
COMMUNICATIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2013

San Francisco Water Power Sewer
Services of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
Nationwide, utilities are grappling with aging infrastructure and San Francisco is no exception. The City’s combined sewer system is 100 years old and its key facilities and sewer pipelines have outlived their useful life. It is critical that the City invests and upgrades this system now to continue protecting public health and the environment.

After eight years of master planning and gathering extensive public feedback along with expert third-party analysis, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is forging ahead with the Sewer System Improvement Program (SSIP), a 20 year multi-billion dollar citywide investment required to upgrade the City’s aging sewer infrastructure. As the planning and design for critical projects are now underway, the success of the SSIP will depend on effective public outreach, stakeholder engagement, and coordinated communication with community partners and sister-agencies.

This 2013 Communications Annual Report serves as a snapshot of the SSIP communication team’s accomplishments and activities from August 2012, when the SFPUC validated the Program, until the end of December 2013. This report highlights the main outreach focuses for 2013, key activities undertaken, public participation numbers, and concludes with an outline of the next steps for 2014-2015.

YEAR 2013
IN A SNAPSHOT

Presented at over 70 community organizations and merchant groups during Sewer System Awareness roadshow

Hosted 65 workshops, planning games and open houses during project planning process reaching 7,500 people

Led over 90 plant, walking and biking tours with over 1,300 in attendance

Collected over 4,800 interactive surveys online and in-person

Sent over 22 issues of Sewer e-newsletter reaching 4,400 subscribers

Built an online sewer following through social media and a robust Program website

Recognized nationally for successful sewer public awareness campaign, “Learn About Me”

Featured in 50 media articles
The SSIP communication team’s public outreach and engagement efforts consist of an integrated mix of tools to reach stakeholders and the public.

The overarching goal of the SSIP Public Outreach Communication effort is to:

*Inform, engage, and empower stakeholders and neighborhood partners throughout the whole lifecycle (planning, design, and construction) of the Program to understand the dire need for this sewer system upgrade and to support this essential work.*

To do this, we are employing the following five (5) strategies:

1. **Provide for meaningful and sustained engagement with stakeholders at their point of discovery**
2. **Utilize community-based participatory planning**
3. **Integrate innovative communication tools in informing, educating and engaging stakeholders**
4. **Develop educational programs**
5. **Integrate the SFPUC Community Benefits approach**

Through the strategic planning, implementation and execution of these public outreach and engagement strategies, we are building support for the Program while communicating the SFPUC’s important role in protecting public health, enhancing the region’s environmental quality of life and planning for the City’s sustainable future.

The SSIP communications team leads, coordinates and organizes all public outreach and communication efforts. All of the planning and implementation is done in full coordination and in partnership with the SSIP Program Management Team, the Wastewater Enterprise, and the broader External Affairs bureau.

Key audiences vary according to the project needs, but include sewer ratepayers (homeowners, businesses and commercial), renters, elected leaders, environmental and civic interest groups, media, other City departments and SFPUC personnel.
PUBLIC OUTREACH

2013 Key Efforts

While the SSIP communications team was tasked with relaying the importance of the SSIP as a whole, the three main outreach focus areas for 2012-2013 were:

Raising Sewer System Awareness
To raise public awareness about the important and necessary role of the City’s aging sewer system, the communications team took the message on the road and presented at over 70 community organizations, merchant groups, and non-profits spanning the 11 districts of San Francisco. Through this outreach, the SFPUC made valuable stakeholder connections while also taking the community pulse on SSIP and their neighborhood-specific sewer needs.

SSIP Roadshow
- Neighborhood groups included Excelsior Action Group, Haight-Ashbury Improvement Association, and Coalition for San Francisco Neighborhoods
- Merchant Associations included West Portal Merchants Association, and Chinese Chamber of Commerce
- Nonprofits included Friends of the Urban Forest, Surfrider Foundation, and SPUR

Obtaining Public Input in the Planning and Design of Green Infrastructure Projects
Throughout 2013, planning and design for eight green infrastructure projects, one in each of the City’s watersheds, commenced simultaneously and required public feedback during the opportunities and alternatives phases. Public input was important in narrowing project design details, taking into account each project site’s specific public needs and preferences.

