

Proposed General Guidelines for City of Austin Task Force on Community Engagement

1. Goal and Purpose

Members of the Task Force on Community Engagement will examine Austin's community engagement tools and techniques and seek consensus on recommendations to enhance community engagement in the City, as specified in Resolution No. 20150129-023. The Task Force will report back to the Council in a written report and a Council in-person presentation, with a description of existing City community engagement tools, innovative techniques and tools used across the country, identification of best practices, and recommendations for enhancing existing resources, including fiscal implications.

2. Topics of Interest to Council Sponsors

Council Member Sponsors have identified several specific topics of interest that they would like the Task Force to consider as part of its process to develop recommendations to enhance community engagement. These topics include:

- Disability accommodations
- Foreign-language access
- Virtual/online participation
- District/neighborhood-centered engagement alternatives

3. Participants

- a. **Appointments.** Each council member will have one appointment to this Task Force, with the Mayor appointing the balance of the 13 Task Force members. Appointments will reflect the diversity of the Austin community and include members with expertise in the field of public engagement.
- b. **No Alternates.** There will be no alternate members.
- c. **Public Input.** All meetings of the full Task Force will be open to the public. Per the Resolution, the Task Force is required to follow the requirements of the Texas Open Meetings Act. The public may provide input to the Task Force through one or more community input sessions, written feedback (mail or email) or other engagement strategies to be determined by the Task Force.
- d. **Media Contact.** Members will characterize their comments to the media as being from them as individuals, rather than from the Task Force as a whole. Members will publicly, and in their contact with the media, support any consensus agreements made by the Task Force. Questions concerning what happened at the meeting can be handled by referring to the approved meeting summaries which will be found on the Task Force web site.

4. Decision Making and Internal Organization

- a. **Decision Making.** The Task Force will make decisions by consensus and collaborative problem solving. This means that for a given issue, the interests (unmet needs) will be identified and the group will brainstorm possible ways to meet all the interests. Discussion will continue until the group finds an outcome that can be supported by everyone. Although the consensus outcome may not be everyone's favorite or preference, it meets enough of each person's interests that he or she is willing to support it to those outside the group.

- b. **Consensus Process.** The flow chart on page four shows the process that will be used to seek consensus.
- c. **Meeting Agendas.** Draft meeting agendas will be developed by the facilitators and City staff. The draft will be sent electronically to the members and posted publicly no less than 72 hours in advance of each meeting. The final agenda will be approved by the Task Force at the start of each meeting.
- d. **Meeting Summaries.** A summary of each meeting will be prepared by the facilitators and distributed to all Task Force members. Each summary will include a summary of actions taken, a list of those attending, and other pertinent information about discussions. Meeting summaries will be approved at the following Task Force meeting. Draft and approved meeting summaries will be posted on the City of Austin web site in the section [pertaining to this Task Force](#).

5. Safeguards for the Members

- a. **Good Faith.** All members will act in good faith in all aspects of these meetings.
- b. **Withdrawal from the Group.** Any member may withdraw from the Task Force at any time without prejudice. If a member withdraws, the council member who selected that person will be asked to name a replacement.
- c. **Respect.** Task Force members will be expected to interact with each other, City staff and the facilitators respectfully and to follow any guidelines agreed upon by the group.

6. Responsibilities of the Members

- a. **Attendance.** Members will make good faith efforts to be present at every meeting.
- b. **Quorum.** In order for the group to have full and representative discussions, any meeting that has fewer than 7 attending Task Force members will be canceled and rescheduled.
- c. **Preparation for Meetings.** Members are expected to prepare for all meetings as deemed necessary by the group. This may involve reading or listening to online presentations, meeting with others in agreed upon ad hoc groups, preparing proposals or summaries to bring to the full group and reviewing meeting notes and agendas.
- d. **Contact with Stakeholders.** The Task Force will agree on a plan for gathering input from other residents who are not members. All Task Force members will be expected to participate in such sessions and to interact with the residents in ways that are respectful of the residents and the other Task Force members.
- e. **Electronic communications:** Task Force meetings are subject to the Texas Open Meetings Act, which applies beyond traditional meeting settings and can also occur through a non-spoken exchange, such as written materials or email. Therefore, members should be very cautious about email or text-message interactions among themselves on a subject matter that is related to Task Force business and are discouraged from emailing the Task Force group members.

