



The Built Environment and Physical Activity Community Mobilization for Change

Presented by Burnham Martin

The presentation will provide a brief overview of approaches to getting people involved in improving their communities. Why bother to involve as many people as possible in a project?

- Hands on work to build or improve facilities benefits from good turnout,
- Government officials are more likely to support a project or policy changes if numbers of constituents signal their support, and
- Long-term support for a project which may take years to complete and may need ongoing stewardship once completed requires ongoing public interest.

Important to consider: people vary in their interests, skills, and time and different approaches will be ideal to involve the greatest number of community members.

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program helps state and local groups with developing trails and conserving rivers and land. My reference for this talk is community-based trail projects, but I feel that the techniques I will mention will work just as well with policy or ordinance changes.

Most projects will benefit from being associated with a group or organization

Create or find a group to help with the project by sharing work, expanding creativity, and insuring a long-term presence if appropriate. It could be a non-profit or town board, but could also be a task group or coalition with no legal standing. Key to a smooth running group:

- Having a clear sense of purpose
- Having a good work plan describing steps and possibly a timeline for completing a project
- Having clear, meaningful meeting agendas

Important and rapidly changing – the news media

Look for opportunities to get a project mentioned in the media to build public awareness and good will.

- Electronic – television and radio
- Print – newspapers and newsletters

Keep up to date on 21st century media

- E-mail action alerts, updates, and newsletters
- Video clips on You Tube
- Web sites
- Podcasts
- What's next?

(Please see page 2)

Meeting indoors

Large indoor meetings can provide the public with information, facilitate public feedback, and build support for a project.

- Standard public meetings – presentation of an idea or plan followed by public feedback
- Mapping workshops – enabling citizens to map positive and negative features in their community
- Charrettes – engaging professionals in short-term community design workshops

The fun stuff – activity outdoors

Experiences out in the environment to build a constituency in a fun and inclusive way

- Photography-based activity – using cameras to examine positive or negative aspects of a community
- Guided walks to visit potential trail system or route
- Walkability evaluation – a hands-on look at good design as well as barriers to walking
- Hands-on trail work – some folks really like to get involved by getting dirty
- Grand opening – celebrate an accomplishment, recognize contributors, and introduce folks to a new resource

Other outdoor activity

- Walking school bus/bike train
- Competition – holding a race to raise funds or build awareness of a project, resource, or area
- Festival
- Guided natural/cultural history tours
- Guest speaker to describe a similar project in another community

A few final words of advice to anyone interested in changing the physical environment, based on my experience:

1. Celebrate intermediate steps.
2. Thank everyone, share credit liberally.
3. Have fun along the way.

A few related web resources

(Some of these offer suggestions for community mobilization; others offer information about improving the built environment.)

NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation

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| Assistance | www.nps.gov/rtca |
| NPS RTCA Community Toolbox | http://www.nps.gov/phso/rtcatoolbox/ |
| Maine Conservation Corps | http://www.state.me.us/doc/parks/mcc/index.html |
| Kaiser Permanente Photovoice story | http://info.kp.org/communitybenefit/our_stories_4.html |
| Photovoice | http://www.photovoice.com/ |
| Board Café | http://www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/index.php |
| Center for Community GIS | www.community-gis.org |
| National Center for Biking and Walking | http://www.bikewalk.org/index.php |
| Rails-to-Trails Conservancy | http://www.railtrails.org/index.html |
| American Trails | http://www.americantrails.org/ |

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.