



Information Item

Date: January 7, 2015

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Rod Gould, City Manager
Subject: Community Civic Engagement Strategy Update

Introduction

Civic engagement is integral to democratic governance. It fosters awareness about civic issues and enhances the relationship people have with their community. Yet, local government has been slow to make use of emerging methods of connecting with community members and promoting participation. Traditional models of engaging in the public decision-making process have proven antiquated in today's fast-paced world. Local government is faced with managing a vibrant 21st century representative democracy with tools from the late 19th century.

The Community Civic Engagement Strategy (CCES) is an initiative to experiment with new ways to connect with and solicit input from a broad spectrum of the Santa Monica community. This information item provides a summary of CCES activities and outcomes to date, as well as information on what is to come in 2015.

Background

On [January 14, 2014](#) Council approved the Community Civic Engagement Strategy to experiment with ways to connect people and their local government. Staff set out to enhance the relationship between the two via meaningful in-person programs, web-based tools, and informational resources that, when combined, sustain broad and

diverse community involvement in civic affairs. This report summarizes programs launched since January 2014, and introduces efforts through 2015.

Discussion

Civic Engagement Team

January 2014 seven City staff from the City Manager's Office, Information Services Department, Planning and Community Development, the Office of Pier Management, and Community and Cultural Services formed the Civic Engagement Team (CET) to initiate CCES programs. Staff was selected based on varied experience in urban planning, communication, technology, and experience engaging with the Santa Monica community. The group's goal is threefold: make civic participation casual, accessible, welcoming, and meaningful; help inform decision makers and staff about community sentiment, questions, and trends; and involve people from all walks of life. The CET vets CCES programs to ensure precise implementation of this goal.

The People's Academy

The People's Academy (Academy) was the first CCES program, launched in Spring 2014. The Academy is a behind-the-scenes look at local government operations, partnerships, and innovation. It's an opportunity to learn about how local government works in Santa Monica.

Outreach about the academy began January 2014. An Academy website (www.academy.smgov.net) directed residents to information and the online application. City partners including Neighborhood Associations, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Parent Teacher Associations, Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, The Jaycees, Saint Monica's, the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, among others were notified about the opportunity to apply. Press releases were distributed to local media. City staff posted two rounds of information about the Academy on City social media channels. Residents who signed up via [SM Alerts](#) to receive information about ways to get involved in local government were emailed links to the Academy website.

For the inaugural Academy, interested residents could submit an application between February 19 and March 5, 2014. During that time 216 applications were received. Fields in the application solicited objective information about the individual, along with subjective responses regarding why they want to be in the academy (see attachment A).

The CET was tasked with selecting 20 applicants for the inaugural class. The application review process was designed to select a diverse group of applicants. All identifying information (names, email, etc.) was removed from applications during the review process. Each applicant was assigned a three-digit unique identification number. Staff reviewed applications based on question responses, selecting applications with the most thoughtful answers for each of the five age brackets: 18 – 30, 31 – 40, 41 – 50, 51 – 60, and 61+. Staff listed selections for each age group and discussed applications with an eye for the greatest representation of diversity using all application fields. The top four applications were selected for each age bracket. Remaining applications were placed on a waiting list.

Twenty applicants were notified of admission while staff created the Academy curriculum. Classes were designed to encourage group deliberation, similar to the collective problem-solving elected officials undertake in the democratic process. Focus was placed on active learning guided by asking effective questions to seek factual information rather than others' interpretation of reality.

Six classes covered local government basics about budget, and affordable housing mixed with practical information about technology, mobility, and sustainability relevant in everyday life. Instructors included by City staff, predominantly from the executive team. Participants met with leaders from the City, School District, and College to understand each organization's core mission, how they achieve it, and how they support each other. Instructors taught the ins and outs of the public right of way, open space, and other public infrastructure via a walking tour through downtown Santa Monica. Participants sat with the Emergency Manager, Police, and Fire Chief to learn how public safety is a

shared responsibility. Academy participants wrestled with the proverbial questions of transportation and land use, and how staff approaches these challenges in an urban environment. After each class, participants provided anonymous feedback via a course evaluation.

During class participants talked at length with instructors about the consequences and trade-offs of long-term public policy and resource decisions. Rarely did ideas and opinions about the use of public resources align. Participants disagreed, yet everyone remained willing to participate and find solutions to the scenarios presented. After seven weeks, People's Academy participants gained a deeper understanding of what it takes to run a city effectively, and meaningful ways to follow their unique interests and become involved.

