

Case Study Title: Marana Citizens' Forum

Case Study Category: Communications

Jurisdiction name: Town of Marana

Jurisdiction population: 34,961 (2010 Census data)

City Manager: Gilbert Davidson

Consideration for an Innovation Award: yes

Consideration for Rapid Fire session: yes

Project Leader: Amanda Jones, Management Assistant, Town Manager's Office

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Purpose:

In 2006, the Town Council formed five Citizen Advisory Commissions (CACs) via formal resolution. These five commissions evolved over the past six years into the Police, Parks and Recreation, Utilities, Business and Economic Development, and Affordable Housing Citizen Advisory Commissions. These commissions consisted of members from throughout the community and each was assigned a staff member to act as a liaison. The CACs relied heavily on Town staff to agendize their meetings, prepare all discussion materials, and provide detailed updates. The CACs focused on specific topics with a community perspective. As Marana grew, issues throughout the Town became more complex and required a more interconnected and multi-disciplinary approach. This led to the creation of the Marana Citizens' Forum.

There were months of preparation leading up to the first Forum session held in Fall 2012. Staff worked on the initial framework, and presented the idea to Department Heads for input. To make the program viable, it was vital to garner buy-in from the CAC members. Staff attended the regularly scheduled meetings of the CACs to present the idea to them, and then met with all the Commissioners together for a final overview and solicitation of feedback. They provided valuable insight regarding the functionality, as well as what they would like to see included in the new concept. To further test the concept, the Town held a trial-run of the process using staff. Finally, in November 2011, Town Council acted to suspend the CACs and institute the Marana Citizens' Forum as an outlet for civic engagement and a conduit for community input and idea sharing.

Structure:

Each Forum session is a series of four meetings; Orientation, Introduction, Data Presentation, and Panel Discussion meetings. Initially, the Marana Citizens' Forum was a series of three meetings held over a two month period, culminating in a presentation to the Town Council on the recommendations. Over the past two years this process has expanded and now includes an Orientation meeting held at the beginning of each session to introduce the Delegates to each other, the process, and allow them to choose from three potential topics, the topic for the Forum session.

The Introduction meeting allows the Delegates to begin a high level discussion of the chosen topic and also provides an opportunity for them to request any data points that could help set the context for their discussion and, eventually, recommendations. This data is gathered and presented at the Data Presentation meeting, traditionally by Town staff. The Delegates are presented with guiding questions during the Panel Discussion meeting, based on the discussion over the past meetings, and are tasked with creating tangible recommendations to present to the Town Council. All three of these meetings are facilitated by a trained Facilitator and the Introduction and Panel Discussion meetings are recorded by a trained Recorder. Both of these positions are vital to keeping the group on task as well as culminating the discussion to a consensus statement.

The Forum Delegates are made up of members from all across the community. Some of the Commissioners decided to continue as Delegates, but most of the Delegates come from additional sources. There are appointees from the Town Council, community partners (Marana Unified School District, Marana Health Center, Northwest Fire District, Marana Chamber of Commerce, CalPortland), and an at-large application process. These diverse Delegates create a vibrant and energetic conversation and generate smart and thoughtful recommendations. The only costs associated with the Marana Citizens' Forum are minimal staff time and the trained Facilitator. The savings are primarily Town-wide staff time since this program creates a streamlined and direct approach to multi-disciplinary problems.

We have held three Forum sessions since Fall 2012 and each one has proven better than the last. The recommendations from each of the sessions have started to be implemented by Town staff including, a community newsletter and a beautification task force. The Delegates have also taken the lead on implementing some of their recommendations by developing a community survey and an implementation plan for completion.