

Your Team Briefing: Feedback and Grade

THIS IS A VERY DETAILED FEEDBACK MEMO

Team X (student names removed)

Our feedback and evaluation (course grade) covers your briefing, visual aids, and handout, though the feedback below focuses on the first two elements.

Briefing (content and delivery)

You tackled and sharpened a number of things between the dry run and the final briefing, including what had been: ineffective treatment of community organization and stakeholder process issues; and several distracting delivery problems, such as a lack of eye contact and posture and positioning flaws.

You delivered a final briefing with a number of key strengths: an early orientation to the site and its planning history (clear and appropriately brief, cleverly punctuated with "... done in 2006 and never implemented"); a provocative assessment, right after, in "why not implemented" (the most pointed and clear we saw); an early roadmap in the multi-dimensional "development agenda" slide and remarks; slides that met the "stand-alone" test better than most in the class; well-labeled and annotated maps that helped you convey powerful spatial ideas simply and quickly; a clear and economical presentation of what in the current plan should be adopted and championed versus what should be modified (something the briefees struggled to get out of at least half the other teams); effective assessment of the AGENCY's track record, including enforcement failures; a financing focus, including the complex but powerful notion of self-finance, which stood out as a distinctive element of the briefing and was perhaps the most thorough effort in the class to address the "fundability" question in the assignment scope; and generally energetic as well as poised delivery (details below) by knowledgeable speakers.

Other areas, we and the briefees noted, could have been stronger:

- **The core recommendations constitute a well-rounded and ambitious agenda, but it could have been better presented.** But the elements of the agenda range from long-run outcomes ("create an identifiable destination") to start-up action steps ("facilitate creation of a stakeholder organization"). So the logic of parallelism could be stronger here, and rethinking that logic would have led you to an important enhancement: what should come first on this very ambitious agenda? And what next, building on the momentum or foundations laid? And so on. Student A's response to Xav's question suggested that the team might not have thought beyond "getting it all done as a package." And the mayor's question about integration likewise raised this issue. Finally, we liked the core theme of "community development balanced with creating a destination." That idea came out too subtle and wordy. You needed a revision to

make it more catchy and accessible, such as “Build a community, not just a destination,” perhaps? Nevertheless, this was a thoughtful wrangling with what’s at stake on the OurTown waterfront and how the mayor should approach it. Notes below that particular slide would have explicated that central concept.

- **The message on stakeholder organization remained a weaker element of the briefing.** The main slide is a muddle of oddly coupled ideas (e.g., the principle “don’t forget physical development” follows the action recommendation “form a stakeholder-driven community organization”). You also recommend actively listening to OurTown stakeholders but don’t indicate, on the slides that is, who they are or what key interests or past conflicts are at issue (your responsive handling of questions about those issues compensated somewhat, and the appendix is rich but not a substitute for clear handling in the main briefing). Given that a recently elected mayor thinks naturally in terms of stakeholders, support, and conflict, this was a real shortcoming. Also, you’d want to clearly distinguish your “stakeholder-driven community organization” from the nonprofit partnership organization in the current plan—or identify their parallels, as appropriate. This element needed rethinking and a different presentation approach.
- **On questioning, “regulation” was an awkward framing of the varied challenges and functions associated with “who will implement,” some of which had nothing to do with regulation or its enforcement.** The underlying logic seemed to be that implementation is about enforcing an official plan, whereas the partnership concept and the need for both public and private money belie that outdated conception of planning. “Accountability” is a much more appropriate concept for public-private collaboration, and one element of that is formal regulation. But your slides offered an important, concise assessment of the AGENCY’s past failures and capacity problems and helpfully recommended (a) developing regulations collaboratively and then (b) expanding the AGENCY’s enforcement capacity and enhancing its performance.
- **You needed to edit the self-finance message and slides some more to make the main idea, not the secondary advice to do market assessments, stand out.** From our standpoint, the main idea was about how to use public money to prime the pump of a savvy public-private financing to yield both capital investment and operational funds. Still, the reminder about assessing the market was useful.

As for **delivery effectiveness**, Student A’s strengths were strong and well-paced voice (animating, energetic), which is important for the start of a nighttime briefing, where audience attention and energy are major concerns. Plus poise in the body (solid, non-distracting posture). Your eye contact was generally ok, except where you used the slide as a notecard, as on the “why not implemented” message/slide. You want to avoid this, most of all in the opening minutes, because *not* having to read off your slides tends to be read (unconsciously) by the listener as a proxy for preparedness and confidence in your own message. In addition, with practice, you want to work on making eye contact with a variety of listeners; you seemed rather rigidly pointed in one direction. And watch the um’s and uh’s. In the

end, we remember relatively simple ideas, and your word choice was effective. But don't try to hit a script. Try to think of it as a conversation. It will also let you explore a repertoire of gestures to add expressive power and energy to your ideas. Keeping your hands behind your back was preferable to distracting gestures, though.

