

Reporting on Community Conversations

Report Audiences

- Your immediate community audience includes anyone who attended the community conversation about housing, those who indicated an interest but could not attend, attendees of any prior community conversations about housing (plus those who indicated interest), as well as anyone already on the city's housing list.
- Additionally, anyone in your City/environs is also an audience for what was learned, so plan to provide a short blurb and a link to the report in your city's regular newsletter. Cities have reported that awareness and trust have increased even among many residents that did not attend; they appreciate the "on ramp" to basic information about housing plus seeing that elected and appointed city officials are sincerely listening to a broad range of the community.
- Your Council, relevant Commissioners/appointed officials and staff are also audiences. A best practice is to first create the report in the format that is accessible to community members and then, if needed, develop a short staff memo that serves as a cover to the community report.

Overall Guidelines

- This report is *for* the community *about* the community. Reports should be written for all community members, using a welcoming and accessible tone and style.
- Length is usually around 4 pages, including white space, photos and highlighted quotes. Aim to be long enough for people to get a sense of what happened without an exhaustive recap of all comments. Many will be skimming it to get a sense of who was there and what it was like.
- Make a special effort to use language that is accessible to community members with limited exposure to civic or planning terms and concepts. Minimize jargon when at all possible. Provide examples, if needed, for key concepts that are likely to unfamiliar to those not involved civically.
- Consistent with the frame used in the community conversation, share how housing is experienced as a collective challenge. Identify areas of shared experience and shared hopes. Acknowledge community concerns that surfaced without overemphasizing limitations.
- Include quotes from community members to help illustrate key findings.
- Include multiple photos from the community conversation that demonstrate the age and ethnic diversity of who attended. Where possible, include some close-up photos that depict community members listening to and learning from each other. Many residents who are less engaged assume that city meetings are contentious turn taking at the mike (and that discourages participation). Let them see that this was something different.

Report Outline – Content Categories

1 - Introduction

Provide a short overview of the purpose and goals of your housing community engagement project overall and this community conversation, in particular. Share the relevant city agencies or departments involved, as well as community partners providing support.

2 - Project Activities to Date

If applicable, acknowledge other relevant community contacts and input that preceded this community conversation. Explain how the session built on that. This may include a range of community research, outreach or engagement activities, such as:

- Any prior community conversation or dialogue about housing
- Pop-Up conversations, intercepts or interviews
- Surveys
- Stakeholder meetings, neighborhood meetings

3 - Meeting Overview

Provide a short statement about when the meeting was held and where it took place. Share how many community members were in attendance and ways of dimensionalizing what types of people in the community were represented. Briefly describe the meeting format, including presentations and table discussions. Explain the role played by elected officials and appointed officials, if they were in attendance (e.g., as listeners) and how the community input was gathered (e.g., via a combination of table discussions, report outs and individual input sheets). In addition to a link to the PPT, consider providing a sidebar with any of the “basic facts” or general policy options that were considered as content for the reader.

4 - Community Input

Themes: Summarize overall themes and major takeaways that emerged from the conversation. *Based on table discussions, how is the community experiencing the issue? What topics were of greatest interest? What values and guiding principles emerged?*

Reaction to housing options: If community members have been asked to react to a proposal or set of solutions, include their feedback on each major item, using the information gathered from the table discussion and individual input sheets. Include things that had appeal or sparked interest as well as prevalent concerns.

Feedback about the meeting: Share participant feedback about the process and group learning experience. What did they value? What did they ask for more information about?

Use community member quotes throughout to help illustrate key points. Pay special attention to hopes and opportunities that community members have identified – these are the basis for positive energy to move forward together.

5 - Next Steps

Describe the immediate next steps that the city and partners will take. Share the dates and times of upcoming public meetings related to the issue. Point people toward a website or online survey, if appropriate, and encourage them to learn more. Also provide options or links to next steps that community members can take outside of official city actions. The best reports answer these questions: *How can community members continue to stay involved? How can they learn more about the issue?*

Think about other venues and occasions where the results of the meeting can be communicated beyond the meeting report. The fact that the community conversation happened and that there was mutual learning is good news to be shared!