

Community Engagement: Recommendations for Development Project Applicants

PUBLIC INFORMATION HANDOUT

The San Francisco Planning Department (SF Planning) is responsible for helping shape an inclusive City with more equitable, sustainable, and healthy communities. Part of this responsibility includes reviewing and approving development projects. SF Planning encourages community engagement so people can participate in important changes in their neighborhoods and because development projects can affect different communities, especially communities of color and historically disenfranchised groups, in different ways. Successful community engagement can help build public awareness about important proposals, garner useful community feedback, shape projects in ways that make them more responsive to their neighborhoods, and lead to a more collaborative and streamlined review and approval process.

While SF Planning encourages engagement for every project, developments of a bigger scale or that may potentially have greater neighborhood impacts warrant more comprehensive outreach. The level and intensity of community engagement should be appropriate for the project type, size, and/or location.

- » For smaller projects or many of those that don't require a Public Hearing, communicating with nearby neighbors may be more appropriate than engaging with community groups.
- » Larger projects often necessitate more outreach, like thoughtful and early conversations, regular communication with neighborhood groups, multiple public meetings, and discussing community priorities.

A proactive, inclusive, and transparent community engagement process can maximize benefits for both a project and the community, strengthen neighbor relations, and speed the review and approval processes.

This document includes information on community engagement best practices, the purpose and benefits of good public outreach, when and how engagement can occur during the development review process, and resources to assist Project Applicants.



Guiding Principles for Community Engagement

- 1. Inclusive:** All community members are invited to participate
- 2. Accessible:** Information is understandable and engagement is approachable
- 3. Transparent:** The community is aware of their level of influence in decisions
- 4. Respectful:** Diverse views are appreciated, and authentic civil dialogue is encouraged
- 5. Meaningful:** The community is engaged in a way that is genuine, appropriate, and practical
- 6. Early:** Engagement is started in the beginning-stages of a project
- 7. Accountable:** Agreed upon commitments are fulfilled and results are communicated to those involved

Preliminary Project Assessment (if applicable)

Projects that require a [Preliminary Project Assessment](#) will receive specific community engagement guidance from SF Planning

1. Prepare for Outreach

RESEARCH

1. Learn about the community

- » Determine if the project is in a [Priority Equity geography](#), [Environmental Justice Community](#), or [Cultural District](#)
- » Determine which [Merchants Association](#) or [Community Benefits District](#) to contact
 - Typically only for projects with commercial, industrial, or mixed-use components
- » Review relevant community planning efforts and reports (e.g., [Historic Context Statements](#) & [Neighborhood Strategies](#))
- » For assistance accessing information, contact pic@sfgov.org or the staff planner if one has been assigned

PLAN

2. Create an engagement strategy

- » Define project goals and expected timeline
- » Create a project narrative (e.g., what it is, who it is for, why it is important, how it will fit the community)
- » Create a list of community groups and neighborhood and business associations to engage
 - Use the [Registered Neighborhood Group](#) list as a starting point for contacting local organizations
- » Determine who and how they will be engaged and possible barriers to participation (e.g., time, childcare, food, transportation)
- » Questions to consider when developing an engagement strategy may include:
 - What type of feedback is needed?
 - What is the community's level of influence?
 - What details of the project are flexible or non-negotiable?
 - What is the anticipated City process and timeline will be?
 - What locations are best for outreach events?
 - How can underrepresented groups be engaged?

CONNECT

3. Foster relationships with community members

- » Reach out to the community as early as possible
- » Contact community groups, neighborhood associations, residents, and other relevant stakeholders
- » Consider partnering with community groups to host meetings, gather feedback, and seek advice on neighborhood contacts
 - If community groups have their own regular meetings it may more be efficient and convenient to present there rather than hosting a special event

STRATEGIZE

4. Connect community priorities with project outcomes

- » Through community conversations and research, seek to understand neighborhood concerns and priorities
- » Identifying how the project can help advance community priorities or address concerns is a great starting point for facilitating engagement events

Special Circumstances

Occasionally for very large projects that garner significant community interest, it may be appropriate to do more active, in-person engagement, such as guided community site walks, focus groups, surveys, door-to-door visits to nearby homes and businesses, or open houses.

2. Pre-Application Meeting

Some projects require [Pre-Application Meetings](#), which are held early in the development process with adjacent neighbors and Registered Neighborhood Groups to get initial feedback about the project.

