



Public Engagement with Diverse Communities in Medford

Fall 2013 • Planning, Public Policy and Management

Roanel Herrera • Planning, Public Policy and Management
Gerardo Sandoval, PhD • Assistant Professor •
Planning, Public Policy and Management



Sustainable Cities Initiative

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SCI Directors and Staff

Nico Larco, SCI Co-Director and Associate Professor of Architecture

Marc Schlossberg, SCI Co-Director and Associate Professor of Planning, Public Policy, and Management

Bob Choquette, Sustainable City Year Program Manager

About SCI

The Sustainable Cities Initiative (SCI) is a cross-disciplinary organization at the University of Oregon that promotes education, service, public outreach, and research on the design and development of sustainable cities. We are redefining higher education for the public good and catalyzing community change toward sustainability. Our work addresses sustainability at multiple scales and emerges from the conviction that creating the sustainable city cannot happen within any single discipline. SCI is grounded in cross-disciplinary engagement as the key strategy for improving community sustainability. Our work connects student energy, faculty experience, and community needs to produce innovative, tangible solutions for the creation of a sustainable society.

About SCYP

The Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) is a year-long partnership between SCI and one city in Oregon, in which students and faculty in courses from across the university collaborate with the partner city on sustainability and livability projects. SCYP faculty and students work in collaboration with staff from the partner city through a variety of studio projects and service-learning courses to provide students with real-world projects to investigate. Students bring energy, enthusiasm, and innovative approaches to difficult, persistent problems. SCYP's primary value derives from collaborations resulting in on-the-ground impact and expanded conversations for a community ready to transition to a more sustainable and livable future.

About City of Medford

Medford, located in Jackson County in Southern Oregon's Rogue Valley, has a population of 75,920 within a metropolitan statistical area of 206,310 people, the 4th largest in the state. The City was founded in 1883 at its present site because of its proximity to Bear Creek and the Oregon and California Railroad, becoming the County seat in 1927.

The downtown is a National Historic District and it is flourishing today due to support from the City's Urban Renewal Agency in cooperation with business and property owners. New construction, building restorations, infrastructure improvements and community events are creating a forward-looking downtown grounded in its diverse past. Streets have been realigned and improved with new pedestrian and bicycle amenities.

Medford is the economic center for a region of over 460,000 people in Southern Oregon and Northern California. In the past, its economy was fueled by agriculture and lumber products. Although the lumber industry has declined, three lumber mills, Boise Cascade, Timber Products and Sierra Pine, remain. The area also is home to an expanding vineyard and wine industry that includes a large assortment of varietals and over 60 wineries. Lithia Motors, the 9th largest auto retailer in the U.S., has been headquartered in Medford since 1970.

The City is a regional hub for medical services. Two major medical centers employ over 7,000 people in the region. Medford is also a retirement destination, with senior housing, assisted living and other elder care services acting as an important part of the economy.

The Bear Creek Greenway extends from Ashland through central Medford and includes a 26-mile multi-use path, linking several cities and numerous parks. Roxy Ann Peak, one of Medford's most prominent landmarks, is a 3,573-foot dormant volcano located on the east side in Prescott Park, Medford's largest city park at 1,740 acres.

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Executive Summary

With an overall goal of facilitating outreach in minority neighborhoods, this report describes the process behind a successful collaborative outreach project based on bottom-up outreach strategies.

On September 28, 2013, the University of Oregon Sustainable Cities Initiative worked with city and police officials in Medford to outreach to local minority populations. Professor Gerardo Sandoval from the Department of Planning, Public Policy, and Management (PPPM) invited James Rojas, a MIT-trained planner, to host a model-building workshop in Medford and engage the public in a planning and urban design process. Roanel Herrera, master's degree student in the PPPM Department, also provided help throughout the project.

The city's annual Greater Medford Multicultural Fair is generally attended by thousands of visitors representing very diverse cultural heritages. It has been Dr. Sandoval's experience that outreaching to marginalized Latino populations demands that planners reach out to these populations where they are already gathering, such as at churches, schools, public parks, and cultural fairs.

