

Field Report: Strategic Guide to Engage Youth in SF Planning Initiatives

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ISSUE

In order to retain San Francisco’s population of children, the SF Planning Department must educate, engage, and incorporate youth in their planning initiatives to develop a child and family friendly city. San Francisco’s population of children has remained stagnant for the last 15+ years because families tend to leave the city once their children reach school age. In comparison to the 12 largest cities in the United States and Bay Area counties, San Francisco has the lowest percentage (18%) of family households with children. Ultimately, maintaining families and children of all economic levels and racial demographics in San Francisco is difficult and includes multiple challenges, including, public safety, high quality schools, job opportunities, and affordable housing. This memo will specifically analyze San Francisco (SF) Planning Department’s current Family Friendly City initiative, which seeks to develop an effective family and youth engagement process to meet the needs of all families in San Francisco. Given the intentional educational experience, children are natural planners that understand their neighborhoods and can provide meaningful feedback for SF Planning. Using Y-PLAN (Youth – Plan, Learn, Act, Now) and Balboa High School as a case study, we will explore opportunities to make improve SF Planning’s Family Friendly City initiative.

METHODS

In order to understand San Francisco (SF) Planning Department’s current family and youth engagement process through the Y-PLAN program at Balboa High School, classroom site observations and focus group interviews were conducted. Four classroom site visits and one workgroup planning meeting observation were completed over the course of the semester, including an observation of Y-PLAN students performing a walkthrough of the Excelsior neighborhood with SF Planning staff members. Students were asked focus group questions regarding their understanding of the planning process and desired learning goals. Individual interviews were then conducted with two teachers of the Y-PLAN program to determine how well the projects were aligned with their curriculum objectives. Additionally, individual interviews were conducted with two SF Planning staff members to better understand their current process and desired goals to engage with youth.

FINDINGS

SF Planners, and community members seek youth voices to inform the development of their city

Within the Excelsior and Outer Mission working strategy group, there exists a strong desire to understand what youth wanted to see improved around mobility access in the surrounding neighborhood. The mobility-focused working group seeks to use youth perspectives on transportation routes to better inform how MUNI can be better utilized. Additionally, there exists opportunities for other working groups focused on topics such as public realm to





incorporate youth insights into their strategic plans.

Teachers and SF Planners aspire to equip students with the content knowledge, scientific methodologies, and skills to diversify the planning field

There exists a strong desire to incorporate the scientific learning process into the curriculum and for exposing more students to the different career paths available within the planning field. Teachers believe that engaging students in the planning process represents an opportunity to teach them how to collect and analyze data on meaningful projects. SF planners seek to empower students with the knowledge and skills to propose project ideas to improve their own neighborhoods.

There is low capacity and no clear process to incorporate youth voices into the planning process

The San Francisco planning department currently lacks a formal strategy for engaging youth and schools in the planning process. While SF planners are strongly interested in gaining more student input, there exists resource, time, and budget constraints that limit their ability to intentionally reach out to youth. Additionally, SF planners desire to be more involved with developing the lesson plan content and presentation materials to teach students about the planning process. Ultimately, SF planners firmly believe that youth are natural planners and have strong potential for sharing a unique perspective on neighborhood redevelopment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that SF Planning build internal capacity and foster a youth-centered culture that incorporates youth and school collaboration in their planning processes. The SF Planning Department can achieve this goal through three potential strategies:

- Hiring a Family Friendly City Initiative Full-Time Employee
 - This FTE will collaborate with schools to educate students on urban planning and coordinate youth presentations at community workgroup meetings. They will actively foster and scale partnerships with San Francisco Unified School District schools to develop a stronger process in educating students about urban planning and incorporating youth voices into planning projects.
- Integrate school and youth engagement into every Planner's job description
 - Require a youth engagement strategy into every SF Planning project that specifies the process and partnerships with local schools that will be leveraged. Furthermore, implement a professional development curriculum that trains planners to effectively facilitate dialogue and engage students in urban planning.
- Contracting Third-Party Provider
 - Contract responsibilities of aligning and coordinating engagement between SF Planning and SFUSD schools to a third party. They will maintain regular communication and logistics within the partnership.

