

3

Strategy Chosen to Maximize Public Participation

This chapter discusses the means used to ensure extensive public participation in the water planning process. The following topics are included:

- Use of Media
- Outreach Tailored to Specific Communities and Constituencies
- Public Meetings
- Contact with Elected Officials

Because of the region's diversity of interests and the need to build broad public support for the recommendations in a non-binding regional water plan, public participation has been central to the planning process in the Middle Rio Grande Region (MRG Region). The importance of public participation is reflected in the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly's (Water Assembly) mission statement, which declares the group's purpose to be "the development of a regional water plan through an open, inclusive and participatory process." This chapter presents the strategies used to achieve the Water Assembly's mission. Chapter 4 details the events and processes used to fulfill these strategies.

3.1 Use of Media

Due to limited funding, media were utilized to the extent they were made available on a no cost or minimal cost basis.

Announcements for public events in the form of press releases or public service announcements were regularly provided to the print and broadcast media, along with media kits and conferences with editorial boards. The media kits consisted of organized packets of educational materials prepared through the planning process (see Section 4.3). Members of the Water Assembly participated as "experts" on call-in shows and provided planning materials to reporters and editors, who presented much of the material to their readers as "news."

Contacts for publicity were made with local newspapers throughout the region as well as with the main Albuquerque media outlets. Letters and articles were published in these local newspapers on a regular basis. Water Assembly volunteers also wrote opinion pieces which appeared in the papers on a number of occasions.

Examples of media-relevant materials, e.g. articles, media kits, and press releases, are found in Supporting Documents Series C.

Public meetings were designed to draw the attention of local television and print media outlets. Efforts were made to use the public service departments of particular television stations to televise selected public events.

3.1.1 Press Releases

Water planning studies and reports, as well as all general public meetings, were advertised to the local radio, television, and print media—both the main Albuquerque outlets and throughout the region. Press releases were designed to highlight essential points and to concisely summarize the report or nature of the public meeting. A general trailing format summarizing the nature, goals, references, and contacts for the regional water planning process was used for press releases. Press releases were designed so a reporter could, if desired, copy the release into an effective news article. Supporting Documents C-7 contains a list of the media entities in the region.

3.2 Outreach Tailored to Specific Communities and Constituencies

As indicated above, press contacts were made throughout the region so as to reach people in rural areas and smaller communities such as Cuba, Bernalillo, the South Valley and Los Lunas.

In addition, a standard presentation—with allowance for some modification to address the interests and needs of different audiences—was developed on the nature of the region’s water problem and on the processes used and progress made toward solving that problem. This presentation was delivered to these geographically distinct communities, as well as to special interest organizations.

The presentation was designed to be both technically accurate and clearly understandable by lay people, and was updated as development of the regional water plan progressed. It was used to elicit feedback and guidance from attendees, and that guidance was incorporated into the planning process.

3.3 Public Meetings

The public participation effort for this program focused primarily on public meetings. Over the course of the water-planning program, an extensive series of public meetings were held to bring information to the public and to elicit general comments, values, goals, objectives, and preferences from the public. Meetings took the form of community conversations (CCs), regional forums, and annual water assemblies. Each series of CCs included five or six separate meetings held over two weeks in all three counties in the region. They were largely topic-based and focused on a particular stage of the planning process. Following each CC series, people from throughout the region were invited to attend a one-day regional forum which typically presented results from the CCs and highlighted progress being made through the stages of the planning process. Additionally, there was an all-day annual water assembly which also disseminated information on the planning process and provided a public venue for conducting elections to various positions within the WA and for coordinating other administrative details. Specific meeting details appear in Section 4.2.

A public comment database was established to record comments made at these meetings. Besides the text and context of the comment, the database recorded, to the extent possible, when, where, and who made the comment, along with any ancillary data facts. The more than 2300 comments that were gathered in the public comment database (Supporting Document D).

3.4 Contact with Elected Officials

The Water Assembly took several approaches toward making contact with elected officials. First, a partnership was established between the WA and the Water Resources Board of the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG). The Water Resources Board has representatives from non-tribal jurisdictions within the region. The Water Resources Board also has seats for each of the tribal jurisdictions within the region (unoccupied except by Isleta Pueblo for a brief time). Coordination with elected officials was carried out through this board.

Presentations developed for the general public were tailored for elected officials and delivered to the governing bodies of the various Water Resources Board political jurisdictions within the region. The targeted frequency for such presentations was every one to two years. Three such briefings were arranged during the last year of the planning process.

Particular outreach efforts were made to the region’s state legislators and to those state and federal agencies whose activities have some bearing on the region’s water. The purpose of such outreach was to keep them informed about the process and to obtain input on their preferences and concerns. The primary outreach method was to deliver presentations to groups of legislators.

Participation of tribal entities within the region was solicited. Presentations to tribal councils as well as to the coalition of six southern pueblos were offered on a regular basis. Positions at all planning discussion tables were made available to tribal representatives.

In addition to the above, the Water Assembly asked elected officials, tribal representatives, and agency representatives to speak at public water planning meetings.