Complementing this approach was Mr. Rojas' collaborative planning method, which is designed to be fun and engaging for all family members. Hence, the fair seemed like an appropriate venue where the model-building approach of his workshops could be used as an effective community outreach tool. By building interactive models that people can manipulate, Mr. Rojas allows participants to translate conceptual planning ideas into physical forms. As a result, people learn the important roles planning and design play in shaping their community. Most importantly, however, Mr. Rojas' interactive models provide participants, many of whom are usually left out of the planning process, with an opportunity to share their vision for their community.

This report describes how to overcome the most common limitations of public participation programs when outreaching to marginal populations. It identified common themes participants were concerned about that emerged via the workshop, such as safety and access to biking paths, access to public parks by the Latino community, and the need to build an inclusive community that promotes equal treatment and opportunity and eliminates all forms of discrimination. This report also provides police and city officials in Medford with recommendations of strategies to effectively engage its minority populations, especially the city's growing Latino population.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide city personnel with recommendations of strategies that can be used to increase and enhance outreach in marginal neighborhoods, especially among areas that have growing Latino populations. More than that, however, we hope that this report will lead to a new framework for thinking about how to conduct outreach in general. Typically, public engagement efforts fail to capture the full range of opinion that is representative of the public because they tend to lack open and inclusive channels of participation. In other words, outreach models have traditionally been designed to focus primarily on creating meaningful interaction between agencies and the public, and not necessarily on creating inclusive opportunities of participation for a wide range of stakeholders.

Today, contemporary models of public participation can effectively include marginal populations in planning and development efforts by creating opportunities that facilitate informal interaction and communication. In *Latino Outreach Strategies for Civic Engagement* (2008), Greg Keidan argues that conducting outreach in locations that feel comfortable and familiar such as “churches and primary schools are best for Latino people and immigrants because they feel safe there.” By engaging minority populations in spaces that feel culturally safe (e.g., churches, schools, parks, etc.), meaningful connections can be made because outreach is conducted at their level, in their particular environment, and through a less threatening bottom-up approach.

When public engagement activities are organized through this approach, meetings and workshops seem both less formal and structured because they aren’t held in professional settings (e.g., conference rooms, universities, government office buildings, etc.). This helps to eliminate the fear and distrust minority populations associate with city planners, academics, and public authorities such as police. Further, research suggests that informal communication structures play a significant role in disseminating information and knowledge within marginal communities. People are more likely to attend workshops and meetings, for example, if they are invited by organizations that have earned a strong reputation in the community, which is usually the case if they provide a direct service to the community. Thus, local government entities or agencies interested in conducting outreach in minority communities should collaborate with organizations that have built trust in the community because the leaders of these organizations can become key partners in coordinating their efforts. Therefore, we suggest outreach strategies for a minority community be designed to: (a) increase levels of informal interaction and communication between city officials/staff, police and the public (especially marginalized Latinos) and (b) coordinate outreach efforts through organizational networks that have established trust in the community.

Setting

Medford is geographically located on the west side of Oregon, approximately 27 miles north of the California border. The city, which is the county seat of Jackson County, is the industrial, retail, and professional center of southern Oregon and northern California. It is situated in the heart of southern Oregon's Rogue River Valley, which is known for its scenic beauty, outdoor recreation, and historical and cultural attractions. Medford also sits in a rain shadow between the Cascade Range and Siskiyou Mountains, so it does not experience most of the rain associated with western Oregon, making it drier and sunnier than the Willamette Valley.

Historically, Medford's economy has been based on agriculture (pears, peaches) and timber products. Harry & David, the largest direct marketer of fruits and food gifts in the United States, for example, is based in Medford. Harry & David is the largest employer in southern Oregon, with 1,700 year-round and approximately 6,700 seasonal employees in the Medford area. In recent years, however, Medford's economy has been driven primarily by the health care industry. One reason Medford has become a regional hub for medical services is because the closest towns of equal or larger size are several hours away by car. Also, the mild climate and relative isolation of the valley has made the area a popular retirement destination, so assisted living and senior services have become an important part of the economy. The two major medical centers in the city, Rogue Valley Medical Center and Providence Medford Medical Center, employ over 2,000 people. Lastly, Medford and the surrounding area is becoming home to Oregon's expanding winemaking industry. Southern Oregon offers an excellent selection of wines such as Pinot Noir, Mescolare, Chardonnay, Merlot, Viognier, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Additionally, unlike the rest of Oregon, the region has also enjoyed success with two lesser-known varietals: Spanish Tempranillo and French Condrieu.

