



Smart Growth America

Making Neighborhoods Great Together

Fighting for Sustainable Communities

Communications Training for Local
Meetings on Sustainable Communities

July 28, 2011

What is the opposition to Sustainable Communities?



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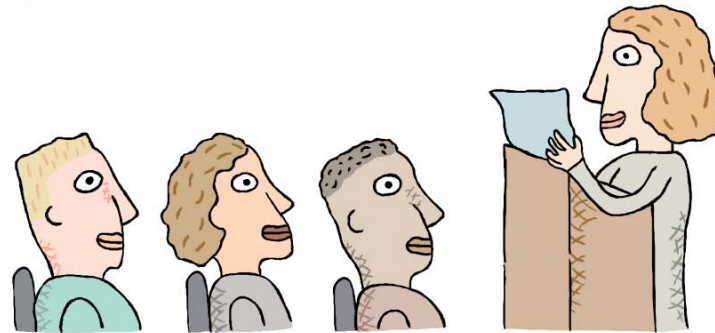


Poll question

- Have you seen any aggressive local opposition recently?

Why the attacks?

- Primary Reasons:
 - **Audience** is very skeptical of government and is responsive to an anti-smart growth message
 - **Organizational and messaging failures** by coalitions



Organizational Failures

- Lack of friendly audience participants
- No strong moderator
- Weak coalition

Poll question

- Are you (or your coalition/consortium) in the middle of trying to implement a project that will require public input, meetings or review?

Messaging Vulnerabilities

- Indications of a predetermined outcome or preference
- Outsiders/federal government



vs.

**Local
Community**

Positive Messaging: the talking points YOU WANT to deliver

Be proactive.

You want to consistently reinforce: “This is a community driven process in which we decide what our future should look like.”

Positive Messaging: the talking points YOU WANT to deliver

Role of Government

- “The government is going to spend **my tax dollars** no matter what, **I’m here to get a say** in how they’re spent.”
- “This is a **democratic process**, driven by the community, so we can decide what we want our future to look like.”

The role of “fear” in today’s discourse

- Be prepared to hear some opposition that includes fears and being afraid of change.
- RESPECT people’s fears, don’t disregard them.
- Offer solutions to allay those fears, and reassure people that they are in charge of their own community

Positive Messaging: the talking points YOU WANT to deliver

Property Rights

- “We have a free country, until you **infringe on other people’s rights.**”
- “When you make decisions that increase congestion, raise my taxes, and increase the school load, then **you impact my property rights.**”
- “We have always been a land of **rights AND responsibilities.**”

Positive Messaging: the talking points YOU WANT to deliver

Community's Future

- “A community that fails to plan will face more **congestion, traffic and higher taxes.**”
- “I want my **children and grandchildren** to be able to live here.”
- “Making our community attractive and preparing for growth allows **businesses** to know what to expect and plan for their future.”

Positive Messaging: the talking points YOU WANT to deliver

Personal Stories

- Why you **love** your town/city/area
- Examples of **failed local planning**
- Local or state **ordinances** that already require planning (if applicable)

Anticipating the Opposition

Them on Them Their main message.	Them on You Their criticism.
You on Them Your response to get back to your message.	You on You Your main message.

Poll Question

- Have you heard of “UN Agenda 21”?

Opposition's Messaging

- United Nation's **Agenda 21**, New World Order,
- The three "E"s: **Environment, Equity, Economy**
- "**Sustainability**", climate change is a hoax
- Federal government coming in and **taking your land away**
- **Social engineering** designed to make us all live in dense city apartments, get rid of cars

Opposition Messaging

- “I’m here to stick up for my **property rights** and to maintain my freedoms.”
- “I want to be able to live the **lifestyle** I want without anyone coming and telling me how to change to meet their ideals.”

Them on Them	Them on You
You on Them	You on You

Opposition Messaging

- “You want to change the **zoning** to take away my property rights so it will be impossible for me to sell my land later.”
- “Government has **no place in making decisions** like this.”
- “This is an **illegitimate process**, driven by socialists at the U.N.”

