

**City of Toppenish**  
**Association of Washington Cities**  
**MUNICIPAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS**  
**2003**

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**What it was; why it was needed.**

In the wake of I-695, the City of Toppenish lost over .5 million dollars in sales equalization dollars. Although the Washington State Legislature provided "backfill" monies to offset the impact, the State's own surplus quickly dwindled, gradually reducing city aide. In 2004, the City of Toppenish will be, for the first time since 1999, completely independent of all State assistance.

Faced with a potential \$450,000+ deficit, the City of Toppenish embarked on a very proactive approach to fiscal management. In October 2002, the Council chose to utilize reserve funds to maintain current city services at the existing level and authorize staff to pursue an aggressive public outreach campaign during the first quarter of 2003. The remaining two months of 2002 were spent charting a comprehensive outline designed to capsule the budget crisis, spread the message, and ultimately solicit resident participation and guidance. In the end, six weekly meetings were scheduled in five different locations chosen for their accessibility and resident-friendly environment.

With a solid strategic map in place, the City Manager followed a well-charted course to market the City's public outreach campaign. Over a period of five weeks, he met with school administrators, ministerial alliances, community service clubs, high school students, and media. Announcements were posted in local businesses (Exhibit A), mailed to Chamber members, sent home in children's school backpacks, repeatedly announced in the local newspaper, and broadcast on the local access cable TV station. The coverage was extensive.

**How it operated.**

Each 90-minute forum consisted of a 30-minute presentation, 30-minute breakout groups, and 30-minutes group reports. Tables were supplied with writing materials and the following bilingual documents:

Program Statements (city service summaries)	Exhibit B
2003 City Services (funded by the General Fund)	Exhibit C
2003 General Fund (revenue sources)	Exhibit D
City Utility Taxes	Exhibit E
City Service Comments	Exhibit F

During the 30-minute presentation, the City Manager frequently referred to the budget documents to illustrate budget impacts. These visual tools proved to be valuable assets throughout the public outreach process. After the presentation and once questions were answered, participants broke into groups of eight or ten to prioritize city services, review and consider revenue options, and suggest alternative options or reductions. Each table had a designated timer to help keep everyone on task as well as a reporter. At the end of the break out session, reporters shared their table's priorities and comments. Comments were then recorded on an easel for staff and Council to review at a later date.

This same format continued for another four weeks, and although Spanish interpreters were available at each meeting, Latino participation was very low. Recognizing the importance that this group be heard, Council decided to hold one more meeting.

In preparation, the City Manager met with a well-known interpreter to discuss the meeting's format. Once again, the media was notified. When the evening arrived, the City recognized its largest participation yet. Latino residents praised the City for organizing such an event and requested more opportunities to participate and learn about local government.

**What it cost.**

The costs associated with this effort were minimal. It is estimated that less than \$1,000 was spent on printing, snacks and coffee, Spanish interpretation, and equipment rental (as needed). The Toppenish School District waived the fee for their facilities and willingly provided all available equipment at no charge. Local media coverage was provided at no charge due to public interest level.

**How it benefited the city/community.**

The City's public outreach efforts culminated during the April 2003 Study Session where Council reviewed a summary of forum comments and suggestions (Exhibit G). The four-month process provided the Council with significant direction from the very people they represent, enabling them to instruct staff with an appropriate course of action never before utilized.

Throughout and since the public outreach process, Council and staff have been approached by numerous residents thanking them for the opportunity to participate. By going directly to the people, Council gained public support and understanding for revenue increases – an action that surely would have been greeted with public opposition had Council responded definitively. Instead, the City of Toppenish has multiple municipal supporters throughout the community, equipped with a basic understanding of the budget situation, and prepared to enlighten their fellow neighbor. The City couldn't ask for a more powerful asset in the face of budget woes.