SIGNAGE FOUNDATION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

URBAN WAYFINDING PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL

THE **SIGNAGE** FOUNDATION

Wayfinding is about much more than helping people get where they want to go. In recent years, communities have begun to understand the benefits that wayfinding delivers in enhancing brand and reinforcing key destinations. The "Urban Wayfinding Planning and Implementation Manual," a report published by the Signage Foundation and the International Sign Association, is a workbook that offers support to planners and city officials interested in developing such programs.

The report explores the steps toward creating a successful program, from financing through ongoing management, as well as offering guidance for hiring outside consultants and a roadmap for the approval process with community leaders, government officials and other stakeholders. These steps are supplemented with case studies of innovative and successful implementations.

Wayfinding systems mean different things to different people. The most meaningful, however, link numerous layers from the vehicular edges of the region down to pedestrian main streets. Common design cues—and strategic know-how—are essential.

SELECT CASE STUDIES:

- Vancouver, B.C., enhanced bus shelters, maps, kiosks and newspaper boxes in a project coordinated by the city's TransLink, which manages all public transportation services.

- The extensive City of Charlotte (N.C.) wayfinding system incorporates sign elements into highways, city roads, pedestrian areas, parking and public transit.

- The City of Philadelphia's wayfinding program, initiated in 1988 with the first signs installed in 1992, was a pioneer.

- The LA Walks, developed by a coalition of nine Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), aims to make downtown easier to navigate for pedestrians and motorists.

- The Rockville (Md.) Town Center, a prime example of a public/private partnership for the development of a new mixed-use transit-oriented development, features a number of innovative wayfinding system approaches.

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL WAYFINDING PROGRAM

KEY TAKEAWAY 1:

Even in an age of smartphones and GPS, physical wayfinding elements—monuments, directional systems, directories, interpretive and even regulatory signs—can enrich and enhance experiences with urban environments.

- Each urban area has its own personality and "brand." Wayfinding systems strengthen that brand by improving the legibility, navigation, understanding and accessibility of the environment. Such systems also reinforce an area's defining history, architecture and landmarks, all the elements that make it unique.

- Because wayfinding systems create an organizational structure for destination hierarchy, less prominent districts and destinations can also receive a boost.

- Wayfinding systems help the public find parking more easily, improve traffic flow and ease the transition from cars to pedestrian and transit use.

- Wayfinding systems reduce visual clutter by presenting clear and consolidated information, helping solidify a consistent urban brand identity and character.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2:

Because wayfinding systems are meant to be a vital part of public spaces, the regulatory framework is crucial. In addition to extensive planning, these systems require consultation with key constituencies from concept through implementation.

- Develop a stakeholder map based on the wayfinding program development process, including specific roles and responsibilities of key leaders. Stakeholders involved may include a steering committee, management committees and task forces and a group that can reach out to the general public (political and community leaders, key destinations, funding agencies, media, etc.). Develop an outreach plan that ensures the stakeholders involved have the tools they need to communicate to their constituencies.

- In terms of regulation, recognize that even though governments have updated codes to meet the requirements of wayfinding and identity systems in recent decades, gaps still remain between codes and best practices.

- Use available research, precedent and best practices research to determine the appropriate code framework for the environment and to make the case for regulatory changes. In addition, when negotiating with code officials, demonstrate knowledge of—and maintain respect for—the current code structure. Aim for reform for all future projects, rather than focusing on small exceptions.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3:

Successfully financing a wayfinding system requires an understanding of the complete design and implementation process, as well as the ability to identify a range of financing solutions.

- In general, funding for wayfinding systems falls into four categories: planning, design, fabrication/installation and ongoing management. Different funding sources are effective for different phases of the process.

- Special Service Districts may incorporate funding for the system into larger streetscape initiatives. Standalone federal and state grants can provide capital funding for sign programs; costs may also be integrated into larger infrastructure and building programs. Program implementation and ongoing management might be funded through fees from destinations, commercials interests, parking and the like. Many downtown districts employ a tax on commercial businesses that can be applied to ongoing management and maintenance costs.

KEY TAKEAWAY 4:

Planning, design and ongoing management of a wayfinding system is no simple task.

- Take the time to outline the mission, goal and scope of the potential project in a design brief before hiring a design or planning firm. In addition, before starting the sign program, educate stakeholders in the planning, design, and implementation issues.

- Design is usually a two-part process: schematic or concept design and design development. This allows greater ability to manage the design, stakeholder review and approval processes, as well as ensuring buy-in to a chosen concept at strategically defined benchmarks.

- The longevity of the system should be considered early on in the process. Materials must be carefully selected to match the intended life of the system, and continuous legibility testing should also be part of the plan.

- System maintenance will be an ongoing issue, including periodic cleaning and replacement of damaged elements. The system will need to be updated over time with the addition or subtraction of destinations and expansion into new areas. Also important is the removal of unauthorized signs and obsolete elements. Guidelines with an outline of clear roles and responsibilities will help ensure the system is maintained.

TOP 5 FINANCING SOURCES FOR WAYFINDING PROGRAMS:

1 Tax Increment Financing

2 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU)

3 City Capital Budget for Economic Development

4 Community Development Block Grants

5 Institutional and Corporate Grants

Read the Full Report at www.thesignagefoundation.org/urbanwayfinding

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