Demographics

U.S. Census data indicates that Medford's population has become more diverse over the last 30 years. In 1990, for example, only 6 percent of the population was Latino. This percentage grew to 9 percent by 2000, and more than doubled in numbers from 2,387 Latinos in 1990 to 5,841 in 2000. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Latinos constituted 12 percent of Medford's population (8,726 people).

There are several reasons why the city has experienced an increase in its Latino population. First, the area's expanding agricultural industry has attracted a Latino migrant labor force. Recently, Latinos seem to be deciding to settle more in the area (the reasons for this go beyond the scope of analysis of this report). This permanent settlement pattern has resulted in new US-born children.

Medford, OR	1990	2000	2010
Total Population	46,951	63,154	73,821
White Alone	43,392	54,299	60,388
Hispanic or Latino:	2,387	5,841	8,726
Black or African American Alone	118	291	407
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	513	607	397
Asian or Pacific Islander	524	843	1,484
Other Race	17	1273	2,419

Figure 1: Total Population (Hispanic or Latino by Race) Source: U.S. Census Bureau

While the U.S. Census Bureau has been able to successfully document the steady increase in Medford's Latino population from 1990 to 2010, their calculations do not estimate the number of unauthorized immigrants working and living in the community. In other words, the magnitude of the increase in Medford's Latino population is not fully known because many unauthorized Latino migrant workers do not participate in the census for fear of being deported. School district data that tracks the share of Latinos and non-Latinos in its student body, however, can serve as an indicator that paints a picture of the city's Latino population. For example, 2010 ethnicity demographic data from Medford School District reported that 20.5 percent of its K-12 student population was Latino. Compared to 2010 census data, that share is 8.7 percentage points higher (20.5 percent of student population is Latino vs. 11.8 percent of the city's population is Latino).

