

Lessons Learned
Clean Water Initiative
Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District
April 24, 2012
(updated November 14, 2013)

The following are lessons learned during the planning and implementation of the 2012 Community Clean Water Initiative in Contra Costa County. These lessons learned were gathered from interviewing staff involved in the funding initiative with the Flood Control District and Clean Water Program.

1. Have someone on the consultant interview panel that has experience in the elections process.
2. Talk to other agencies that have gone through the process during the project planning phase.
3. Amend the Flood Control District Act to better defend a property related fee and provide more funding flexibility.
4. Is a 54% survey result enough to go forward with an election? What is an appropriate factor of safety.
5. Was a countywide approach a viable model? Should a different approach, such as regional elections be implemented? Were we too committed to a countywide election?
6. Better ways to track costs are needed for our storm water permit (MRP) activities so we have better data to explain our need for funding.
7. Not submitting ballots to the Elections Office was a problem. Need to go through the Elections Office or do a better job of informing people of the property owner ballot process. Registered voter process as opposed to property owner process.
8. Ballots had to be signed by the property owner per law, which created a problem for some people. Need better informational material on the process and compare with other similar processes that have signature requirements that people may be more familiar with.
9. There was no pro/con argument in the ballot packet, which was not required by law. Need better description/information on the process. What can we do, what are the limitations for us to do a pro/con argument?

10. Our "PR" campaign started too late. It should have started way before the notice of public hearing. We should have tapped into our connections with creek groups better and earlier. Should we hold public debates or a voter's forum instead?
11. We had no champion. We need to engage creek groups early on before the election process to be our champions after election process starts. We also needed cities to champion the election.
12. We had no succinct talking points. Need to develop 3 key talking points that resonate with people and keep repeating them.
13. A lot of questions were asked about the legality of the election process. Need to hire an attorney/professor/judge to write up an informational piece on the legal requirements.
14. The local newspaper mounted a vigorous opposition to the initiative. Need to bring in our PIO early on to talk to media up front.
15. There was a sentiment that the Regional Board is unreasonable and the MRP should be changed/modified. Need to bring in the Regional Board to discuss the MRP. Why it is required and why county/cities have permit requirements.
16. There was confusion as to what the fee would be spent on. Need better communication on a project list and what the fee will pay for. Also, need some "sexy" projects that resonate with the public.
17. There was no full disclosure of the existing Stormwater Utility Assessment during the election. Need to think of how to communicate this out to the public.
18. Not all cities supported the election. Need a resolution of support from each city before the election process begins.
19. It wasn't clear to the public why we were using a property related fee. We need to have a better informational mailer about this.
20. There was some reported confusion by people not being able to determine their assessment from the ballot. This might have been a problem more for commercial parcels. Need to make sure the ballot language is crystal clear on how the property fee is calculated.