Implementing a diverse outreach engagement plan using traditional and innovative tools, the communications team tailored their outreach effort to the needs of each community and watershed. These outreach efforts included neighborhood open houses, workshops, coffee talks, online Metroquest surveys, door-to-door outreach and direct mail marketing.

Participatory Planning for Urban Watershed Assessment on the Bayside
Employing a participatory planning approach for the Urban Watershed Assessment (UWA) planning process, the communications team engaged residents and community leaders from the City’s Bayside watersheds (North Shore, Channel, Islais Creek, Sunnydale, and Yosemite) in real-time. Through intercept surveys and the agency’s award winning planning game, participants were able to recommend green and grey infrastructure projects to decrease combined sewer discharges and improve stormwater management on the Bayside.

Public feedback collected with Metroquest surveys

Urban Watershed Planning Game in action
Residents Participate in Sidewalk Garden Project

Through the Sidewalk Garden Project approximately 11,000 square feet of impervious concrete was successfully removed and 84 sidewalk gardens were planted, engaging over 175 community and corporate volunteers from Salesforce.com, Fitbit and Lookout.com, as well as middle school youth from Fei Tian Academy of Arts. These small actions by community members equaled large benefits for our urban watersheds, sewer system, and ratepayers.

Molding the Future Generation of Environmental Stewards

Partnering with the SF Department of the Environment and San Francisco Unified School District, the SFPUC delivered school presentations, professional development training sessions for teachers, and experiences ranging from one-time field trips to year-long opportunities for students to learn about our system. These partnerships, in addition to our relationships with environmental education nonprofits (including Education Outside, A Living Library, and The Watershed Project) helped extend the SFPUC’s reach into the classroom to teach students about our combined sewer system, pollution prevention, and watershed stewardship. Reaching over 5,000 youth, the SFPUC is working to create the next generation of environmental stewards who will care for our natural resources and infrastructure.

Engaging Residents in the Community

Street fairs, markets, and community events played a vital role in soliciting public input. By attending local community events the communications team was able to meet residents in their neighborhoods and gather input on projects occurring in their watershed.
PUBLIC OUTREACH

Engagement in 2013

In 2013, the communications team led a robust public education and outreach effort that stretched citywide, engaging stakeholders from diverse communities and neighborhoods involving both traditional and non-traditional engagement tools. Building an informed, engaged and empowered stakeholder network will create advocates for the SSIP within each neighborhood and community throughout the City.

Employing Traditional Engagement Approaches
Using traditional outreach methods such as giving tours of treatment plants and hosting meetings in the community, the SSIP communications team was able to actively educate and raise awareness of the important role of the sewer system.

65 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS AND OPEN HOUSES
Hosted during planning and design phases for the eight green infrastructure projects using interactive forums for participants to engage in hands-on learning and provide project input.

70+ PRESENTATIONS IN CITY’S 11 DISTRICTS
Made valuable connections with citywide stakeholders while raising awareness of the purpose and need of SSIP.

175+ TOUR DE SF SEWER SYSTEM ATTENDEES
Led participants on green infrastructure bike and walking tours of project sites showing the green technologies being applied in innovative ways throughout the City.

1,250+ PLANT TOUR ATTENDEES
Hosted a total of 86 tours at our Oceanside and Southeast Treatment Plants, providing attendees a behind-the-scenes tour of the invisible, but aging sewer system.

PRESENTATIONS
WORKSHOPS
COMMUNITY EVENTS
Utilizing Innovative Tools

Innovative engagement tools were also utilized to maximize community participation. These methods were used to reach residents and stakeholders at their point of discovery through online or digital tools. These tools resulted in reaching a wider group of people that normally would not be reached using traditional engagement tools.

3,600+ METROQUEST SURVEYS

Neighborhood specific online surveys allowed residents to comment on proposed changes and suggest areas of interest and focus. Surveys were also collected at community events and street fairs.

1,200+ INTERCEPT SURVEYS

Provided convenient and accessible multi-lingual (Spanish, Chinese and English), face-to-face intercept surveys for people to learn about the sewer system and the Urban Watershed Assessment process.

170+ URBAN WATERSHED ASSESSMENT GAME PARTICIPANTS

Interactive planning game allowed attendees a hands-on opportunity to work together to plan for green and grey infrastructure projects for 20-years of sewer system improvements.