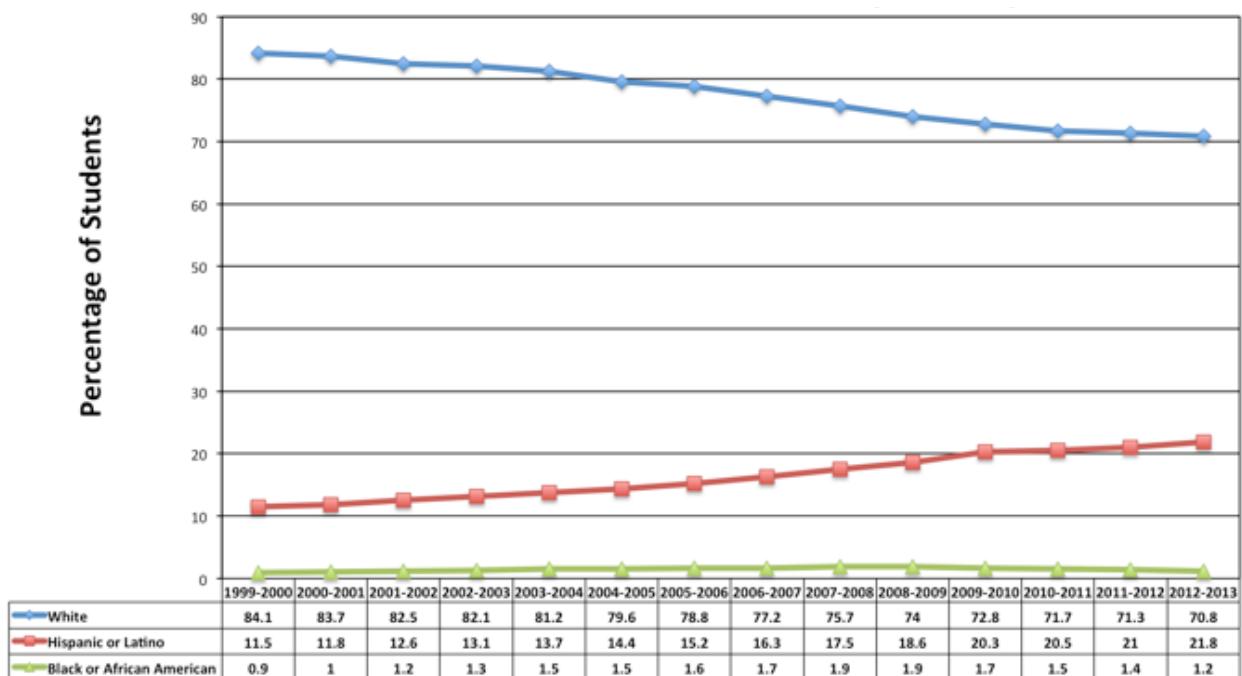


Figure 2: Student Ethnicity in Medford School District (Oregon Department of Education)

Methods and Approach

The project was designed to conduct outreach in one of the city's minority neighborhoods. Professor Gerardo Sandoval, from the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management, invited James Rojas to host a model-building workshop at the Greater Medford Multicultural Fair and engage the public in the planning process. With neighborhood-based planning and outreach to minority populations, a good way of engaging the public regarding planning issues is by going out to places where they are already participating, such as cultural festivals. We envisioned this approach would help us (1) understand key issues diverse community members are facing in Medford and (2) give us an opportunity to describe the workshop process as a way to broadly define an outreach strategy planners, elected officials, and community-based organizations in Medford can use to effectively engage the most marginalized segments of the community's population.

We worked closely with police and city officials in Medford to reach the widest possible audience at the fair. Lilia Caballero, the Police Department's cultural outreach coordinator, and Cheryl Adams office administrator from the Planning Department, both played important roles in inviting people to the workshop and communicating to participants the unique opportunity they would have to discuss issues that are important to them. Caballero is also a member of the Hispanic Interagency Committee (HIC), so she was able to invite a large number of people to attend because she tapped into the organization's network (e.g., list serve, monthly meetings, informal social networks, etc.). Adams also helped in encouraging city staff to participate. She also worked with a bilingual first grade teacher to disseminate a bilingual flyer promoting the fair's workshop through the school system.

By working with police and city officials, we relied on the connections and networks they maintained within the Latino community. Strategies of public engagement have traditionally focused on individuals who are well connected to the system and tend to ignore "vulnerable segments of the population who might be invisible by circumstance and/or by active choice" (Sandoval and Maldonado 2012). By actively seeking to engage the most marginalized segment of the city's population, however, we were able to talk about important community issues with people who are generally not connected and don't understand or fear the system. In some cases, we even spoke with individuals who live completely under the radar because of their unauthorized status (e.g. Latino immigrants who are agricultural and reforestation workers).

Conducting Outreach with a Networking Approach

The following recommendations are useful when making outreach efforts to minority populations because they help reduce people's distrust of the government and/or police department:

1. Build relationships with community leaders, and get their buy-in to help with outreach and planning.

Police and city officials can build relationships with leaders of several organizations by meeting one-on-one with them and explaining how their outreach efforts could potentially improve both neighborhood safety and planning processes. These relationships can play fundamental roles in increasing public participation because the leaders of these organizations can become key partners in coordinating outreach efforts. Ultimately, these types of relationships help build trust in the community.

2. Use organizational networks so that participants are invited by people they know and trust.

Trying to recruit Latino participants for a public workshop without first building a relationship with them can be disappointing. In Medford, Lilia Caballero promoted the event during HIC's monthly meetings. Since the HIC shares resources, networks, and updates around current programs that can support Hispanic or Latino families, they have a strong reputation in the Latino community. Ms. Caballero and HIC's trusted staff members promoted the event (as opposed to having the city send impersonal emails or mailed reminders), and they played a pivotal role in generating more excitement about the event in the Latino community because people were invited by an organization they know and trust.

