

Location: San Mateo County

Issue: San Mateo County's Long-term Housing Solutions

Methodology: Threshold 2008 – Countywide Assembly (Deliberative Poll), Online Dialogue, and Community Conversations

Link to more: <http://www.threshold2008.org>

CSC: 2008 Common Sense Grant Recipient

In 2002, civic leaders formed a group known as the Housing Nachos to address the shortfall of housing in San Mateo County. The Nachos conducted citizen engagement events in 2003 and 2004. The event in 2003 was a ChoiceDialogue, and in 2004, the event was a Stakeholder Dialogue. Viewpoint Learning facilitated both of these events. The Housing Nachos have now formed Threshold 2008 to further the discussion.

Threshold 2008 combines three different citizen engagement approaches in its methodology. The Countywide Assembly utilized the Deliberative Polling technique developed by Dr. James Fishkin of Stanford University. The Online Dialogue and Community Conversations are tools developed and facilitated by Viewpoint Learning.

The Countywide Assembly took place March 15-16, 2008, and included a statistically representative sample of 238 residents of San Mateo County. Participants received balanced information, engaged in discussions among small groups, and consulted with experts. The results showed that participants became more attuned to the housing crisis in San Mateo County and were willing to sacrifice job growth for a lower number of commuters. The participants also stressed the desire for more regional authority and public consultation in housing matters.

In May 2008, over 400 residents and workers in San Mateo County discussed their views on affordable housing in facilitated "Online Dialogues." These dialogues ran for two weeks. Participants learned about the pertinent issues and made tradeoffs in regards to the housing dilemma. The process included small group discussions in which participants contributed at their convenience during the two-week period. "Community Conversations" will commence in June and July 2008. These conversations will engage citizens at the local level at 50 scheduled sites around the county. Viewpoint Learning will train 50 moderators to conduct these conversations and will also create and provide information kits specifically designed for this issue.

The perspectives and conclusions gathered during all three phases of civic engagement will be reviewed by the public and city officials in a report that was released in late 2008.

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