



## FORM BEST PRACTICES CONTEST

Municipality Sebastopol Country USA

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Name project

Community creation of eco-tourism campaign

Category Certification Criteria

- Energy and environmental policies (politiche energetiche e ambientali);
- Infrastructure policies (politiche infrastrutturali);
- Quality of urban life policies (politiche per la qualita' urbana);
- Agricultural, touristic and artisan policies (politiche agricole, turistiche, artigianali);
- Policies for hospitality, awareness and training (politiche per l'ospitalita, la consapevolezza e la formazione);
- Social cohesion (coesione sociale).

Summary project



Our town has mixed feelings about becoming a tourist destination. On the one hand, with only 8000 people, we need to diversify our economic base. On the other, we worry about being overrun with visitors and losing the qualities we love about Sebastopol. As a result, Cittaslow Sebastopol set out to engage the community in identifying the benefits and concerns, as well as possible solutions to the issues so we could pro-actively shape the growing tourist industry in our town to fit our needs and our unique personality.

1. **Internet Survey of the Community:** Advertised in local papers, through a banner on the library, and through email lists and Facebook pages of the city government and many different community organizations.
2. **Internet Survey of local businesses and non-profit organizations.** Sent via email lists and postcards.
3. **"Keep the Conversation Constructive" workshop** on listening skills offered for free to leaders of community organizations to develop confidence in engaging the public dialogue about this and other controversial topics.
4. **Booth at Farmers' Market** to encourage community conversations.
5. **Open House with voting on solutions proposed in Internet and Farm Market surveys** (8 themes were identified: Traffic; parking; environmental impact; activities and attractions; new businesses; Home Stay/Farm Stays; visitor support services; signs, maps and apps). Co-sponsored by the Core Project, Sonoma County Farm Trails, the Sebastopol Entrepreneurs' Project, the Sebastopol Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center; and the City of Sebastopol.
6. **Presentation of workshop on how to start a Home Stay/Farm Stay business,** developed in collaboration with Sonoma County Farm Trails and the Sebastopol Entrepreneurs' Project.
7. **What To Do in Sebastopol Survey** enlisting the suggestions of area residents as preparation for development of a trifold brochure highlighting our nearby nature, healthy lifestyle orientation and vibrant creative community. Survey respondents are entered into a drawing to win one of three \$100 gift cards to the local businesses of their choosing. The survey was publicized through ads in local papers (online and print), email lists, Facebook and leafleting at the Sebastopol Farmers' Market.
8. **"Sebastopol Is a Slow City" street banners.** There are positions on 44 lampposts throughout the town that can be rented to display fabric banners roughly 18" wide by 72" tall. Cittaslow Sebastopol is producing 12 banners to be strategically placed September 15 – October 14, 2014 (and on-going in future years) to celebrate our slow status and honor International Cittaslow Day.