Them on Them	Them on You
You on Them	You on You

Opposition Messaging

- “We can use this process to make decisions to protect **our property rights and provide certainty for the future.**”
- “This will help our businesses and our **economy.**”
- “Disrupting this process means that others don’t get the freedom to **participate in our local process.**”

Them on Them	Them on You
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Opposition Messaging

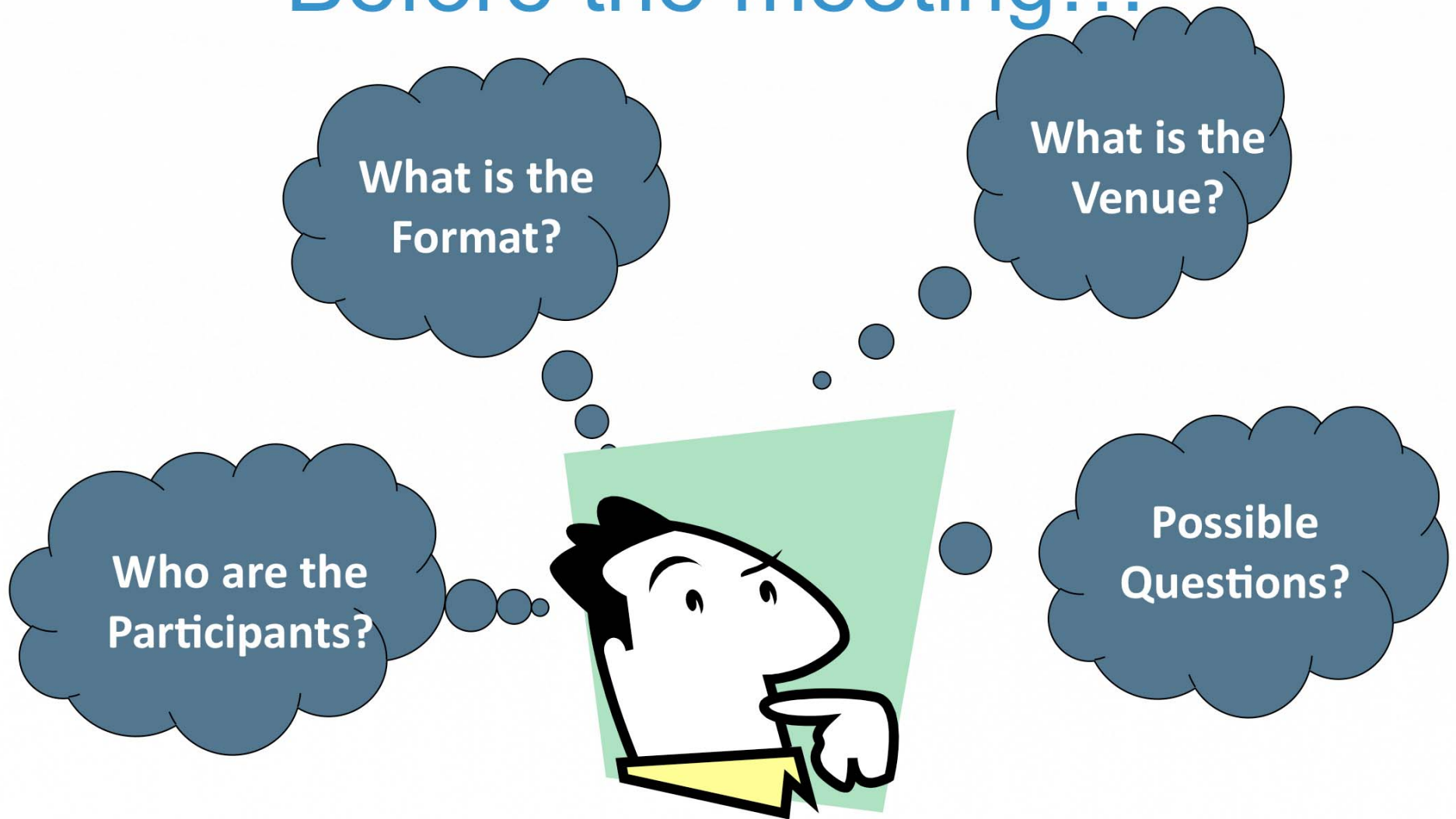
- “This is our community’s planning process, and we all deserve the **right to be heard.**”
- “We need to **plan for our future.** This is an opportunity for everyone to share their ideas and priorities for our community.”
- “I want to be a part of this to make sure my **great community** is there for my kids and grandkids.”

