

Public Education and Outreach Campaign Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

When a planning issue is of vital local importance, how do you educate the public about options and elicit meaningful feedback at the same time?

This was the challenge addressed by TLC PR for the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OMPO).

OMPO, a city-state agency, is charged with periodic updating of the long-term transportation plan for the entire island. The update prioritizes transportation for the next quarter-century and directs the course of billions of dollars of public funding.



The challenge given to our team by OMPO was to inform the general public and key stakeholders about various transportation alternatives and obtain their input on which alternatives were most important to them.

Our firm worked as part of a team to develop an evaluation matrix of 14 potential outreach techniques. Knowing that budget parameters prevented employing all of the techniques, we conducted a "return on investment" analysis, assessing and ranking the ability of each outreach tactic to achieve specific goals such as number of people impacted, whether critical stakeholders were reached, and whether the technique addressed environmental justice concerns, a required element of the federal funding. For example, a direct mail campaign ranked high in number of people reached, but low in cost-effectiveness.

By conducting this analysis, we provided the client with a solid, quantified justification for selecting the techniques that were ultimately used in the campaign, while omitting others.

The final outreach strategy called for an innovative range of approaches to engage the public at a time when busy schedules and competing interests made the large central "town meeting" concept less effective. These approaches included development and targeted distribution of a questionnaire/brochure, statistically accurate phone surveys, and multiple public meetings in various communities on the island. Additionally, we engaged the community in non-traditional settings: at the Alapai Bus Transit Station, where people certain to be interested in transit planning were found in abundance; at the University of Hawai'i campus center to elicit student interest; and even at the Kailua Farmers' Market.

As part of this strategy, we made a concerted effort to address environmental justice, a concept important to the federal funders of the project. This involved reaching out to non-English-speaking immigrant populations, and other traditionally underrepresented and economically disadvantaged groups. We encouraged these groups to provide input through radio and print advertising that was translated into each group's respective language. A translation service hotline was also made available at the public meetings.

To obtain wider feedback, we commissioned phone surveys to collect and quantify public comments on an island wide basis. Results provided valuable insights into the status of public perception with regard to transportation and desired improvements. We also provided counsel in the development of a stakeholder survey to gather comments from key stakeholders, and created a questionnaire/brochure with a return-mail component to solicit further written feedback from the general community.

We also helped organize, promote, and orchestrate several regional meetings that educated the public about transportation alternatives and gave attendees an opportunity to voice their support or opposition.

Via news releases and pitching efforts, TLC PR secured numerous media placements, resulting in nearly three million positive media impressions and encouraging widespread public participation in the planning process.

Results: OMPO received more than 600 comments offering suggestions on the transportation plan.