Participants of the inaugural academy graduated May 13, 2014. Applicants for a second academy were selected and notified early August 2014 using the same methodology as the inaugural class. After seven weeks of classes, the second cohort of twenty residents graduated October 28, 2014. A total of 257 applications were received in 2014. In total, forty residents successfully graduated from the Academy. Remaining applicants on the wait list will be reviewed with new applications for future Academies.

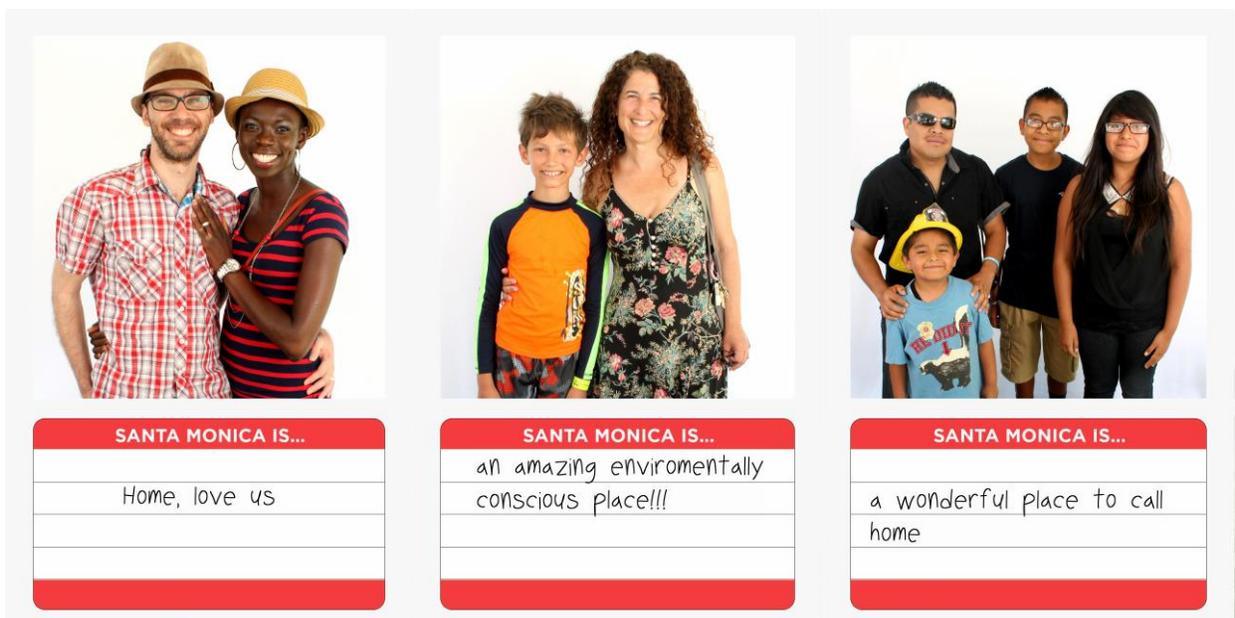
In 2015 staff will offer two People's Academy sessions – the first beginning April 2015, the second commencing September 2015. Rolling admission encourages interested residents to apply any time. All applications received five weeks prior to the first class will be reviewed for admission.

Civic Pride

To cultivate new types of civic participation, a component of the CCES focuses on providing opportunities for people to share their personal experiences, particularly why they choose to live in Santa Monica.

The first interactive community art project brought to light the relationship between people and place. On June 14, 2014 at the Santa Monica Festival, over 1,000 people participated in an interactive community art project called “Santa Monica Is...” (see attachment B).

The project used photography as a vehicle to capture people’s feeling for the city. After having a photo taken, people were prompted to complete the phrase “Santa Monica Is...” Over 500 photographs were taken. Participants received a printed photograph and had the opportunity to register to receive additional information about future opportunities to get involved.



As part of the outreach campaign for the November community event series *Santa Monica Talks*, a second interactive, pop-up community art project was held at four different locations.

Location	Date	Begin	End
Downtown Farmers' Market	WED 11/12	8:00 AM	1:00 PM
Virginia Avenue Park, Pico Library	WED 11/12	2:00 PM	6:00 PM
Main Public Library, <i>main entrance</i>	MON 11/17	12:00 PM	5:00 PM
Real Office Centers	WED 11/19	12:00 PM	5:00 PM

An interactive chalk board encouraged passers-by to share what Santa Monica meant to them. People wrote brief descriptions, and talked with staff about *Santa Monica Talks*.