4,100 ENEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS

Sent bi-weekly to 4,100 subscribers, the Sewer eNewsletter keeps residents up-to-date on the Program’s progress, event date reminders for open houses and community workshops, and wise tips on pollution prevention.
ENGAGING ONLINE

Building A Following

Program Website
Developing a robust online SSIP presence on sfwater.org and across the agency’s social media channels was vital in reaching San Francisco residents. Online avenues allowed for public input to be incorporated for those unable to attend community meetings.

With 34 web pages in total, citizens can access all the up-to-date information about SSIP projects - renderings, reports and information about events. The success of this outreach effort is evident in the number of hits these pages received – over 12,000 for the home pages of each program area alone.

Social Media
In order to maximize outreach of SSIP related content on the agency’s social media accounts, event reminders, giveaways and online surveys were worked into themes such as #ManholeMonday, #TriviaTuesday and #ThrowbackThursday. By incorporating creative hasthags, SSIP content reached a wider audience while positioning the SFPUC as a social media savvy agency.

• Social media platforms have become vital for transparent and relevant information sharing with SFPUC stakeholders, allowing real time two-way conversations between the SFPUC and the public.

• Reach of 12K social media followers were utilized to increase participation in online surveys, community workshops, and to update residents on project milestones. Included an online only giveaway surrounding the SSIP “Learn About Me” ad campaign.

12,000+
total
SSIP Page Hits
In October 2013, the “Learn About Me” ad campaign was launched to build awareness of the necessity and scale of San Francisco’s aging combined sewer system. Ads were featured on buses, neighborhood newsletters, ethnic media, and online.

Using pithy slogans establishing the important role of the sewer system, along with a sewer manhole and the agency’s website, the ad campaign was received with enthusiasm. Residents who saw the ads were encouraged to share a picture on agency social media channels for prizes such as an “I love SF Water” bottle and Sewer T-shirts featuring the sayings found on ads.

In November 2013, Inc.com published an article recognizing why the SFPUC, a government agency, is such an unlikely organization to have such a creative marketing campaign. The author attributed the success to “having ads in the right place at the right time,” having timely responses on social media, and by taking a risk with a potty humor themed ad campaign.

Coordinating the ad campaign with other agency social media strategies resulted in seeing a 50% growth in the rate of new followers on Twitter and Facebook. This also resulted in a 23% increase in project related website hits since the campaign launched. Sewer ads placed on Muni buses, trains, in newspapers, and online had an estimated reach of 68 million people. Combined with our social media efforts, the reach has been estimated at over 69 million.

A SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS STORY
Public Awareness Ad Campaign

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BRINGING AWARENESS

Our “City Under The City”

SSIP projects and community events were featured several times in both national and local media outlets throughout 2013. Additionally, online media sources covered our efforts and ensured that different communities and residents were up-to-date with program milestones and opportunities to participate in the planning process.

Print and electronic media attention about the City’s aging infrastructure and the significant need for upgrades helped inform and educate the public about the purpose and need of the Program. Having stories featured in mainstream news outlets, local blogs, neighborhood newsletters, and in ethnic media ensured the SFPUC reached the City’s diverse communities.

A San Francisco Examiner front page story featured right highlighted the positive efforts made by the SFPUC to address the state of the sewer system plus challenges to repair and replace this aging infrastructure.

In November, KTVU Channel 2 aired a five minute segment called San Francisco: Crumbling sewer system could put residents at risk which further complemented the public awareness campaign and featured our key message points about the SSIP and the benefits of green infrastructure.

Local San Francisco blogs frequently shared stories featuring community workshops and open houses. The STREETSBLOG SF frequently shared articles highlighting the green infrastructure projects occurring in the different parts of the City, often including our interactive surveys and meeting notices when available.
PRINT MATERIALS

Eye-Catching And Accessible

The SSIP communications team created Brand and Style Guidelines along with templates to create efficiency and standards in educating the public about our projects. Using these guidelines and templates, we created vibrant outreach materials that include:

- Postcards
- Flyers
- Factsheets
- Posters
- Community Workshop Summaries

Collateral was translated into Spanish and Chinese to reach more San Francisco residents. Event notices for community open houses and the watershed planning game featured renderings of proposed green infrastructure designs to help residents visualize the proposed projects in their neighborhoods. Factsheets and workshop summary reports included timelines of the projects’ planning, design, and construction phases.
2014-2015
CONTINUING PUBLIC OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

The SSIP communications team will continue to utilize traditional and innovative public outreach tools and engagement strategies. Two key SSIP Bayside projects: The rebuilding of the Biosolids Digesters Facilities project, and a major upgrade of a weak link in the Bayside collections system—the Central Bayside System Improvements Project—will require considerable public outreach as they approach their alternatives analysis milestones. Engaging existing and new stakeholders on these projects is essential as these projects are developed.

