinion leaders to help craft and distribute the report. The effort has received both statewide and national accolades from highly respected government communication organizations (see notes in response to R8).

R10. Each agency should include on all written communications the social media platforms they use.

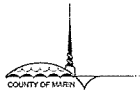
Response: This recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

Integrating links to social media was part of the County's 2014 brand strengthening effort with the development and release of its Identity Style Guide (<https://www.marincounty.org/~media/files/departments/ad/communications/countyofmarinidentitystyleguide.pdf>). Templates were created so staff can easily integrate links to social media into their email signatures and on department flyers and other communications.

R11. Each agency should communicate and emphasize to the public the importance of participation in PE.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

If there is an opportunity for PE – whether workshop, comment period, survey or other – we emphasize it in our communications to the public. In many cases, the County uses social media to provide reminders of PE opportunities, especially as deadlines or workshop dates draw near. For example, the recent Open Marin survey and accompanying workshop conducted for Short Term Rentals was announced by the County of Marin via a news release on May 30 that was shared with media, e-subscribers, and social media followers. The County then re-shared the information on social media platforms 10 different times (at least once per week) on social media leading up to the July 18 workshop, asking followers to participate in the survey and/or workshop.



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R12. Each agency should publish an annual report describing the effectiveness of their PE efforts.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented by the County of Marin.

The County of Marin references increased PE in its most recent Annual Report (<https://www.marincounty.org/2016>) and the newly released FY2016-17 Social Media Report (<https://www.marincounty.org/depts/ad/divisions/communications/social-media-year-in-review>).

In addition to year-to-year snapshots, here is a summary of effectiveness and growth over the past four years (since the implementation of the 2012 Public Communications Plan):

- Twitter followers have increased 350%
- Facebook followers have increased 660%
- Facebook followers engage with County of Marin's posts 370% more than 4 years ago.
- Number of YouTube subscribers has increased 247%
- YouTube video views have increased 240%
- More than 125,000 people are subscribed to the County of Marin's email service. More than 13,000 profiles were created in the last year alone.