During both interactive community art projects people inquired about the City in general. Many expressed an interest in learning more about City initiatives relevant to their unique interests. People welcomed creative ways to express how they think or feel

about Santa Monica. This type of creative, reflective interaction may help people uncover and feel more connected to their city. And, what people share could prove instructive for policymakers (see attachment C).

Santa Monica Talks

Santa Monica Talks is a free community event for people who live and work in Santa Monica and want to learn about what is happening in the city. The event is held every other year to kick off the City's biennial budget process. The City Manager shares his perspective on City services and Santa Monica's future. City staff is available to answer questions and provide essential information about current city programs, initiatives, and ways for people to get involved with local government.

Three events were held:

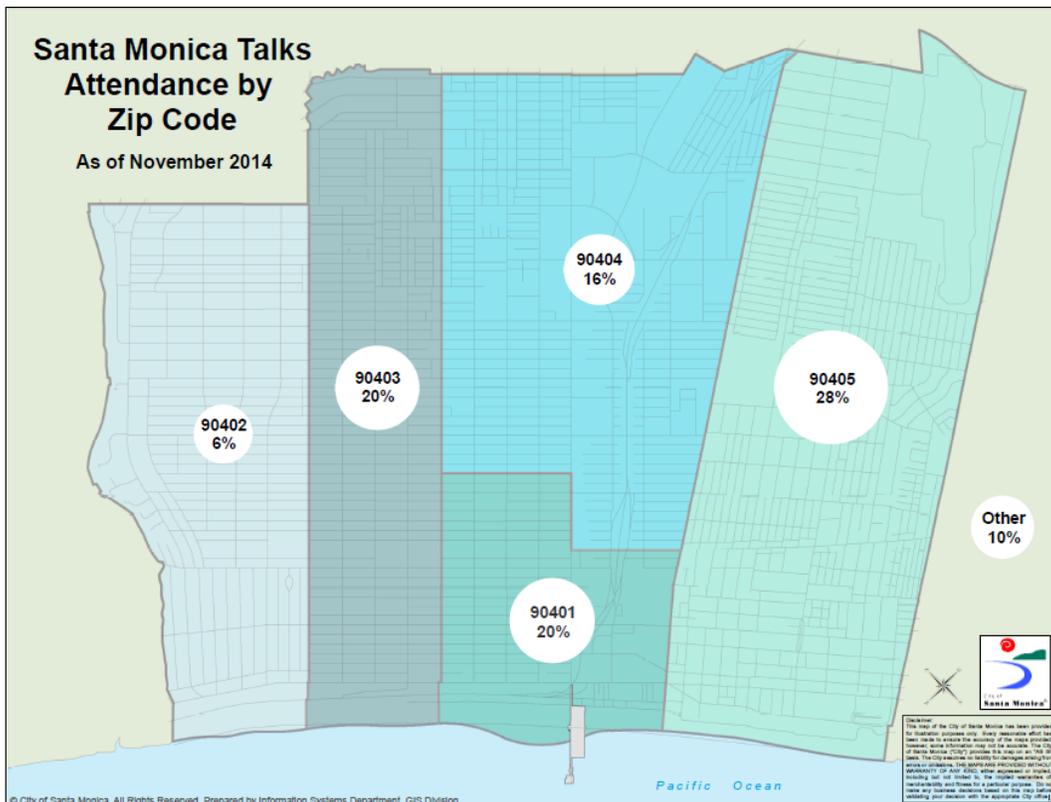
Thursday, November 13	Tongva Park
Tuesday, November 18	The Civic Auditorium East Wing
Thursday, November 20	Real Office Centers

Staff mobilized a significant outreach campaign to encourage a positive turnout. The event was visually rebranded to honor Santa Monica's past while encouraging people from all walks of life to attend. A website (www.smgov.net/smtalks) was created to provide event information, showcase partnering restaurants, and direct people to register online. Staff met with city partners about the event series including Neighborhood Association members, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Parent Teacher Associations, Buy Local Santa Monica, Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, and the Jaycees, among others.

Press releases were distributed to local media. City staff posted three rounds of information about the event series on City social media channels. KCRW ran a total of twelve 30 second spots between 11/06 and 11/18. Flyers were distributed at Santa Monica Farmers' markets and public counters. Digital banners were posted on City

websites. People registered on City email list-serves were notified of the event series and encouraged to sign up. The event was cross-promoted at four different locations during the interactive, pop-up community art project.

Information at each event was the same. While people signed-in, attendees talked with staff at booths with City programs, and enjoyed food and drinks. To showcase local talent, the City Manager’s Office worked with twelve restaurants and businesses associated with [Buy Local Santa Monica](#). The City Manager presented information about City finances and services. A period of thirty minutes was allotted for the audience to ask the City Manager questions. Thereafter attendees were free to visit with City staff, eat food, or play games that tested their retention of information from the City Manager’s presentation (see attachment D for photos of *Santa Monica Talks*).