- » Follow all required procedures
- » If there is a significant non-English speaking population, as feasible mail out translated notices and provide translation services at the Pre-Application Meeting
- » At the Pre-Application Meeting clearly describe the Project, explain the anticipated review process and timeline, and answer questions and concerns as fully as possible

3. Community Engagement

Project Applicants are sometimes asked to do additional community engagement beyond what is required because of the project's size, type, or location of projects, so that projects can move forward in the most inclusive and efficient way possible. Potential concerns can be identified, and feasible solutions developed to avoid conflict and delay. These are hosted by the Project Applicant and not facilitated by SF Planning; City staff does not typically attend these meetings. Below are recommendations for hosting effective community engagement events and other forms of public outreach.

1. Send Invitations

- » Mail out meeting invitations to community groups, residents, and other invitees as early as possible, ideally no later than 14 days before the meeting
 - o Include translated invitations and meeting materials when feasible if there is a significant non-English speaking population. There are several language-access services available, including free online websites. For a list of vendors approved by the [Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs](#), please visit the [LAO Resource Library](#).
 - o An email, phone number, or point-of-contact that can respond to questions and comments in-language is helpful
- » Refer to the [Property Information Map](#) to see addresses of adjacent properties and use the [Registered Neighborhood Group](#) list as a starting point for contacting local organizations
- » Include clear and relevant information on the mailer (e.g., project overview, basic plans or drawings, meeting location, date, and time)

2. Choose accessible meeting times & locations

- » Meeting time:
 - o Schedule meetings during hours accessible for different types of people
 - o Avoid dates and times that conflict with neighborhood events (e.g., sporting events, school activities, religious gatherings, festivals)
 - o Consider multiple time options: Weekday evenings 6-9PM; Weekday lunch times 11AM-1PM; Weekends 10AM-6PM
 - o Try to get on the agenda for community groups' existing meetings
 - o Co-host a meeting with a community group when appropriate and possible
- » Location:
 - o Determine if virtual, in-person, or both is most accessible
 - o If meeting in-person, choose a location in the neighborhood which meets minimum ADA standards, has plenty of tables and seating, is easy to get to (walkable, parking availability, and transit accessibility) and is an inviting and neutral location
 - o Suggestions: Reserve a community space such as a [public library](#), [local school](#), church, or [community center](#)
- » When possible, provide additional accommodations to encourage more people to attend, such as:
 - o On-site childcare
 - o Translation services
 - o Food, coffee, or snacks
 - o Transportation

3. Run a smooth & inclusive meeting

- » Meeting materials should be:
 - o Available both digitally and in print
 - o Written in plain and simple language that is easy to understand regardless of education level or familiarity with the project and development process
 - o Clear and concise – If providing plans and drawings, show simplified versions with clear labels
 - o In fonts and colors that are easy to read by people of different ages and abilities
 - o Culturally sensitive and translated into any languages predominantly spoken in the neighborhood
- » Provide an optional sign-in sheet for people to get email updates
- » Set clear goals and an agenda for the meeting
- » Manage expectations about the community's level of involvement and influence in decision-making
- » Share project contact information
- » Provide next steps

Submit Application

4. Project Review

- » Once SF Planning starts reviewing the Project Application, the staff planner may ask the Project Applicant to conduct additional outreach
 - o Talk to neighbors and community groups (See Sections 1 and 3)
 - o Provide periodic updates via email, phone, or newsletter to let the community know the status of the project and any significant changes. If project review takes longer than a year, at minimum annual updates are recommended
 - o If a Public Hearing is required, contact neighbors and community groups approximately two months ahead of time

5. Public Notice

- » Follow all required procedures
 - o Anticipate and incorporate the City's issuance of required notices
 - o SF Planning will mail out [Section 311](#) or [Section 333](#) Public Notices when applicable
- » Answer questions and comments from neighbors and community groups
- » Keep the community informed about Public Hearings, continuances, etc.

6. Public Hearing

- » Prepare a public presentation, including visual aids
- » Be prepared to respond to comments from the public and Commissioners
- » Invite community members to show support for the project or share comments

