

Local Government Energy Efficiency

BEST PRACTICES: ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

INTRODUCTION

By Joseph Oldham

This fact sheet on engaging elected officials was presented as part of the Statewide Energy Efficiency Collaborative (SEEC) Best Practices Forum on June 19, 2014 in San Diego by my good friend Liz Yager from Sonoma County.

As the Energy and Sustainability Program Manager of the County of Sonoma, Liz works with elected officials from both Sonoma County and each of the nine cities within the county implementing energy related programs across the region. As a Division manager Liz oversees the Sonoma County Energy Independence Program (SCEIP), the Sonoma County Energy Watch (SCEW) local government partnership with Pacific Gas and Electric, in addition to her responsibility for internal utility and sustainability programs in County operations. SCEIP is one of the most successful and long running Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing programs in the country. Because energy efficiency and renewable energy programs are complex and historically have not been a core function of local government, Liz and her team have had to learn how to properly engage elected officials on the topics in order to retain support for these programs. Her years of experience working with elected officials coming from different jurisdictions with different agendas and priorities are reflected in the fact sheet.

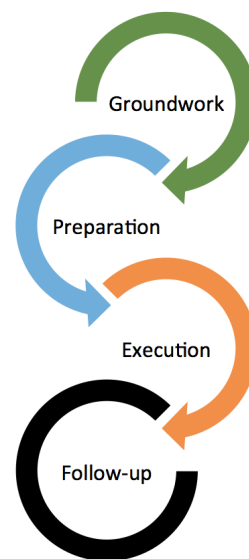
To date, the community facing aspects of the SCEW and SCEIP programs together have been responsible for over \$70 million in local investment activity and have created or supported over 900 jobs.

EXPERIENCES SUCCESSFULLY ENGAGING ELECTED OFFICIALS

By Liz Yager

GROUNDWORK

- Identify key staff within the official's office to act as a sounding board for how best to navigate process and policy discussions and present ideas for the best chance at long-term success. Staff has influence with the official, they spend a lot of time with them; if you can influence or impress staff they may help you. Oftentimes staff are the ones doing the research, putting together packets or agendas, and may act as an advisor to the official.
- Be/become the local focal point/clearinghouse facilitating the engagement of business, education, non-profits, etc. in your area, on your topic. Highlight focusing on core competencies, eliminating duplication of effort, and leveraging resources. Highlight government's role as the connector, supporter, and facilitator for others' good works. Focus on local non-profits and trade organizations aligned with your efforts: solar vendor alliances, energy efficiency organizations, building trade organizations. Build a community advisory group.
- Encourage partners (i.e.: contractors) that support your efforts to reach out to their elected officials and share their ideas.



WORDS TO LIVE BY

- Don't **EVER** surprise them, **especially** in public! Give them a briefing and opportunity to ask questions before hand.
- Keep it real when setting program expectations. **Do not** promise more than the program can deliver.

Successfully Engaging Elected Officials

PREPARATION - *Actually write it down, don't just hear it in your head.*

- Like for a media event, actually write down your objective and message for a meeting to keep you focused and on point. Keep your message short and simple, and have the background and research material ready if needed. They want to know it's been explored from all facets and analyzed, including community support, especially in an election year.
- Study and know your audience, what is their favorite topic, what are they passionate about, how does this fit into the context of what they are already dealing with?
- Know how your effort benefits the official and or their expectations.
- Know the positive effects of your effort on the local economy – local multiplier effect and jobs!
- Know how your effort fits into (consistent with) the jurisdiction's strategic plan.
- GO TO THEIR (elected official's) events, help, and hang back to talk with them about how your program links with their priorities.

EXECUTION

- Involve them early in the process in a way that aligns with their other existing priorities and allows them to "take credit" for ideas and ongoing work.
- Tell them what you are going to tell them (agenda), tell it to them (presentation), then tell them what you just told them (summary).
- Help them own the program or product. Brief them, show them benefits, have constituents talk to them, show how your issue connects to other issues and how it helps them as an elected.
- Offer solutions that include options; don't just bring problems.
- Always expect the unexpected! Elected officials may have a completely different take on your issue or problem; it could be technical or political or historical, but it is relevant to how they accept (or don't) what you're working on.

FOLLOW-UP

- Give them an updated one-pager on the program quarterly. Provide education on the benefits and impacts of the program, especially tangential benefits, such as positive health impacts of efficiency upgrades.
- Give them a great testimonial (story to tell) in their speeches. Have stories that help them relate to the topic or point you are trying to make. Provide the talking points they need to highlight their leadership in supporting the effort.

RELEVANT WEB LINKS

SCEIP Home Page

<http://www.sonomacountyenergy.org/>

SCEW Home Page

<http://www.sonoma-county.org/gs/energy/scew/>

Energy and Sustainability Division Home Page

<http://www.sonoma-county.org/gs/energy/>

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