

Customer Experience (CX) Center of Excellence

# Insights from Payette National Forest

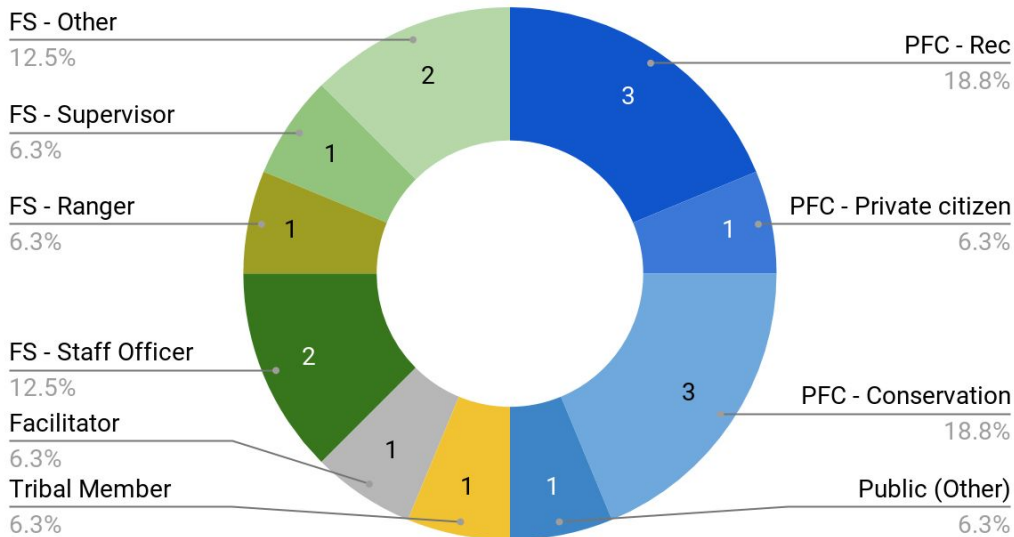
April 22, 2019



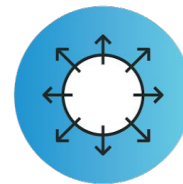
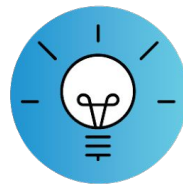
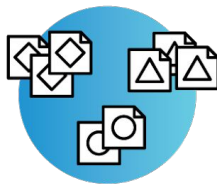
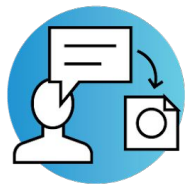
# Payette Case Study: By the Numbers