3. Choose a location that feels comfortable and familiar.

While hotels, conference rooms, and universities are good meeting venues for professionals and populations that have privilege, marginal populations and recent immigrants might feel uncomfortable attending events because they can be intimidating. This workshop was held at a public event in Hawthorne Park, however, so individuals who live near the downtown area felt more comfortable attending because they are familiar with the park. Since the event also had a multicultural theme with diverse music, food, and other vendors, the event was non-threatening. In our past research, the Latino immigrant populations seem to also interact at elementary schools since they feel a sense of safety.

4. Develop bilingual recruitment materials for Latino outreach events.

Spanish-language recruitment materials and flyers are necessary to boost Latino civic engagement. Translated materials, in other words, help build trust because they demonstrate that a project team has a higher level of cultural competency. For this project, both an English and Spanish flyer was developed to promote the participatory workshop. They were distributed electronically via email and through list serves that belong to established community-based organizations.

5. Make follow-up calls to people who have agreed to attend a public engagement event.

Research indicates that Latinos, for example, are more likely to attend workshops or meetings when they are contacted directly by a trusted organization's staff members or by a project's management team. Also, if staff members and project teams make follow-up phone calls and rely on in-person invitations, they give individuals an opportunity to ask questions about the event, which ultimately helps to reduce any feelings of fear or concern.

6. Offer tangible incentives or rewards for participants.

It is important to offer some sort of incentive or recognition when possible because some participants may have to take the day off from work or have budgets that are very constrained. Food or \$10-15 gift cards, for instance, can be provided to individuals or families who attend. Developing a feedback mechanism where community participants see how policy makers used the information gained from their participation is also critical.

Workshop Design

Approximately 100-125 individuals provided feedback about what they wanted to see in their community during James Rojas' participatory workshop in Medford. Mr. Rojas, who previously worked for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, has conducted over 250 of these community-building workshops throughout the United States. Individuals who decided to participate represented a number of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Everyone from elected officials to children and entire families were engaged in the model-building process. Some of the participants also included Spanish-speaking, low-income, and marginal Latinos, some of whom may have been unauthorized immigrants.

At the fair, the model was placed near a heavily traveled sidewalk, which helped to create a visual dialogue with pedestrians. As soon as people glanced at the model, and the hundreds of tiny and colorful objects that were located on an adjacent table, they seemed to become curious about the large installation, and gravitated towards the six-foot model. The model of downtown Medford was bound by Main and Jackson Streets, with Hawthorne Park at the center. Bear Creek, which runs parallel to the park, was covered by the I-5 freeway. Major streets, landmarks, and other geographical features were also added to visually define and create this section of Medford. The model was created to serve more as an art piece for creative thinking and visioning, and not as a replica of the city.



Figure 3: Medford Mayor Gary Wheeler interacts with model as James Rojas explains the process.

Right away participants oriented themselves on the model/map with the help of street names, landmarks, and geographical features. They projected themselves into the model and generally asked questions like, “Where are we located on this map?”, “Where do I live?”, or “Where do I work?” Once people understood that they were allowed to personalize the model, they began interacting with it and started rearranging the pieces on the board. They were asked to “re-design Medford” and discuss what they wanted to see in their neighborhoods or in the city.

There were times when people seemed puzzled by our question, but for the most part everyone eagerly spoke to us and provided excellent feedback about important community issues. We received dozens of comments like: “We need more green and open space near my house.”, “We need to bring Hawthorne Park’s swimming pool back,” or “We need grocery stores to be in the center of town.” In the end, the workshop was a success because it allowed people from different cultures to come together, share ideas with one another, and create a collective vision for their community.



Figure 4: James Rojas' Interactive Model of downtown Medford engages the public in Hawthorne Park during the city's 2013 Multicultural Fair.



Figure 5: James Rojas' Interactive Model of downtown Medford engages the public in Hawthorne Park during the city's 2013 Multicultural Fair.