Permit Approval

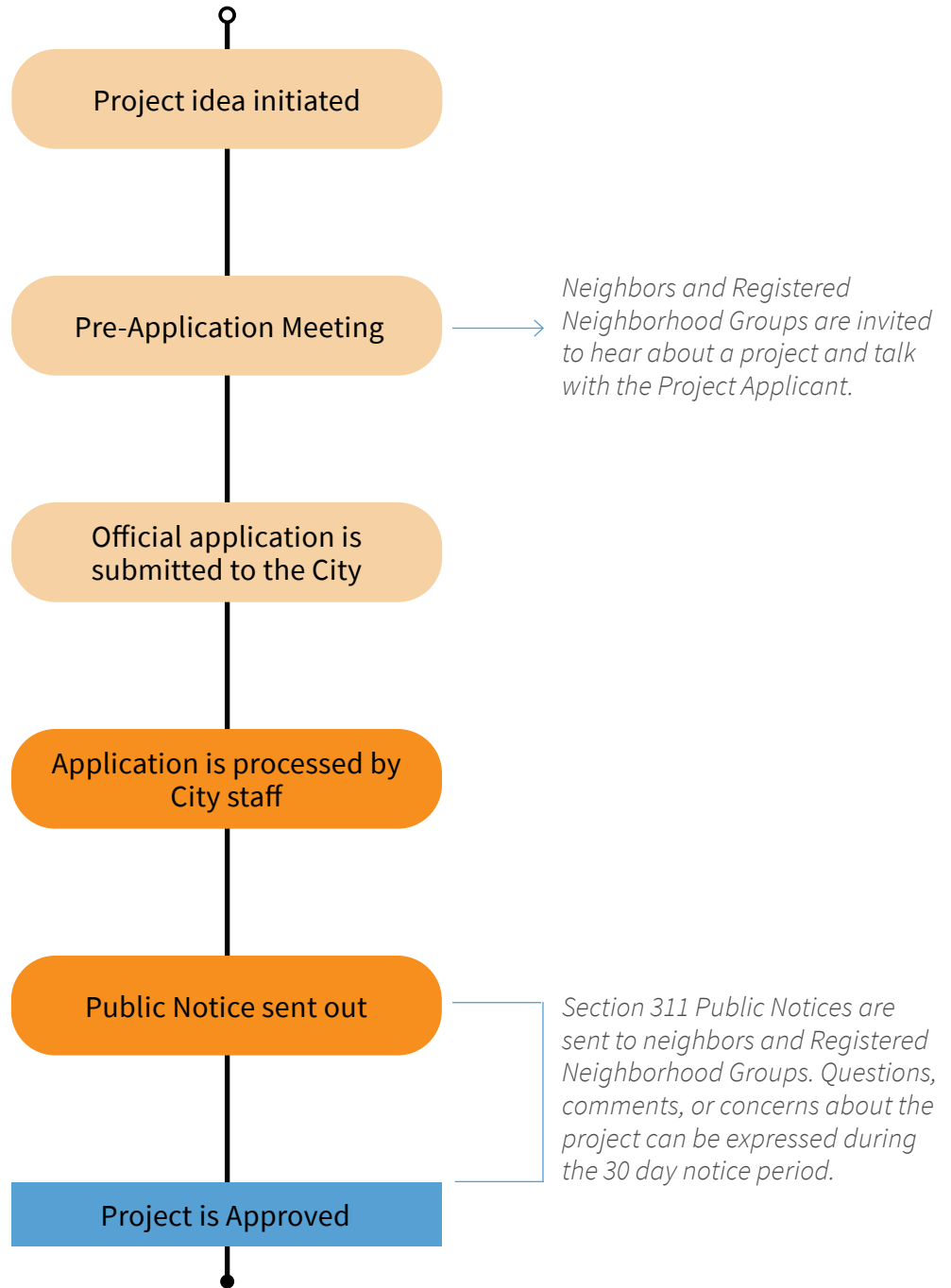
6. Follow-Up

- » If arrangements were made to continue collaborating with neighbors or community groups post-approval (e.g. construction-related measures, further design development, programming and site activation), maintain regular lines of communication so commitments are met

Project Process: Typical Small Development

Typical “small projects” may include expanding an existing building, constructing a new house, or changing or starting a new business.

Members of the public can contact the Project Applicant and staff planners with questions or comments at any time throughout the process.