In total 257 community members attended *Santa Monica Talks* – a 63% increase in total attendees compared to 2012 numbers. Of the 114 residents who completed a brief

survey about the event series, 70% found the opening discussion with City Manager Rod Gould very informative (see attachment E). Twenty-two percent were satisfied with the event series, while sixty-five percent were very satisfied. Of total attendees who completed the survey, 2.7% noted they were dissatisfied with the event series.

Upcoming CCES programs

Staff is working to sustain and build upon CCES programs developed in 2014. Next up is to create an event series to bring together community members over food and drinks to discuss broad topics about community + urban life in the 21st century. Also, the tech community has expressed interest in hosting a hack-a-thon, a multi-day event to develop solutions to community problems using technology.

Emerging technology has potential to make City Council meetings more accessible. The ability to submit a chit to speak on a specific Council agenda item electronically will be available in 2015. Staff is investigating ways for people to track specific issues on a Council agenda and to use technology to participate more easily in the public decision-making process.

A technological platform would complement, not supplant, other non-technology-based ways to connect community members with staff and elected officials. The goal of the CCES is to provide a well-rounded set of civic engagement strategies so local government remains accessible to a broad range of community members. With time and partnership, CCES will modernize the relationship between people and their local government, and sustain a culture of democratic participation in everyday life.

Prepared By: Matt Mornick, Assistant to the City Manager.

Attachment A:	People's Academy Application
Attachment B:	Santa Monica Is Photo Project
Attachment C:	Photographs from Santa Monica Talks
Attachment D:	Santa Monica Talks Survey Results
Attachment E:	Santa Monica Is... Chalk Board Findings

Attachment A – People’s Academy Application

Register at <http://academy.smgov.net/Registration.aspx>. There is rolling enrollment.

NAME			
ADDRESS			
CITY		ZIP CODE	
LENGTH OF SANTA MONICA RESIDENCY		RENT OR OWN	
BIRTHDATE		GENDER	
EMAIL		PHONE	
INDUSTRY			
DO YOU OWN A BUSINESS IN SANTA MONICA?			
HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE ACADEMY? (100 word limit)			
WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THE ACADEMY? (100 word limit)			
DESCRIBE YOUR PREVIOUS AND CURRENT COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (100 word limit)			
WHAT IS YOUR HOPE FOR SANTA MONICA’S FUTURE? (100 word limit)			

Attachment B – Santa Monica Is Photo Project

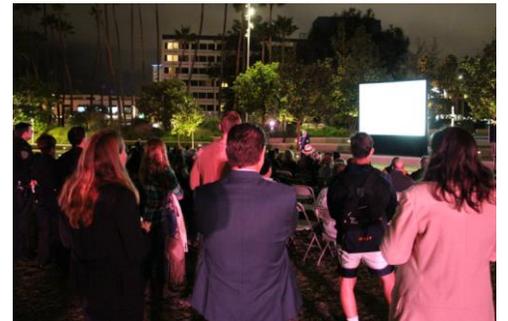


Attachment C - Santa Monica Is... Chalk Board Findings





Attachment D – Photographs from *Santa Monica Talks*



Attachment E – Santa Monica Talks Survey Results

A total of 114 residents completed a brief post-event survey regarding Santa Monica Talks. A summary of the findings are below.

Please check which Santa Monica Talks events you attended:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Tongva Park	35.1%	40
Civic Auditorium, East Wing	39.5%	45
Real Office Centers	31.6%	36

How did you hear about this event?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Daily Press	21.1%	24
Santa Monica Next	7.0%	8
Interactive Community Chalk Boards	1.8%	2
Email	57.0%	65
Social Media	14.9%	17
KCRW	4.4%	5
City Website	16.7%	19
Friend	12.3%	14

Question	Average
How informative did you find the opening discussion with City Manager Rod Gould?	70% Very Informative 1% Not Very Informative
Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?	65% Very Satisfied 3% Dissatisfied

Age Group	Response Percentage	Santa Monica Population Percentage**
20-24	2%	7.2%
25-34	14%	13.5%
35-44	12%	12.8%
45-54	8%	13.8%
55-59	5%	6.7%
60+	21%	20%
Unknown*	38%	

* Because a number of event attendees did not register online, staff did not capture their age.

** American Community Survey population and demographic data, 2013. United States Census, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.