7. Conflicts of Interest

- a. While the Task Force on Community Engagement will make only recommendations for City Council consideration, we intend for those recommendations to be made without conflict of interest. Therefore we agree that if any Task Force member, or a person or persons related to a member in the first or second degree by affinity or consanguinity*, have/has a substantial interest in an endeavor or activity

that would be subject to a special economic effect by a recommendation of the Task Force, that member will abstain from the consensus involving that endeavor or activity.

**Your first degree relatives by consanguinity (blood) are your parents and children. Your first degree relatives by affinity (marriage) are your spouse, your spouse's children, and your children's and parent's spouses. Your second degree relatives by consanguinity are your brothers, sisters, grandparents, and grandchildren. Your second degree relatives by affinity are your spouse's brothers, sisters, grandparents, and grandchildren, and the spouses of your brothers, sisters, grandparents, and grandchildren. For this purpose, a marriage that has ended because of death or divorce is considered to continue as long as a child of that marriage is living.*

8. Responsibilities of the Facilitators

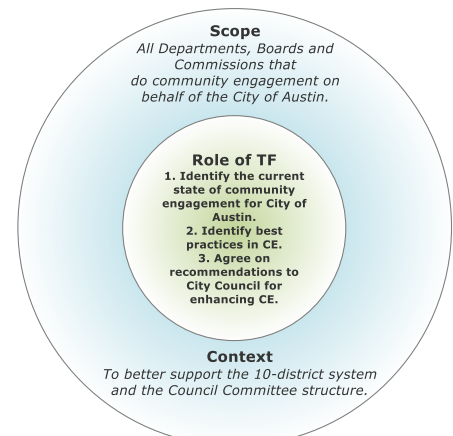
- a. **Standard Practices for Facilitators.** The primary task of the facilitators is to guide the meetings of the Task Force within the agreed upon ground rules, discussion guidelines and protocols. The facilitators will act in accordance with the Standard Practices for Facilitators in Agreement Seeking Processes (page five).

9. Schedule

- a. The Task Force will establish a regular schedule for its meetings. The full Task Force will not meet as a full group more than once every two weeks, except by consensus of the group. Task groups or other subgroups may meet at their discretion. A location for the meetings on City premises will be selected by City staff based on the needs of the group and availability.

