

Location: San Diego Region

Issue: San Diego Region's "Future of San Diego Regional Airport"

Methodology: Viewpoint Learning – ChoiceWork Dialogues (county residents)

Link to more: <http://www.viewpointlearning.com/publications/reports.shtml>

San Diego International Airport, also known as Lindbergh Field, has been in existence for over 75 years and has served as San Diego's primary airport. However, due to an increase in population and growing demand for air travel, another airport was necessary to sustain the current demand. Unfortunately with cases of infrastructural development, many city and county citizens' feel a strong sense of NIMBY'ism ("not in my backyard.") In March and April 2004, the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (SDCRAA) sponsored six Viewpoint Learning eight-hour long ChoiceWork Dialogues amongst 35-45 randomly selected San Diego County residents from all ethnic, political and socio-economic backgrounds. In ChoiceWork Dialogues citizens' use dialogue, rather than debate after spending the first half of the eight-hour day familiarizing themselves with the possible scenarios, pros and cons; and spend the last half of the day discussing trade offs for their scenarios.

Over the six dialogues a total of 224 San Diego County residents discussed their opinion about the current airport in Lindbergh Field and the necessity of another airport in San Diego. The participants were asked to evaluate "what kind of airport they wanted" in four scenarios designed by aviation experts, economists and the SDCRAA: improve Lindbergh Field as much as possible; supplement Lindbergh Field with a second airport; close Lindbergh Field and replace it with a single airport; or build an "Aeroplex." During the six dialogues it was almost immediately decided by the participants that building a new airport was a necessary solution. Initially they agreed that the scenario, which supplemented Lindbergh Field with a second airport was very efficient; however, eventually majorities in five out of the six groups decided that maintaining Lindbergh Field would be financially draining in the long run, leaving future generations with the current issue and thus Lindbergh Field should eventually shut down. The benefits of airport development would be improved public transit, more jobs, lower airfares, and additional housing. The downfalls were noise concerns, increased traffic around the site, and building on open space, which raised issues of NIMBY'ism.

Participants of Session 4 demonstrated mistrust towards government-regulated decisions. Once citizens felt government officials were manipulating them, they voted down any options towards resolving the issue. During this session facilitators pushed participants to express what they would support if airlines rejected a supplemental solution, which led participants to feel mistrust towards all options. They felt they were being pressured into an undesirable alternate solution.

The positive result of the ChoiceWork Dialogues was that they created solutions for San Diego's airport crisis and the citizens who participated in the dialogues discussed key issues on air travel and regional development. During the ChoiceWork Dialogues experts, politicians, and stakeholders provided their technical contribution, and citizen participants represented citizens' beliefs and priorities.