

Location: San Francisco

Issue: San Francisco's Citywide Policy Priorities – "SF Listens"

Methodology: AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meeting

Link:

<http://www.americaspeaks.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=565&grandparentID=473&parentID=688>

A leader renowned for his innovative and creative approach to policy-making, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, wanted to get the informed voice of San Franciscans regarding policy priorities for his new administration. In March and April of 2005, he kicked off a series of three townhall-style meetings called "SF Listens."

Working with AmericaSpeaks from Washington, DC, Mayor Newsom engaged 500 citizens in conversations about their most important policy issues. The AmericaSpeaks' "21st Century Town Meeting" methodology involves the use of individual voting keypads and laptop computers placed at each table. Through the three-hour meetings, San Franciscans were asked policy questions and then given the chance to deliberate with fellow residents before being asked to offer their opinions both collectively (at each table) and individually.

The issues discussed ranged from public safety and economic development to homelessness and housing. Results did vary between the three different San Francisco communities in which the conversations were held, but common responses played an important role in Mayor Newsom's policy portfolio.