Figure 6: James Rojas' Interactive Model of downtown Medford engages the public in Hawthorne Park during the city's 2013 Multicultural Fair.

Key Findings

The key findings presented below are based on common themes that continually reemerged throughout the six-hour workshop:

Workshop participants stated they wanted more recreational activities and family events in public parks.

Many people stated they wanted “active” parks, which are large, offer diverse activities, are heavily used by the public, and tend to have full-time on-site staff. Active parks are primarily used for athletics and specialized recreational activities. Typical facilities include baseball fields, football fields, soccer fields, basketball and tennis courts, play structures, restrooms, and parking. Several workshop participants specifically mentioned that they wanted to see soccer fields in their community. Another common response provided by participants was a desire for an outdoor swimming pool at Hawthorne Park. During the model rearranging we heard everything from “create a more family-friendly atmosphere at Hawthorne Park” to “let’s build a laser tag place or family fun center.” One young, enthusiastic participant even asked for a “Chuck E. Cheese and Disneyland.” The most common response among workshop participants who talked about family-related events or activities, however, was, “we need more games for kids at parks.” Building active parks could help address this concern.

This is a similar theme we have uncovered in other areas of Oregon where we developed these types of participatory workshops. For example, Mr. Rojas organized his participatory workshops in Eugene/Springfield last year and we discovered that marginalized Latinos lacked a sense of community belonging and inclusion in Lane County. This was particularly evident in their relationship to public spaces and especially public parks.

People discussed the need to build an inclusive community that promotes equal treatment and opportunity and eliminates all forms of discrimination.

Several workshop participants reported frequent incidents of racial discrimination. They mentioned that events or activities designed to bring people from different cultures together would create better awareness about the city’s growing diversity and reduce ethnic and cultural tensions.

By building on issues that affect everyone in the community, the city could raise awareness about the common ground individuals from different groups actually share. Addressing issues that affect everyone such as healthy children, clean parks, safer streets, elderly care, or more recreational centers can help create a common goal that everyone can work towards. Public campaigns designed to address these issues could be used as a tool, for example.



Figure 7: The Interactive Model of downtown Medford asks for feedback from residents.

Other workshop participants discussed that they would like to see more “colors,” statues, or art sculptures throughout the city. They shared that adding this artistic dimension to the city could help build community because art projects could be commissioned to reflect the city’s increasingly diverse identity.

Several individuals discussed the need to build a larger bike infrastructure and improve the safety of bike lanes near Bear Creek.

The workshop revealed that a number of people want to see more bicycle lanes on major roads. Most people who talked about bike infrastructure, however, discussed the need to increase safety near exiting bicycle lanes, especially around Bear Creek. Some participants stated that they would be more willing to use Bear Creek’s bike paths if the police department adopted a tougher crime prevention policy that focused on reducing the use of alcohol and drugs in the area. Other people mentioned that beautifying Bear Creek with better lighting and benches could also help to increase safety, which would promote the use of the area’s bike lanes. Some suggested that getting more people to ride on the bike paths would in turn make the paths safer.