Goal project

Engage the community in growing an eco-tourism sector of our local economy

Result project



1. **Eco-Tourism Survey:** There were 146 respondents from the community and 31 business/non-profit respondents resulting in over 400 proposed solutions to local concerns about increased tourism.
2. **"Keep the Conversation Constructive" workshop** brought together 26 leaders in government, non-profit and business sectors to learn participatory leadership skills involving listening to community members and responding effectively, especially in public situations and to community members that may not be the most constructive in their approach. Evaluation of the workshop was exceedingly positive including descriptions such as "inspiring" "empowering" "energized" and "enlightened." Attendees enthusiastically asked for future workshops of a similar nature.
3. **Eco-Tourism Open House:** Over 120 residents attend an October 2013 workday evening Open House to vote on 160 proposed solutions across 8 themes. Top vote-getters were:
  - a. Increase pedestrian connections to create a "Park once and walk" campaign
  - b. Develop online and mobile directories, maps and apps to assist visitors in finding parking and discovering what they can do in Sebastopol.
  - c. Create a stronger connection between downtown and The Barlow (new make-sell development in the southeast of town).
  - d. Create an eastside parking structure to ease congestion in town and encourage travelers to pull off the highway and visit.
  - e. Reduce litter and promote recycling.
  - f. Convert the cement plant property to a Laguna entryway with a museum and café.
4. **Park Once and Walk Campaign:** In response to the concern about increased traffic and congestion due to increased tourism, Cittaslow Sebastopol put together a Pedestrian Connector Task Force in January 2014 to develop a Park Once and Walk Campaign. Over 30 citizens have participated in strategy and walking meetings including representatives of non-profits, private businesses and government agencies such as iWalk Sebastopol, the Core Project, Studio L'image and the Complete Streets Advisory Committee to the City Council. Routes are currently being assessed with a pilot project roll out planned for August 2014.
5. **City Business Directory and Interactive Map:** In response to the suggestion that we needed a more prominent local directory, Cittaslow Sebastopol has been working with the City Manager, City Finance Department and the City Information Technology contractor to expand the business directory on the City of Sebastopol website so that all businesses with a business license receive a listing. We have prepared a proposal for Fiscal Year 2014-2015 to add a "Map It" feature and make the directory and resulting interactive map an embeddable iFrame any interested organization could insert in their website. Cittaslow Sebastopol is also proposing development of a mobile-friendly website at [WhatToDoInSebastopol.com](http://WhatToDoInSebastopol.com) that will include this directory and interactive map.
6. **McKinley Street-Mural Project:** In response to concerns about connecting The Barlow with the downtown, Cittaslow Sebastopol is working with the Village Building Convergence to raise funds to create a series of paintings along the pavement that will encourage pedestrians at either end (from the Barlow or from the Plaza) to walk east or west to see what the paintings entail. Local artists will be encouraged to submit drawings for one of 5 placements along McKinley Street. The community will be invited to vote on their favorite drawing for each setting and then invited to assist with the painting of the street murals, following the model of Portland Oregon's Intersection Repair projects.
7. **Home Stay/Farm Stay Workshop:** Forty-five area residents attended this half-day workshop in March 2014, 11 from within City limits and 35 from surrounding areas. The workshop was extremely popular and generated a waiting list of 25 people. Topics included marketing resources; insurance considerations; and financial, personal and regulatory issues to consider when opening business of this nature. Overall, the city residents came away very satisfied and the first Home Stay business license application was received by the City within 2 weeks of the workshop. The speaker regarding regulatory requirements in the outlying areas was the one recommended by the County government. The laws in that jurisdiction are more complicated and she was not able to



Finance (costs and benefits)



Costs: Cittaslow Sebastopol is fortunate to have a unique status as a quasi-department of the City. Although we are officially a non-profit, the City Manager and City Council view us as the volunteer wing of the government, bringing together non-profits, for-profits, schools and government agencies to facilitate projects that seem to further Sebastopol's "slowness." (in some ways we are like a "Friends of the Library" all-volunteer support organization.) But because of our quasi-official status, we are a separate line item on the city's budget. Every year, like other city departments, we submit a budget for review. In the 2013-2014 fiscal year, Cittaslow Sebastopol received \$10,000 to develop an eco-tourism campaign. The fiscal year is not yet complete, but our budget is unfolding thusly:

- Eco-Tourism Surveys and Open House: \$1000
- Pedestrian Connector Project: \$400
- City Business Directory Upgrade: \$600
- Home Stay/Farm Stay Workshop: \$1600
- What to Do In Sebastopol Survey: \$1200
- What To Do In Sebastopol Brochures: \$1000
- Advertising Sebastopol to visitors: \$4200
  - Street Banners
  - Media Kit
  - Ad in 2015 Sonoma County Visitors' Guide

Benefits:

Much of this year's project has involved the planning and creation of materials for an Eco-Tourism Campaign. Actually connecting with visitors and potential visitors will not occur until next year when the brochures are distributed, the ad in the Visitors' Guide is published, and the planned websites are up (e.g., the City's Business Directory and Interactive Map, Cittaslow Sebastopol's WhatToDoInSebastopol.com website). That said, the goal of this year was to get the community engaged and focused on creating a green hospitality sector. This is not easy to measure, however we notice:

