Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission
Open Government Working Group
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Report to the Commission
February 3, 2012

This working group was created by action of the commission at its January regular commission meeting. The working group was directed to meet with appropriate city staff to discuss the Open Government resolution recently passed by the City Council, and return to the Commission with recommendations on how best to support this program.

The working group met on January 31. Attending were Commissioners Rosenthal and Ramsey, as well as Stephen Elkins (City of Austin, Chief Information Officer) and Matteo Esquibel (City of Austin, Webmaster).

The purpose of the meeting was to inquire of staff as to plans to respond to ordinance directive, to identify opportunities for commission and community participation, and recommend a process for ongoing open government work.

There was some discussion of specific concerns/priorities from commissioners. One concern was that government compliance requirements often lag technology capabilities, and some things we may want to do may not be permitted (e.g. in a commission open meeting work context). Another concern was that data hygiene and practices be developed in the city (e.g. publishing a CSV file versus a scanned bitmap), as a prerequisite to any successful open data effort.

There was some discussion of public/government outreach and facilitation needed to make the data portal a success. The model discussed was the idea of a "killer app," creating a tipping point for support and engagement. Therefore, an effort to encourage and cultivate app development may be a viable strategy.

The consensus recommendations that came out of this meeting are as follows:

1. The Commission should form an Open Government Working Group to support staff in the continued development and implementation of the open government directive.

2. The working group should be kept small and informal, and work cooperatively on issues identified.

3. The initial composition should be three commissioners, with support from a similar number of staff members. This initial group should extend invitations to about four more people, mutually agreed upon, from the community. Example of people who might be good candidates are: city council staff, civic software developers, open government policy experts, etc.

4. Staff in attendance agree to take the action item to review the open government resolution, propose specific actions in support, identify ways the working group could participate, and provide as a discussion document at the first working group meeting.

5. The first meeting of the working group should be around the second week of February. Since this involves a cross section of people, we'll need to be sensitive to scheduling needs.