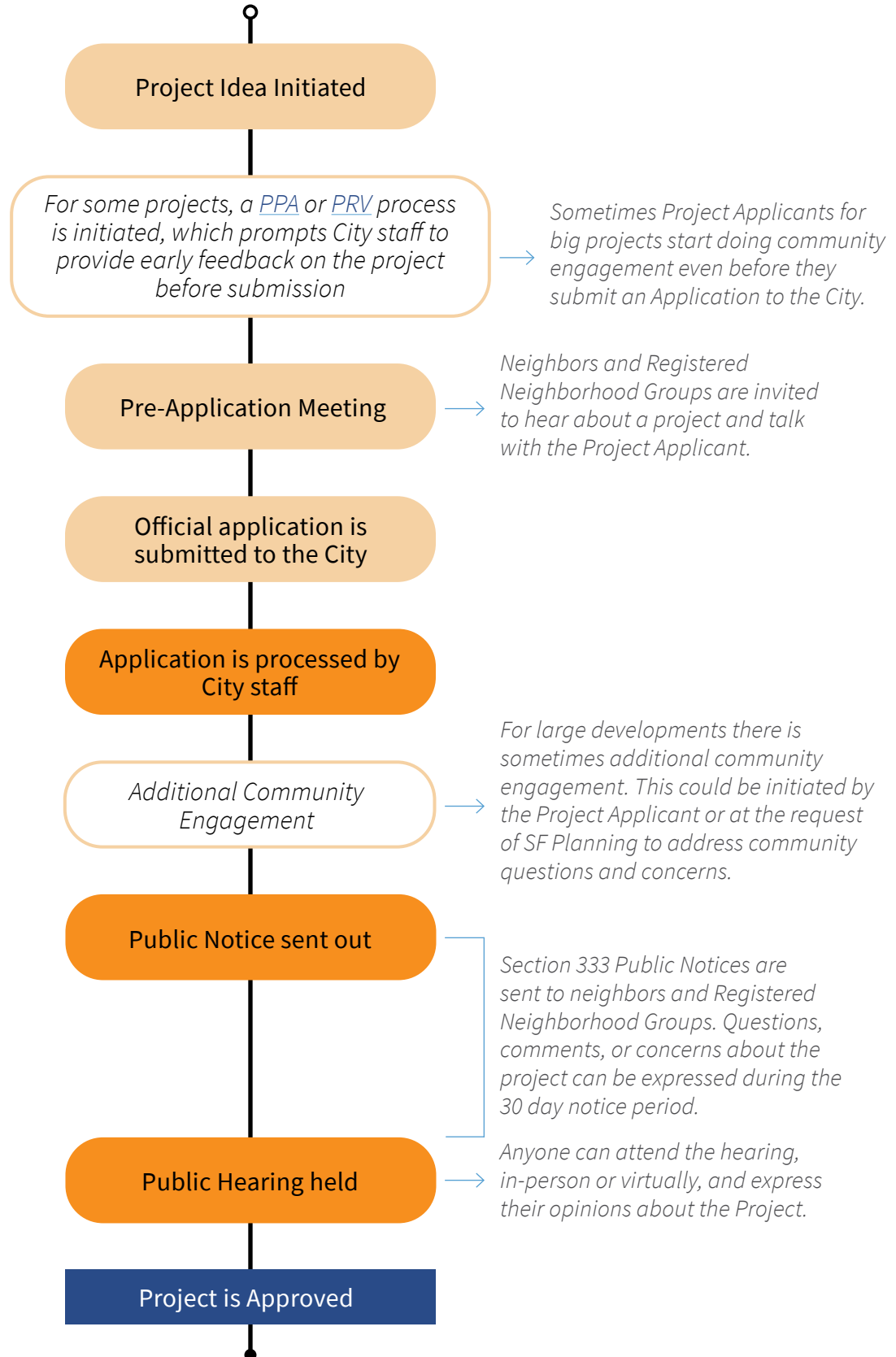


- Project Applicant Task
- SF Planning Task

Project Process: Typical Large Development

Typical “large projects” may include constructing a new building or multi-family housing, opening an office or chain business, or proposed legislation.

Members of the public can contact the Project Applicant and staff planners with questions or comments at any time throughout the process.



- Project Applicant Task
- SF Planning Task

Resources

Application Materials:

- o [San Francisco Planning Department Public Portal](#)
- o [Plan Submittal Guidelines](#)
- o [Project Application \(PRJ\)](#)

Public Procedure Information:

- o [Pre-Application Meeting](#)
- o [311 Neighborhood Notification/Public Notice](#)
- o [333 Public Hearing Notice](#)
- o [Planning Commission & Hearing Procedures](#)
- o [Zoning Administrator & Hearing Procedures](#)
- o [Historic Preservation Commission & Hearing Procedures](#)
- o [Environmental Review Officer & Hearing Procedures](#)

Community Engagement & Informational Resources:

- o [Community Engagement Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- o [Registered Neighborhood Group List](#)
- o [Planning Information Map](#)
- o [Permits in My Neighborhood](#)
- o [Public Notices for Project Applications](#)
- o [Planning Counter at the SF Permit Center](#)
- o [Community Equity Division](#)
- o [Racial & Social Equity Action Plan](#)
- o [Community Development & Engagement](#)

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San Francisco
Planning

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Call or visit the San Francisco Planning Department

Central Reception
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400
San Francisco CA 94103

TEL: **628.652.7600**
WEB: **<https://www.sfplanning.org>**

Planning counter at the Permit Center
49 South Van Ness Avenue, 2nd Floor
San Francisco CA 94103

TEL: **628.652.7300**
Planning staff are available by phone and at the Planning counter. No appointment is necessary.