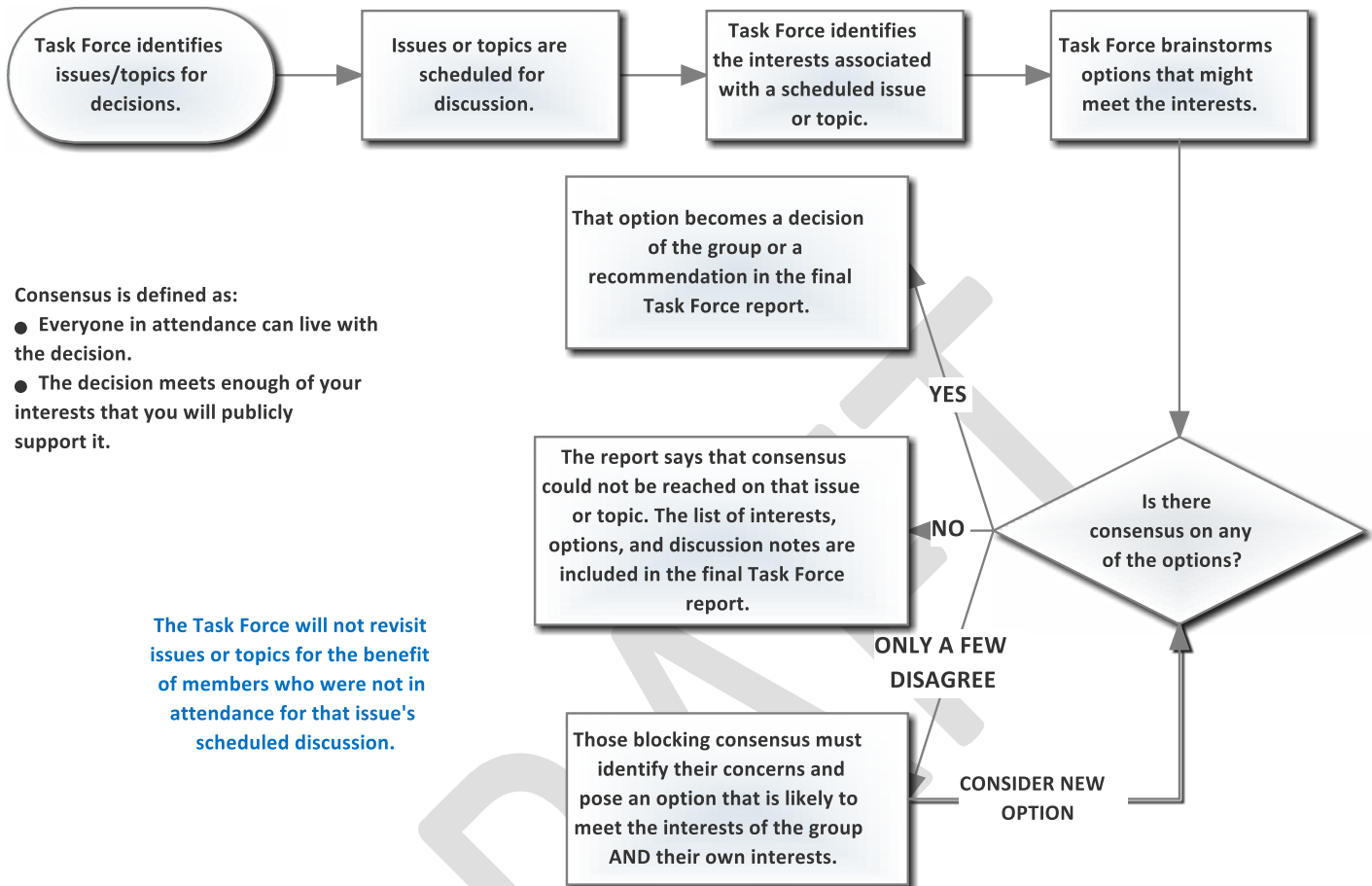
10. Discussion Guidelines

- a. The meetings will not use Robert's Rules of Order to manage discussion, but will use an informal and flexible process that follows the attached flow chart described on page four. Members will develop and help enforce a set of discussion guidelines. Such guidelines may include
 - Speak one at a time.
 - Be concise and help everyone participate.
 - Treat differences as assets.
 - Don't gossip about what is said in meetings.
 - Seek common ground, don't argue over positions.
 - Give the group your full attention.



7/10/15

Proposed Consensus Process for City of Austin Public Engagement Task Force



Standard Practices for Facilitators in Agreement Seeking Processes

The following guidelines govern the facilitator(s) in the conduct of his or her role in agreement seeking processes.

1. Facilitators will not participate in any process that is misrepresented as to its purpose or that is intended to circumvent legal requirements.
2. Facilitators will serve as advocates for principles that underlie collaborative decision making processes, including structuring and managing the process to ensure effective participation by all key stakeholders, whatever their cultural, racial, religious or economic backgrounds.
3. Facilitators will not be advocates for any participant's point of view on any substantive issue.
4. Facilitators will protect the confidentiality of private communications with any of the participants to the degree allowed by the Texas Public Information Act.
5. Facilitators will need to gain the agreement of all participants to the ground rules for the process and to any subsequent modification of them.
6. Once ground rules have been mutually agreed upon, facilitators will enforce them impartially.
7. Facilitators will confront the sponsoring agency when they believe the agency is not acting in good faith, is inhibiting their ability to communicate or manage communications with participants, or is otherwise not abiding by the ground rules. Facilitators will withdraw from the process if the issues cannot be resolved satisfactorily.
8. Facilitators will withdraw from the process if their continuing involvement is not acceptable to the group.
9. Facilitators will disclose any continuing or frequent contractual relationships with the sponsoring agency or one or more of the participants.

** From "Report and Recommendations of the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution Environment/Public Disputes Sector Critical Issues Committee", 2000.*