Them on Them	Them on You
You on Them	You on You

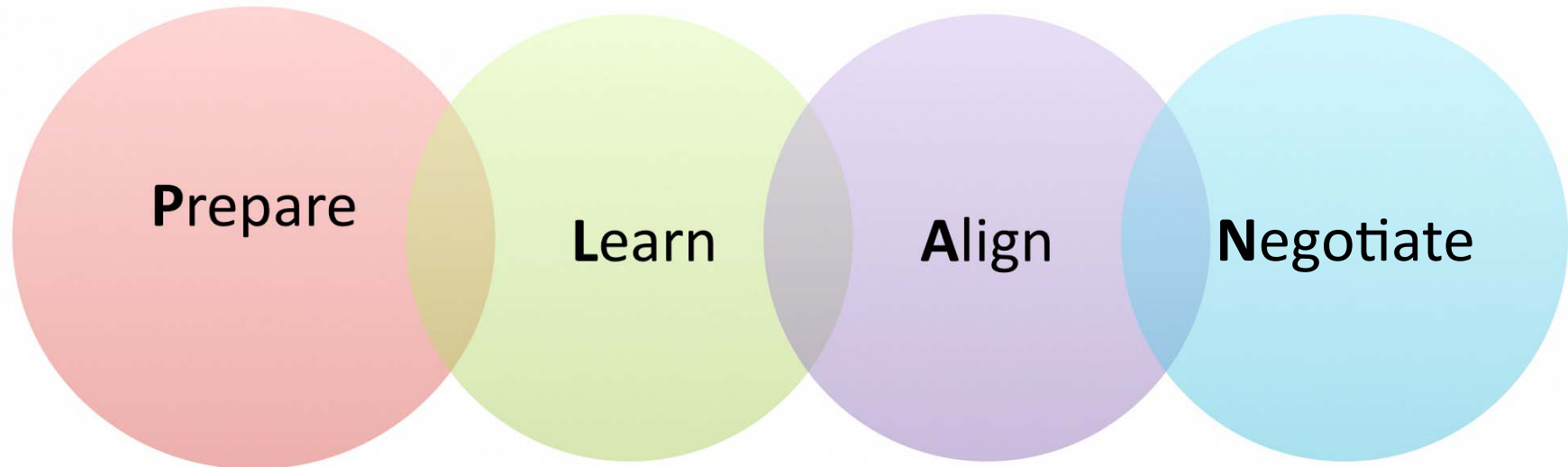
Organizing and Outreach

- Develop **working groups** in your coalition
- **Meet regularly** with closest partners
- **Offer** resources, ideas, materials to partners (don't always ask, offer as well)
- Have **ONE point of contact** for coalition

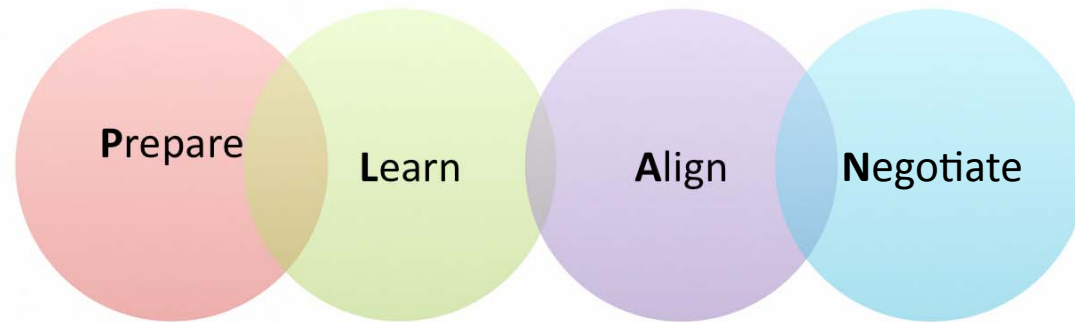
Before the meeting...



Planning for conflict



Planning for conflict



Prepare appropriately

Learn about attendees and listen for potential conflicts

Align with others

Negotiate with those who might raise concerns or surface conflicts

Planning for conflict

- Break into **groups**
- Have people **write down thoughts** individually
- Tell people they can have **host their own meeting** if they do not want to participate productively in yours

Next steps and practical application

- Make your websites and public documents in plain language, not planner or engineer industry terms.
- If you received a funding grant from the federal gov't, don't just post the grant docs and think that equals outreach.
- **KNOW** if opposition is organizing
- **Plan ahead** to anticipate challenges

