Getting Community Buy-in for Financing Needs

Communicating the Value of Water

Water Finance Forum

Financing Resilient and Sustainable Water Infrastructure

March 31, 2016 | Portland, Oregon

What is the Problem?

Water Infrastructure; Treatment; Distribution; Source Protection

Wastewater Collection System; Treatment; I&I; Septic vs. Collections; Discharge

Storm Water System; Transportation System; Under Capacity Issues; Population Loss

Financial Issue; Operational Issue; Regulatory Issue

Whatever the problem is, you must identify all the components of the problem to develop an implementable solution. If you only fix part of the problem, you still have a problem.

How Do We Get to the Solution?

- Who has identified the problem? Has this problem been verified by more than one party?

- Who is asking for a solution? You need to know what sort of solution is expected.

- How do we develop potential solutions? Consultants, government staff, etc.

- How do we pick a solution? Consensus of agencies and parties, lowest cost, dart and blindfold?

- What do we have to consider when picking a solution? Risk to public health, effect on local economy, effect on population, time frames, seasonal considerations, cost, cost, cost, etc.

What is the *RIGHT* Solution?

- Problems usually have more than one solution. Always identify as many solutions as possible.

- Doing nothing is ALWAYS a choice. This becomes the wrong choice when it's proven to be wrong.

- The affected parties need to choose the right solution for themselves. You have make a decision in order to own and be responsible for that decision. Boards, councils, etc. need to be asked to make a choice on how to proceed and what solution to work towards.

- Community buy-in requires community involvement in the decision making process. You need to start slow and make sure that everyone understands the process and what's at stake. If you rush the process the community isn't going to be "in control" and you risk opposition to the solution.

Who are You?

If you are the person that is going to lead or coordinate a project where a solution to a problem has to be found, or a project where a solution to a problem has to be implemented, how are you going to be viewed by the parties involved?

- Are you stake holder, elected official, consultant, agency representative, manager?

- How are you connected to the issue? What is your interest in the either the problem or solution?

- What do you have to gain in this situation? Do you have an agenda or specific goal?

- Are you objective? Is there a potential for you to become biased at some point?

Who are the Players, Decision Makers and Stake Holders

- How complicated is this? Is it two districts? Is a district and a city? Etc…

- Who's making the decisions? Board, Council, Manager, State? Who claims authority vs. inability

- Who's "needs" and who "wants"? Are there parties that have more to gain or lose?

- Does the problem affect one agency or more? If so, which ones and how are they affected?

- Which agency has the bigger problem? Is the agency with the problem looking for a solution?

- Who's got the most to win or lose? City; county; state; unincorporated area; or a few individuals?

Why Are We Fixing This?

- When people talk about government, they usually talk about the problems that they feel government creates and not the solutions that government implements. Have you heard the following phrases before?
  - "You're just doing this so you can raise my rates."
  - "I think there's got to be a better (meaning cheaper) way to do this."
  - "Why can't we just keep doing what we're doing?"
  - "This is just a solution looking for a problem."
  - "We can't afford to do this." Etc…

Determining Obstacles to Community Support

- Who's going to be opposed to one or more potential solutions? Do acknowledge a problem?

- How is the problem viewed? Does the community, or do the communities, understand the problem?

- Have issues and been communicated to those involved to date? And how has this happened?

- Who controls the flow of information? How involved is the media? Does the media even know?

- What's been brought up already? What needs to be brought up? What reaction can you expect?

- Do you have a Public Information Official/Officer (PIO)? Do you need one?

Attitudes that Will Not Work

- Don't be a "hero". You are there to help solve an infrastructure problem – you are not saving anyone from anything. Solutions to these problems generally and usually are going to cost someone money, and they will want to talk about the cost and why they should have to pay for it. You need to viewed as an advocate for a necessary solution to a real problem.

- Don't be a "salesman". You are not "selling" a solution. You're presenting a solution to those that have the problem, and they have to make a choice. If the problem is real, and the preferred solution holds up to scrutiny, then you are advocating for the responsible decision.

Advocating for the Right Decision

- Stick to the facts. Avoid assumptions and speculation, and encourage others to do the same.

- Always talk about the cost and the worst case. Avoid "cost-creep" discussions where things get more expensive as you go from one conversation to the next.

- Talk about the benefit of the solution and the threats posed by the problem at the same time. Keep the problem and the solution connected in every conversation, and encourage others to do the same.

- Test everything. Every cost and every element to a solution needs to be brought up and beat to death. If you don't find the holes or faults in a solution, rest-assured, your strongest opponent will.