



THE CITY OF
NOVATO
CALIFORNIA

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City Manager
Regan M. Candelario

September 14, 2017

Marin County Civil Grand Jury
Jay Hamilton-Roth, Foreperson
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 275
San Rafael, CA 94903

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report "Public Engagement in Marin: A Pathway to Inclusive Governance"

Dear Mr. Hamilton-Roth,

At its regular meeting of September 12, 2017, the Novato City Council reviewed the above report which requests they City of Novato respond to Recommendations R2 through R12 of the report. The City's response to all is attached.

If the members of the Grand Jury require additional information, please contact City Manager Regan M. Candelario.

We appreciate the work of the Grand Jury and thank you for your service to our residents and Marin County.

Sincerely,

Denise Athas
Mayor
City of Novato

Cc: The Honorable Judge Kelly V. Simmons
Marin County Superior Court
P.O. Box 4988
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988



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

The City of Novato is currently in the beginning stages of updating its Communications Plan. As part of this process, the City will be reaching out to the community and conducting surveys and focus groups for input—including, but not limited to, residents, local business owners and other community partners. Obtaining community input will assist in identifying the public’s needs, communication challenges, outreach opportunities, and interests.

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

The City of Novato works with local agencies to discuss best practices and obtain feedback on public engagement. City staff participate in a countywide communications roundtable which includes communications professionals within Marin County.

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.

The City of Novato utilizes multiple outreach tools to ensure that we are engaging the public early and often across multiple platforms. The City has expanded its public noticing requirements and procedures to improve notification to the community. Improvements include onsite signage for proposed projects, expanded noticing area based on interest and potential impact, easier-to-read and better organized content within the public noticing, and easy-to-find information on the City’s website which allows the public to sign-up for updates on topics of interest.

City outreach tools include: City website, e-mail and text message notifications, social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), Nextdoor, mailed notices, local media, placement of display advertisements and legal ads, City’s e-newsletter, online neighborhood forums (e.g. “Novato in the Know” and Hamilton Forum), Open Novato—an online City Forum, and Novato Community Television. To maximize all opportunities to inform and engage, information is distributed in various formats—including written, infographics, video, verbal, summaries and full-text, ADA-accessible, and translation.

Additionally, the City regularly promotes these resources to the community and monitors the use of these tools to further refine and improve our outreach efforts.

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

The City of Novato is one of the few local agencies that provides an online recap of City Council meetings prior to the minutes being published providing the community with information on decisions made at the most recent City Council meeting. The Council Recaps are posted after each Council meeting and are posted on the City’s website homepage and sent out to subscribers via e-mail and text notifications.

In 2016, the City launched Public Works and Planning project webpages which include a

project's current status, as well as description, location, meeting information, project-related documents (e.g. project plans, notices, staff reports) and staff contact information. These pages are regularly updated to reflect project updates--including decisions made at public meetings, information on upcoming meetings, next steps, community survey results, community feedback from meetings and Open Novato. As meetings are scheduled and project statuses are updated, e-mail and text message subscribers of that project are notified.

For topics that don't have project-specific pages (e.g. SMART Quiet Zones, Redwood and Grant Transit Improvement Project and PG&E Community Pipeline Safety Initiative), the City provides information under the Hot Topics page on the City's website. Additionally, the City posts updates to online forums, like Nextdoor, to inform residents and direct them to project-specific pages on the City's website for more information.

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.

The City of Novato's website has webpages dedicated to current projects and hot topics with information on how to get involved. The City also utilizes Open Novato which is an online forum where the community can weigh-in on citywide topics including land use, budget and other policy considerations. Input from Open Novato is shared with City officials for consideration in their decision-making process.

The City website also includes a "Connect With Us" page where the community can self-select topics of interest and receive regular updates from the City via e-mail and or text notification. Additionally, a search box at the top of every webpage ensures visitors can easily locate the information they are looking for, and each webpage includes a feedback button so that visitors can provide feedback to the City's webmaster.

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

City of Novato staff as a whole and across all City departments and divisions, embrace and make outreach a priority. Public engagement is part of every City employees' job with varying degrees of responsibility.

The City of Novato's Communications Division falls under the Central Administration Department. One full-time Management Analyst/Webmaster and approximately 50% of the Assistant City Manager's time is dedicated to citywide public engagement and outreach. Additionally, each department has at least one communications liaison who are tasked with some or all of the following public engagement activities including public noticing, managing social media accounts, responding to online service requests and e-mails, posting to Nextdoor, face-to-face interaction, conducting public meetings and workshops, and reaching out to community groups and organizations for items relating to their department. Each liaison coordinates outreach and messaging with the Communications Division.

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

The City's Communications Division provides training on new and updated public engagement

processes to City staff. Recently, the City implemented new public noticing guidelines and provided one-on-one hands-on training to staff, as needed, and printed step-by-step instructions.

This year, the City of Novato is looking to provide public engagement training to staff and Council through programs such as the Davenport Institute at Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy. These trainings will include media relations, facilitation training, and public engagement practices.

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

The City of Novato regularly partners with, and continues to develop meaningful and ongoing partnerships local community-based organizations (CBOs) and. City staff frequently give presentations and provides regular updates to local CBOs, service clubs, and special districts. The City's success relies heavily on the strength of these relationships which continue to be a priority for the City.

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

The City of Novato utilizes multiple social media platforms, including those managed separately by other departments. The City includes information on its social media accounts on multiple pages on the City's website, in e-mails, flyers and other promotional materials.

The City will also list the various social media platforms used by the City on the City's letterhead and Council agendas.

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

The City of Novato recognizes the importance of public participation in public engagement, and encourages the public to get engaged by promoting our "Connect With Us" webpage, notifying the public of upcoming meetings and projects, requesting community feedback on citywide topics, promoting public surveys and Open Novato, and recently adding a "public outreach" section to all staff reports. The "public outreach" section on staff reports reminds staff to ensure that public outreach has occurred prior to Council consideration. This section includes information on the types of outreach conducted including, but not limited to, public meetings, workshops, presentations, website information, surveys, newspaper ads, posts to social media and online forums, as well as the outcome of that outreach and any future outreach anticipated.

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

The City is currently updating its Public Engagement Plan, which will be brought to Council before the end of this year and staff has committed to provide an annual update on the City's public engagement efforts.