

# Public Input Case Study: Building public acceptance for replacement of Ferguson Power Plant in Horseshoe Bay, Texas

**Problem:** In Fall 2009, LCRA needed to replace an inefficient power plant built in the 1970s on Lake LBJ. Horseshoe Bay, one of the most affluent and politically connected municipalities in Central Texas, had grown up around the plant, with homes starting at \$1.5 million. Reusing infrastructure would save \$60 million over a “greenfield” site, making it the most economic alternative. It was feared that NIMBY would make the project politically impossible.



**Solution:** A cross-functional team led by Robert Cullick developed and executed a detailed public involvement process in Horseshoe Bay and other lakeside communities, resulting after one year in full public, political and media support for the \$550 million plant. The Board of Directors approved the plant in April 2011, citing community acceptance.

**Process:** The team executed a plan based on disciplined control of information prior to announcement; thorough understanding of stakeholder concerns (lake levels, noise, aesthetics, construction traffic); use of employee focus groups; engineering estimates of possible modifications; continuous work with opinion leaders; open houses; email newsletters and Web announcements; and crisp messages to the news media. LCRA let the public know that it could not veto the project, but that input was important. The process cost \$75,000-\$125,000, primarily staff time.

## Ferguson Replacement Decision Timeline

**December 2009** - Concept introduced quietly to elected officials, wholesale electric customers

**January-February 2010** - Business unit conducted detailed engineering, including potential mitigation techniques, while cross-functional internal team completed stakeholder analysis, developed key messages and aligned communications plan with internal groups, including: business unit, regulatory affairs, intergovernmental relations, environmental, community affairs and communications groups

**March 2010** - Tested key messages with focus group of 12 employees

**April 2010** - LCRA Board approved funding for engineering study, triggering the “swarm,” a four-hour period, precisely coordinated, during which staff rolled out the concept to all stakeholders

**Spring 2010** - Open houses (Horseshoe Bay, Granite Shoals, Kingsland & Marble Falls). Presentations made to city, county, stakeholder and community groups. Constituents sign up for email newsletter, which updates constituents regularly over the next 12 months. Media tour provided explanation of project. Staff shaped project RFP to accommodate public concerns

**April 2011** – Board approved plans to build the unit