

Summary of Themes from June 2007 Focus Group

On June 4, 2007 the City of Santa Monica convened a stakeholder focus group to discuss ideas about community dialogue and information sharing. Over thirty (30) people were present. Attendees included representatives from Santa Monica Commissions, neighborhood associations, local service providers and collaboratives, regional partners, the business community, Santa Monica residents and City staff.

The group discussed the need for a community dialogue to assess the effectiveness of current services, create key messages, design and implement a City-wide public relations, public education and involvement campaign, including efforts focused on ways to help the homeless without giving spare change to panhandlers.

Five themes emerged:

1. Harness and utilize existing forums to disseminate information, do not recreate.
 - Use neighborhood organizations' newsletters, faith-based publications, employer-based publications, community newsletters and other communication tools like e-blasts
 - Drop content into local media and City formats (Seascape and CityTV)
2. Simplify and include key information:
 - Create one page summaries with web links, resources, phone numbers, information regarding funding, service delivery and outcomes, regional issues and other information shared with City Council
3. Messaging is key:
 - Let people know that the community can be involved and can make a positive contribution
 - Be consistent; avoid "spin"; be honest; present solutions
 - Help people feel that their concerns have been heard
4. Employ new / innovative mechanisms for information sharing:
 - Create a staffed, 24-hour 800-number Help Line; direct people to resources or send the police and then follow-up with the caller
 - Implement an interactive, multi-media kiosk
 - Use internet resources (web site, blog, City's web site, e-newsletter)
5. Plan for success:
 - Create a strategic, long-term, holistic, multi-media effort with professional support
 - Make this an ongoing priority; not "one-time"

Topics for Future Community Discussions

- Role of regional partners such as LA County, City of LA, LAHSA
- Public education campaign
- Impacts of homelessness in public spaces
- Alternative giving / anti-panhandling campaign
- Approaches to service delivery and permanent housing and their effectiveness
- Strategies to stem the "in flow" to Santa Monica
- Agency service outcomes