- For a town of our small size, there was a relatively high participation rate in the Internet surveys (146) and at the Eco-Tourism Open House (120+) held on a midweek work night in October.
- Many, many comments of appreciation we provided by participants, thanking us for giving the community a chance to engage in dialogue via the Eco-Tourism Open House and in the Internet surveys.
- Several articles in local papers about our endeavors as a community to shape a form of tourism that fits our personality. Comments in newspaper blogs included the usual naysayers. But there were also comments applauding Sebastopol's efforts to pro-actively create an "honest" form of tourism.
- Our focus on collaboration and serving as a vessel to bring together for-profit, non-profit, school-based and government agencies has planted a seed in the minds of many civic organizations. We are gaining a reputation as a group that is inclusive and productive. We are also modeling collaboration as a social norm in our community and starting to hear other organizations orient themselves in terms of collaborating to get more done.
- A City Council Member who did NOT vote in favor of our funding last year has since publicly thanked us for all that we are doing and remarked that our efforts give him hope that many of the ideas that have been floating around our community for years may actually take shape and come to fruition.
- The Home Stay/Farm Stay workshop was exceedingly popular and we have a waiting list of 25 and growing. This form of meaningful interchange between visitors and locals, spreading the economic benefits within the community and paying high attention to minimizing the impact for neighbors has garnered us high respect and is laying a strong



#### Staff (time use and saving)

There is no doubt in the mind of the City Manager, the Mayor and several of our City Council Members that Cittaslow Sebastopol has saved City staff immeasurable hours, bringing forth projects that meet City goals but would have been much more expensive (or not even happened) had they been championed within city government. Volunteer activities that addressed city goals and saved city time include:

- Identification of citizen concerns about a growing tourism sector. Cittaslow Sebastopol affirms the City's commitment to listen and be responsive to its citizens.
- Numerous articles in the local press about the City of Sebastopol's support of local business.
- Expansion of the City Business Directory with planned project management of further expansion to include an interactive map.
- Piloting of the Pedestrian Connectors through development of the Park Once and Walk campaign. Traffic-calming is a top priority of the City Council. Cittaslow Sebastopol's efforts further that goal and provide a constructive outlet for citizen participation in solving civic problems.

#### Additional information and "Lessons Learned" (if necessarily)



We have attached the Report from the Eco-Tourism Open House. The findings from this event have done much to shape our approach to community engagement. And, in fact, this event did much to cement our credibility in the community and with local businesses. When we were funded by the City in June of 2013, we were surprised at the push-back from select segments of the business community, the non-profit community and some area residents. Five people actively spoke against us at the City Council budget hearings, and there were numerous letters to the editor protesting the City's decision to give us funding. We believe that some of this was a perception that we were competing for City dollars set aside for local non-profits. (Because of our quasi-departmental status, we actually are a separate item on the City budget. But this is a subtle point. From the community point of view, we were a relatively unproven group that was given more money than other more established groups.) Moreover, 100% funding of our project was in contrast with other projects (e.g., repairing area potholes) that some community members felt were of higher priority. While we continue to reach out to area organizations and have overtly joined and participated in some of these civic groups, some are open to collaboration, others are not. This is an on-going challenge.

Over the course of the year, I would say our greatest strengths have been reaching out to the community and giving them a voice, rather than talking "to" or "at" them. We have come to think of ourselves as the "City's ears." With our flip charts at the Farmers' Market, our Internet polls and our community voting meetings, such as the Eco-Tourism Open House, we have proven ourselves to be a committed grass roots organization.

We also were very purposeful in looking not only at what the community identified as concerns, but also at the City's stated goals for the year (i.e., Economic development, improved Web presence, traffic calming). Emphasizing collaboration, gathering together stakeholders, and aligning our projects with projects that meet the desires of the community and the City Council has helped to confirm our value to the City. The budget hearings are coming up in June for fiscal year 2014-2015. One never knows for certain, but we have the impression from our meetings with the Budget Subcommittee that we will receive most if not all of our funding request. The City Manager, the mayor and key Council members (including one who voted against us last year) have all come to recognize the positive, practical impact of our activities and approach.

Link website [www.cittaslowsebastopol.org](http://www.cittaslowsebastopol.org)

(if available)

**Once filled in this form please send it to: [m.zedda@censis.it](mailto:m.zedda@censis.it) , [s.sampaolo@censis.it](mailto:s.sampaolo@censis.it) and [info@cittaslow.net](mailto:info@cittaslow.net)**