

# Open House Guide – Getting Community Input on the Plan

## Getting Ready

### **Preparing Stations:**

Determine the stations you need for your community session. At a minimum, include:

- A station for each main element of the plan where you need public input
- A station for individual and organizational assets

Identify a resource person for each station. This should be someone very knowledgeable about the content that can answer questions about the station's content.

Recruit a scribe for each station to help gather comments that are submitted verbally.

Prepare a diagram of where the stations will be located in the room along with a brief description of each.

Prepare materials for each station (map, handouts, other support materials).

### **Arranging Logistics:**

Determine location and dates/times with an eye on these considerations:

- Where will people be comfortable attending (familiar surroundings, neutral setting)?
- What location will be easy for vulnerable populations to attend (easy walking distance, transportation, parking, handicap accessible, kid friendly)?
- Is there ample room for people to move around comfortably from station to station? Does the room allow for an easy flow in and out?
- What time of day and day of the week would be most convenient for community members? Do you need to consider multiple dates/times to accommodate shift workers or other common time constraints in your community?

Provide simple refreshments, if possible. Something as simple as punch and cookies helps enhance the relaxed atmosphere that is needed.

## Setting Up the Open House

**Setting up the Welcome Center** – Include the following:

- Sign in sheet with a place for people to note if they would like to receive follow up information
- Name tags
- A project overview that describes what the project is about and why their participation is valued
- A diagram of the room with brief descriptions of each station
- Supplies for participants' comments (sticky notes, pens, note cards, etc.)

**Setting up the Stations** -- Each station should have:

- Some kind of visual aid (map, model, chart, list) for participants to consider and offer their thoughts
- A flip chart or other such place for the station resource person to jot notes and comments that people make as they visit that station
- A handout, if appropriate, that people can view as they talk
- At least one question to help guide the responses. It may be helpful to post the question on an easel or wall beside the station so that people can add their comments. Some suggested questions include:
  - At each station

- What else needs to be done to make this goal into a reality?
- What do we need to do as a community to accomplish this goal?
- If we do this, will everyone in our community have access to the assistance they will need in an emergency?
- At the individual and organizational assets station
  - What talents and skills might you contribute to the community in an emergency?
  - How might your organization help us respond in an emergency?
  - NOTE: BE SURE TO HAVE EXTRA COPIES OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASSETS SURVEYS AT THIS STATION
- Exit comment station:
  - What is one thing that you think could help the community be better prepared for a disaster?

**Setting up the Comment and Exit Station** – Have a place for participants to:

- Turn in any comments not already submitted
- Sign up to participate in further sessions
- Sign up to receive a summary report from this session
- Learn more about how they can prepare for disasters. This would be a good place to have handouts about personal/family disaster preparation, community resources, etc.

Be sure a project representative is at this site to personally thank participants and encourage their participation in the other events.

## **Managing the Event**

### **Welcoming participants**

As people arrive, they sign in and are given a pen and a packet of post-it notes (or whatever is in keeping with your note taking process).

Explain the various stations and invite them to visit each one to consider the information gathered. Encourage them to use the post-it notes to make suggestions and comments at each station. Explain that there is no need to write their name on these unless they choose to.

People are encouraged to visit each station and to start at any station and work their way around.

### **Engaging the participants**

- **Coach each of the station staff** on how to encourage participants to come close to view and respond to the questions. Since this experience may be new to many participants, they may need to be encouraged to engage rather than quickly “window shop” each station and keep walking. (See strategies under “floaters” for some ideas.)
- **Have “floaters” that can talk to people that are not engaged** in discussions at the stations. As the floaters identify people that seem to just be standing around or walking past stations without stopping to talk try these strategies:
  - Talk to the participants about something of interest at one of the stations they haven’t visited.
  - Walk with them to the station and ask their thoughts about something at the station.
  - Get them talking about one of the questions that is at one of the stations. Then ask them if they would mind sharing those thoughts at that station.

- Keep in mind that some people may be reluctant to write their own comments for various reasons. Be sensitive to that possibility. If someone seems hesitant, ask if they would mind you recording their insights.

### **Thanking participants**

Having one or more resource people at the door as participants exit is very important. This last point of contact before people leave should be used to:

- Genuinely thank people for coming.
- Answer any last questions that they may have.
- Get one overarching insight from them (such as the one suggested above at the exit comment station.)
- Encourage them to participate in the other civic engagement sessions that will be coming up.
- Gather contact information for anyone that would like to hear more about the project.