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PUBLIC AGENCY

Trend Watch

Blue Flamingo Group's Public Agency Trend Watch is a short, quarterly briefing that tracks one shift shaping public outreach and awareness. Each edition highlights a trending challenge, why it matters, and one area worth a closer look, so public agencies can stay proactive and ahead of the curve.

This edition looks at timing: what happens when agencies bring residents in early, and what happens when they don't.

TOPIC | Getting Out in Front

THE TREND

Outreach Timing Is Becoming the Whole Ballgame

Researchers increasingly point to a pattern called *"decide, announce, defend"*: agencies finalize a plan internally, then present it to the public only after the major choices are locked in.

It's faster on paper.

In practice, it tends to erode trust, invite organized opposition, and put projects at risk of delay or cancellation.

Best Practice: The agencies avoiding that trap share one habit: they build public input into the plan itself, not into the response to public anger.

Two Cities, Two Timelines

GOT AHEAD OF IT | HENRICO COUNTY, VA

Before asking voters to approve a $511 million bond for schools, parks, and public safety projects, the county held a series of public meetings to explain the plan and take questions.

All four ballot questions passed, and the county manager credited the county's ongoing "feedback loop" with residents for the result.

Average approval: 87%, the highest recorded in county referendums since 1953.

Henrico County government, 2022 State of the County address

WAITED TOO LONG | PHOENIX, AZ

Ahead of construction on the South Central light rail extension, outreach to residents along the corridor was limited, according to those affected.

Opposition grew to the point that the city council nearly halted the project outright, ultimately forcing the transit agency back to the drawing board to alter the design.

Result: a project the council came close to killing, and a design sent back for changes.

Urban Institute, 2026

The difference wasn't the size of the project or the strength of the opposition. It was when residents were brought into the conversation, before the plan was final, or after.

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Blue Flamingo Group helps public agencies, and their partners, design communication and campaigns that connect, inform, and drive community action.

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Sources: Henrico County government, "In State of the County address, Vithoulkas credits community engagement for success on bond referendum," Nov. 2022; Henrico County 2022 State of the County presentation. Christina Pierhoples Stacy, Gabe Samuels, and Yonah Freemark, "The US Spends More Time and Money Building Transit Than Most Countries," Urban Institute, April 2026.