

## **Davenport Institute Case Story**

### **Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District**

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***Sponsoring Agency:*** The Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District (HBMWD) operates two separate and distinct water systems: a domestic water system which supplies treated drinking water; and an industrial system which supplies untreated raw water to large industrial users for industrial purposes.

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***The Problem:*** High levels of community frustration and dissatisfaction with how HBMWD planned to deal with its excess water crisis--initially planning to sell the excess water (60 million gallons per day) to outside districts, particularly the Southern California Water District. The initial decision was made without community input. Moreover, HBMWD was approaching its 20 year re-evaluation period in which it would have to reapply for its water permit that determines how much water it could sell commercially. A regulation in the re-evaluation process identified that if water was not being used in the three preceding years of re-application, the water limit (amount available to be sold commercially) would be reduced. HBMWD was facing the challenge of not having an acceptable solution to dealing with the excess water and potentially losing the opportunity--and economic benefit--to make the decision of what to do with the excess water itself.

***Proposed Solution:*** Hire a local facilitator who would lead a community-based planning process known as F.L.O.W. (Frank Language about Our Water) that would allow the community to participate in the decision making process regarding what HBMWD would do with the excess water. The FLOW process would:

1. Discuss the various options regarding what could be done with the water
2. Prioritize those options, and
3. Write/produce a policy recommendation for HBMWD to vote on.

***Goals:*** Its primary goal was to produce sound recommendations that were understood and supported by the community. In addition:

- To provide the community with an understanding of the key challenges and opportunities facing the District and its customers (i.e., the community)
- To enable Board members to understand the community's priorities regarding the Mad River and use of its water
- To strengthen the District's position to maintain control of its water resource
- To position the Board so it can make decisions that benefit the community, and
- To develop a stronger and more trusting relationship between the district Board and the community

*The Process:* HBMWD created a public engagement process that was:

- **Participatory.** The process engaged a broad spectrum of people, especially those who could be impacted by the Board's decisions, in meaningful ways through a variety of methods including face-to-face meetings in various locations and online vehicles.
- **Open and fair.** The community understood the decision-making process and their role in it. They understood the issues and were committed to participating in the planning process.
- **Efficient and time bound.** Participants saw it as a good use of their time.
- **Educational.** People understood the issues and challenges and were able to engage as informed participants.
- **Respectful.** Participants listened to one another and considered each other's points of view, even when they disagreed.
- **Clear.** Participants understood the process and the potential legal constraints that affected the Board's decisions regarding the public's water rights.

To make sure the process was inclusive and participatory, HBMWD established an Advisory Committee (AC) of stakeholders that brought together multiple perspectives from the community. Through the aid of the facilitator, the AC (made up of community members, stakeholder groups, HBMWD board members, etc...) owned and designed what the public engagement process would look like.

*Outputs:* The AC decided they needed a framework or mechanism to evaluate the many ideas or "options" for water uses that would be generated by the various stakeholder groups and the public. In addition, they developed a set of values and criteria that would be used to evaluate these ideas/options.

The seven general categories of values or criteria were:

1. Local Control
2. Legally Viable

3. Environmental Concerns
4. Access Concerns
5. Economic Development
6. District Cost Recovery, and
7. Quality of Life.

In addition, the criteria were categorized in the following way: If an option met or passed the two threshold criteria (Local Control and Legally Viable), then the option could be measured against the remaining five criteria. Specifically, the threshold criteria became:

Local Control: The option must allow the HBMWD to protect, maintain, and determine uses of the existing water rights, and

Legally Viable: The option must implement actions that are currently legal, or if they require permits, variances or changes to law those are likely to be obtained.

The process produced two documents which served as the foundation for AC and the HBMWD Board's decision making process:

1. Framework for Evaluating Water Resource Planning Options
2. Guidance for Applying the Framework

**Outcomes:** As a result of the process, the AC 1) created detailed descriptions of the options to be explored as well as a framework for evaluating them, 2) provided public outreach and education on the water crisis through public meetings and "Water Workshops" in three major cities, and 3) executed an extensive media outreach campaign using television, radio, the internet and print media to engage the public in the process.

**Lessons Learned:** Don't underestimate the voice of the community to stop a project/policy due to lack of community input. When making decisions, all voices/stakeholders should be brought to the table and given valuable consideration in the decision making process.

Allow the organization to take ownership of and play a vital role in developing the engagement process. Having the process be conducted by the stakeholders in the community rather than an outsider is important. Mary Gelinas made sure this was the case and emphasized the importance of this aspect to the success of the process outcomes. She found that:

*Innovative processes must be custom designed to fit the situation at hand. Still there are principles, concepts, and components from WRP that can be used as a model for other jurisdictions to tackle a variety of public policy issues. For example, the Humboldt County Economic Development Team adopted many elements of the WRP process in 2012-2013 to update their Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. It effectively engaged over 450 citizen leaders, formed 18 Citizen Action Teams to generate ideas, and an Industry Leader Council to evaluate solutions to economic challenges. The results was*

*broadly supported--and implemented--economic development strategy. This process was custom-designed, and followed an explicit and agreed-upon set of process principles. Elements from WRP were also incorporated into the Strategic Planning Process of the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation, and Conservation District and the Southern Humboldt Community Healthcare District.”*

*-Mary Gelinas, “Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District” Participedia Case*

While there are multiple aspects that must be considered when analyzing the effects of policy, including cost, impact, etc.. do not forget to take into consideration the weight of the community’s input--or lack thereof. Failure to include the community from the beginning can have negative and counterproductive impacts including lawsuits, removal of persons from office, etc...

***What Can Be Replicated?*** N/A This process was customized and specific for the organization and the situation. Some facilitation components may be replicated per Mary Gelinas.

***Resources:*** N/A