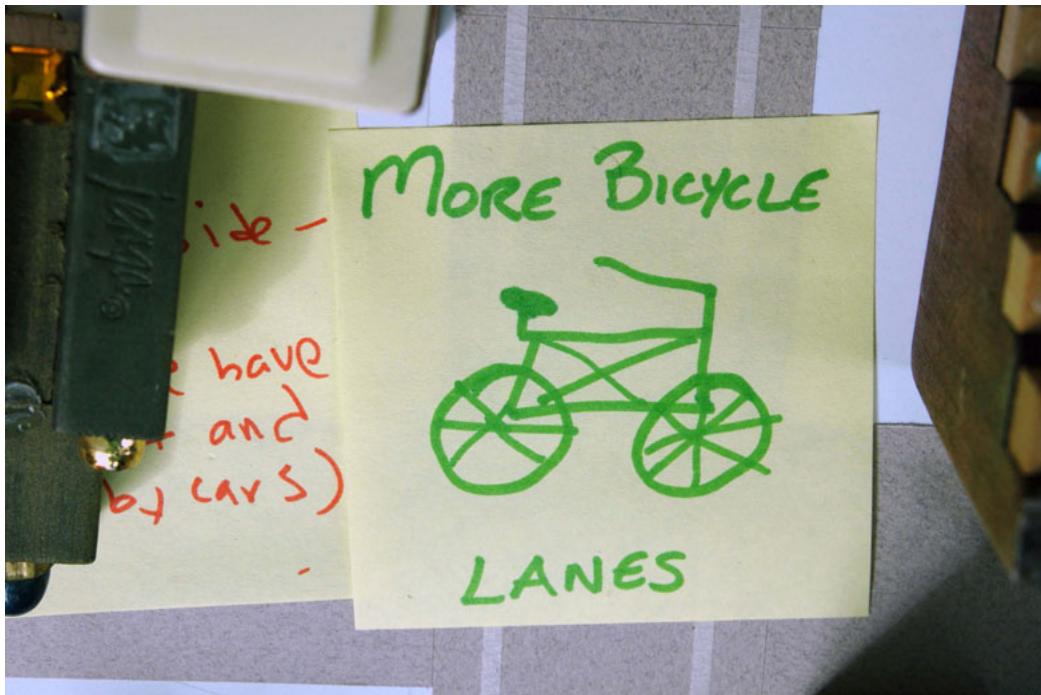


Figure 8: While using the model of downtown Medford, residents discussed the need for more bicycle infrastructure.

People are worried about losing Jackson County branch libraries.

Many individuals stated that they are deeply concerned about losing their branch libraries because these resources have a big impact on education. Nearly all of the libraries in Jackson County could close by next year if officials cannot find additional funding. If no additional funding is found by next year, 14 branch libraries in Jackson County will close. Only the Medford Library would remain open past next year, but it could eventually close by 2015. For people who live in outlying communities, it would be a big loss.

Conclusion

This report provides police and city officials with strategies to overcome the limitations of contemporary public participation models that have limited effectiveness in marginal and Latino communities. The project's public engagement approach was not based on traditional outreach models because our goal was to engage individuals who generally do not get involved in the urban planning and design process.

We were able to successfully conduct outreach in one of Medford's minority neighborhoods because of three factors:

- (1) We used an approach that was based on individual networks;
- (2) we coordinated our outreach efforts through city staff that has solid and established relationships with community-based organizations, Latino businesses, schools and individuals in the Latino community; and
- (3) the public workshop was informal, open to families, and non-coercive.

This report also provides information about the key issues minority neighborhoods in Medford are facing and concerned about, based on data collected during the fair's four-hour workshop. We believe this participatory workshop was successful because we took an asset-based approach and built on an existing community strength to conduct our outreach. We encourage Medford's police and planning officials to use similar strategies for maintaining relationships and channels of communication with the growing Latino population in Medford.

Suggestions for Future Work

This participatory planning workshop was a one-day event, which specifically asked participants to redesign downtown Medford. It was intended to quickly access some of the key issues around planning and community development that people who attended Medford's multicultural fair felt were important. In the four-hour period we received feedback from a diverse group of participants, but that was just a beginning. There is so much potential in Medford for getting the low-income Latino community involved in the planning process and for making their voices heard. We suggest that civic leaders, police, planning staff and city leaders continue to engage minority populations in safe, non-coercive, and positive ways. We learned a lot about important community issues in just a four-hour period that the city could expand and continue to build on.

Another focal area relates to biking issues. Bike safety issues were a major theme that emerged during the workshop. This could be a good opportunity to unite the diverse perspectives and populations that were at the fair around an issue that would bring direct benefits to everyone in Medford. With this in mind, Dr. Sandoval and Dr. Schlossberg (SCI's co-director) will join forces and teach two courses as part of the Sustainable Cities Year in Medford that will examine ways to increase access to biking and delve further into diversity/outreach issues in the city. Dr. Sandoval would continue to work with stakeholders in Medford around Latino outreach while Dr. Schlossberg would focus on biking issues. They would join forces on issues such as transportation equity.

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