**13 pre-visit calls**  
**18 on-site interviews**  
**15 surveys**  
**6 hours of meetings observed**

Interview Participants



# Making Sense of Our Data



## **231 Data Points**

*Direct observations  
and quotes*

## **21 Themes**

*Patterns in human  
behavior*

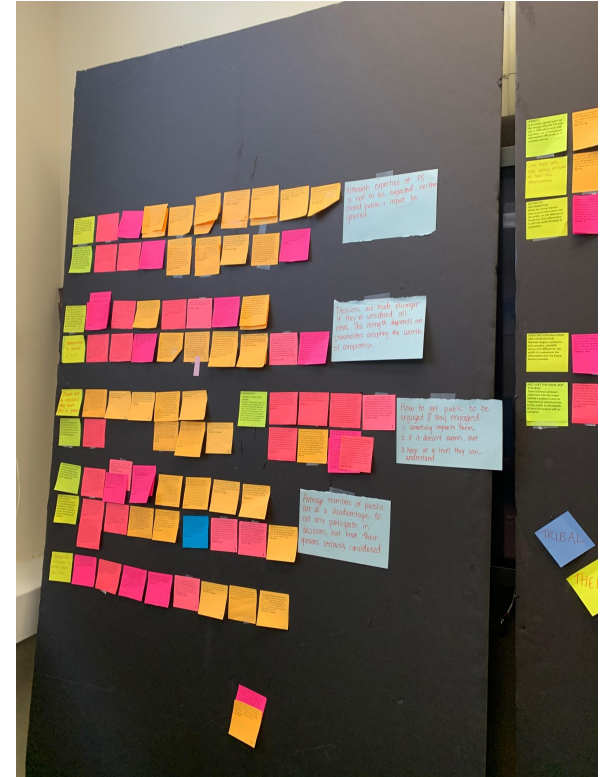
## **6 Insights**

*Learnings about  
patterns of behavior  
that are surprising or  
unexpected*

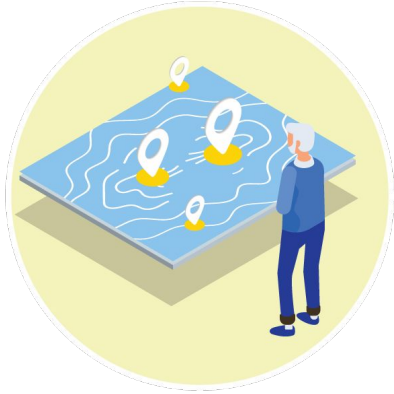
## **3 Opportunity Areas**

*Spaces to explore  
solution ideas*

## Synthesis



# Too Small to Matter, Too Large to Grasp



An individual is more likely to become engaged in forest decisions when they have a stake in the proposed project. Once engaged, an individual becomes a successful decision-maker when they are able to see forest dependencies beyond their personal motivations and is able to compromise. Unfortunately, most forest projects are either too large for the public to fully understand and care about, or too small to be noteworthy.

*“... it’s not really worth my time if it’s just 1,000 acres. Make it big enough to address, and appropriate scale so it’s meaningful from fish perspective, or elk perspective, or a business perspective at the mill. And so by scaling up that works. We’re not gonna agree on these other issues, so that was really important to find out what’s the perceived problem. Are they related? Is there an overlap? And also who’s not at the table?” – Community*

*[On how to keep people engaged] “It really has to fit their cause... There are groups that drop off and come back and if we don't do anything that affects them then people will ‘leave the table’.” – Forest Service*

# Public Engagement: One More Thing to Do



Forest Service staff acknowledge the limits of traditional public engagement methods (i.e., open houses, NEPA form letters), and the success of higher-effort methods (i.e. collaboratives, informal networks, partnership programs). However, limited staff, the lack of resources, and low organizational priority afforded to public engagement discourages staff from investing time in higher-effort methods. Moreover, with a majority of public relations work occurring through informal networking, it is difficult to maintain those networks when Forest Service staff leave.

*“I think the Payette Forest does about the best job of all of them in terms of the leadership being engaged; if you were to ask me what makes the coalition successful, it’s that [the forest supervisor] and his rangers are at all the meetings.” – Community*

*“I think we’re getting a little bit better [at public engagement]. There’s tools out there that we can use. [There’s also] always time pressure and money pressure and that plays into public engagement just like everything else.” – Forest Service*

# Communication Methods Miss the Mark

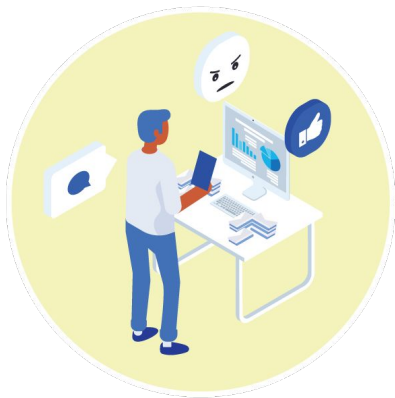


While Forest Service staff complain that public input on projects is not always useful because it lacks specificity, the public complains that the information the Forest Service provides on projects is too hard to find and too complex to decipher. Further hampering the flow of information between the Forest Service and the public is that most public citizens do not understand what NEPA is, let alone how to engage in the NEPA process.