With these projects centered in District 10, a Southeast focused working group (representing non-profits, businesses and residents) has been formed in coordination with the Community Benefits team to gather neighborhood feedback and input on Southeast projects and program initiatives in more detail. This Working Group will allow the Bayview community to have a focal point to discuss these projects, host, workshops, and engage the public on projects and activities occurring in District 10.
SSIP Flagship Projects
As we work toward the Alternative Analyses Reports for these key projects, the SSIP communications team is committed to:

Central Bayside System Improvement Project
• Raising public awareness of project through open houses in Potrero Hill and Dogpatch areas
• Targeted outreach to neighboring communities that may be affected by project alignments
• Use of innovative online tools such as surveys and blogs
• Joint outreach with the UWA team to present potential grey and green infrastructure projects in the Bayside

Biosolids Digesters Facilities Project
• Engaging historic and emerging audiences at their point of discovery
• Increasing the number of treatment plant tours for schools and youth programs in the Bayview and multi-lingual communities
• Showcasing the project throughout the community
• Partnering with community youth organizations to produce short educational videos about the sewer system
• Building project support through the Southeast Working Group

In addition, the UWA team will commence its planning and analysis of the City’s three Westside watersheds (Lake Merced, Richmond, and Sunset) and highlight potential projects on the Bayside connected to the Central Bayside System Improvement Project and other sites. The SFPUC will also move into construction relations with the first green infrastructure projects.
Programmatic Outreach Continues
The team will continue to emphasize the SSIP and projects’ purpose and need in protecting public health and the environment by:

- Conducting focus group surveys to gauge public awareness and understanding of our sewer system
- Increasing the use of social media and innovative engagement tools
- Developing youth programming to reach emerging audiences and future rate payers
- Aggressively pursuing media coverage in print, TV, and online forums

The SSIP communication team’s success is also inter-related with other agency efforts, which include:

- Capitalizing on synergies with other SFPUC divisions and City departments and ensuring that our outreach reflects the diverse communication population we are engaging
- Providing support to the Contractors Assistance Center in preparing training and educational materials for green infrastructure project implementation
- Working with the Customer Service Bureau to help communicate changes in existing wastewater capacity charges and stormwater requirements

Education Programs
Stemming from our work with SSIP interns in 2013, SSIP will engage in more educational programs to carry its message to youth, their parents, and extended families:

- Working with Mission Neighborhood Center to reach more Latino youth and families in the wider Mission area and District 10
- Coordinating with Asian community groups and their work in the broader Bayview to reach emerging audiences
- Partnering with Bayview youth programs to use SSIP as a lab

Community Benefits Approach

- Document our outreach and ensure it is representative of the areas we are working in throughout the City
- Leverage education and local arts initiatives within our projects
- Embrace opportunities to address environmental justice
- Work with small businesses to carry out our work throughout the City
- Support the Contractors Assistance Center in enrolling more local contractors and educating labor about job opportunities
Appendix

Social Media
www.facebook.com/SFWater
www.instagram.com/SFWater
www.twitter.com/SFWater

Media Coverage
“How San Francisco Used Poop Jokes to Save Its Sewer System”

“San Francisco Wants You to Fall in Love With Its Sewer System”
By The Atlantic Cities: http://bit.ly/AtlanticCitiesSFPUC

“An Unlikely Case Study for Excellent User Engagement”

“San Francisco’s Aging Sewer System”

“Top 10 Utilities to Follow on Facebook”


Project Web Pages

MultiMedia
GI Bike Tours: http://bit.ly/GIBikeTour
Treatment Plant Tours: http://bit.ly/PlantTours

Sunset Boulevard Greenway open house
Open house event for the Upper Yosemite Creek Daylighting project