Student B, your strengths include strong eye contact, poised posture, and fluid, varied gestures, which were particularly important for the very spatial elements you presented. Your voice was reasonably well paced, as well: quick and just bordering on rapid fire at times, with good range for emphasis. You need to be able to manage that pace, as you tend to speak as quickly as your mind is recalling the ideas, and the audience often needs to play catch-up. But your style conveyed expertise as well as an enthusiasm for the team's arguments. On a different note, the slides tracked presenters well throughout the briefing, and your doubling as a presenter and slide manager reflected individual strengths but also the team's preparedness.

Student C, clear and well-paced voice (with only a few um's) and poised posture are real strengths for you. Your eye contact was generally strong, though you did some extraneous looking back at slides when you could have, if pointing/directing was the idea, have walked back to and stood alongside the slide image to highlight key elements. You should also have positioned yourself about a step to the right, to stay out of the projection line and make it easier for you to direct our attention to the slides without pivoting 180 degrees around and standing between us and the slide. You gesture naturally and animate the material with your gestures. You can work on their range. Finally, beware the tendency to end your statements with an increase in vocal pitch that suggests a question or uncertainty rather than a persuasive statement. That tonal pattern tends to be read as less definitive and credible.

Student D, well-modulated vocal pace (quick enough to engage but with helpful pauses to emphasize ideas and let us digest them) is a real strength, and so is your vocal range. Where speech is concerned, you want to watch the eh's, which you intersperse frequently (the solution is usually to pause in those moments instead, and having a friend signal you in a practice run is the sure cure). Your posture was poised and solid, eye contact was strong, and you use fluid, varied gestures naturally to emphasize points and direct attention to the slide image. Referring us to the appendix for details was a nice touch.

Student E, your strengths include vocal range and pace (very clear, sharp with distinctions, natural pausing). You also had strong eye contact, which was especially important since you were speaking partially from behind the console and managing your own slides, and fluid, varied gestures that helped tell the story.

Student F, you had a solid posture and eye contact. Particularly because you're tall, gestures are something to work on: They would animate your ideas. And so would more vocal range. The pace was fine, but you can work on animating and varying the vocal pitch to add emphasis, distinguish ideas.

Visual aids (slides and handout)

Your visuals were generally well constructed, with consistent layout, not too much text, and well integrated photos, very well labeled maps, and other strengths.

Some visuals were very good and could be excellent with minor editing. Take "Dispersing public destinations," for example. Bullets 2 to 4 read logically from the subject in the title (these are things that dispersing is meant to accomplish). But the first bullet doesn't follow that logic, even though it's a related idea. Plus, assume a somewhat tired, easily distracted listener: Plain language is usually preferable, for nonspecialists, to shorthand categories (e.g., "shops" instead of "retail"). Revised, the slide might look like this:

We propose dispersing public destinations on the waterfront

- To encourage the public to walk the length of the Harborwalk;
- To encourage economic development (restaurants, shops, etc.);
- To discourage vacant property (fill "gaps" and remove eyesores); and
- To make OurTown (as a whole) an engaging destination, linked to waterfront.

or this ...

OurTown should be the destination, so ...

We propose dispersing public destinations on the waterfront.

- To encourage the public to walk the length of the Harborwalk and link it to the Town;
- To encourage economic development (restaurants, shops, etc.); and
- To discourage vacant property (fill "gaps" and remove eyesores).

The first Self Finance slide (the triangle) is rich and engaging. Some listeners tune out at these ambitious, very conceptual slides. But we all liked this. "Community" is an incredibly elastic term and you should perhaps use "Neighborhood groups" if that is what you meant.

The second Self Finance needs some editing to simplify it (make it less visually busy and complex) and thereby make 1-2 key points stand out. A more complex version could be in your Appendix, for example, with notes below to tell a story.

Finally, we're not sure the yin-yang image communicates very clearly your hopes about something as complex as decision structure. Visual thinking is good, but two lines of text with a support image might have been clearer:

Physical development: AGENCY leads decisions, enforcement, and financial structuring, with stakeholder input;

Cultural development: Other stakeholders lead decisions and programming, with AGENCY support for enforcement and more.

Your score and grade

In scoring each group, we weighed substantive argumentation first and foremost, considering delivery only to the extent that it related directly to your effectiveness as argument makers. We considered visuals as an additional element, weighing content much more heavily than use. Xav reviewed notes on your effectiveness from the dry run and final briefings, compared feedback and ratings by guest briefees and other observers (including MCP2s), and mined additional notes from a review of your video.

We did not grade on a curve but rather on an absolute standard: How well did the workproducts reflect mastery of course concepts and meet professional standards? The mean and median scores were 92, and the grade range was: A (93 and up), A- (90 to 92), and B+ (85 to 89). Contact Xav with any questions.

– Xav and Instructors

Score: 94 Grade: A