*“In Oregon, there’s often where they don’t understand the process, they’re very angry [...] They don’t understand by law that [the Forest Service] is required to do [an environmental analysis] so they think they’re trying to shove more wilderness down and it makes them angry. I once took a retired Forest Service with me [to a meeting], and he explained NEPA and once they understood it was amazing, we had a very civilized meeting.” – Community*

*“You’ve got people that got good ideas. They don’t know how the process works... the people who are professional commentators know how the process works, but the people who are just the public in general [...] they don’t know what’s useful. At our public meetings, they’ll say this is what’s useful... they do try to give a little bit of direction but you’re only hitting the 20 people that show up at a really big meeting.” – Forest Service*

# Everyone is an Expert of Sorts



Forest leadership attests to the benefits of taking public input seriously and Payette Forest Coalition members express the motivating power of seeing their inputs result in action. However, there still seems to be a culture amongst Forest Service employees that favors technical expertise over public input. Interviewees warn that attitudes towards public engagement can become a self-fulfilling prophecy; if a citizen walks away from an engagement feeling ignored, they may stop making the effort to provide input.

*“Sometimes [the Forest Service] does too good a job and [has] anticipated everything and here’s the perfect draft. Maybe they’re right, maybe they’re not. But there’s something to be said about seeing a document or decision shift and improve ... And then the members of the public can see that they made a difference, not just in the document but in the landscape.” – Community*

*“I kind of think in the Forest Service our technical specialists get a little too narrow-minded. Fisheries guy is like fish, nothing else. So I always kind of thought that while we’re at the table and have all these interests [...] that ID team needs to open that up a little bit more.” – Forest Service*



# Juggling Diversity and Inclusivity



All interview participants profess that incorporating diverse viewpoints into decision-making processes results in a decision that is more durable, holistic, and implementable. At the same time, there is broad acknowledgement that current avenues for providing input and forums for decision-making favor only a small group of the population: those that have the time to donate and the technical expertise to provide. Not to mention that the Payette Forest Coalition meets for multiple hours during the typical workday hours.

*“I think overall the courts recognize that decisions that have this kind of backing are good decisions. They’re not viewing it like David and Goliath like the little David out there trying to slay the Giant Forest Service. They’re viewing it like, ‘wait a minute here there’s a lot of people of different interests and different backgrounds, opinions that are supporting this.’ So I think it helps.” – Community*

*“But that only hits on a portion of the public, the people who are interested and engaged and have the time and proximity to be involved. So the rest of the public has to read through a document and call the forest.” – Forest Service*

# Tools for Successful Engagement



One of the largest barriers to public engagement is an absence of tools and techniques through which decisions, information, and discussions are communicated. Tools include websites, mailing list access, and facilitators. Techniques include methods used to translate complex, lengthy project documents into public-friendly formats. While inefficient tools can delay or even prohibit access to information, ineffective communication techniques can stifle public understanding and interest. Both can negate public engagement.

*“So the problem is that they’ll say... what does this mean anyway? And I’ll try to explain to them that it’s just another term they invented to deal with something.” – Community*

*“We absolutely need better websites and we need the ability to keep that information alive and fresh and current [...] We can't even give people the information that they need, let alone projects or collaboratives.” – Forest Service*

*“Doing a better job of telling why in a shorter format. If we could really narrow it down if we could do a YouTube video.... provide some visuals. [...] If we could do a better job of showing, here’s what it was before, here’s what it is now. Using technology a little better to portray it.” – Forest Service*

# Opportunity Areas

1

**Choosing and Designing Projects for Public Input:** How might the Forest Service design and select “public-engagement-friendly” projects that are large enough to bring all of those stakeholders to the table, and can pinpoint key areas of influence that will bring scope and meaning to all stakeholders?

2

**Equipping Staff with Tools for Public Engagement:** How can we equip Forest Service staff with the tools necessary to communicate and defend decisions to the Public in a way that promotes understanding on both ends? Are there opportunities to improve communication by (1) leveraging existing suite of public outreach tools (i.e., GovDelivery, PALS), (2) providing public outreach trainings, and (3) socializing methods proven successful by other National Forests?

3

**Promoting Public Engagement as a Core Value:** How might the Forest Service more formally integrate public outreach activities into employee responsibilities and recognize employees who are going above and beyond their duties by engaging with the public?