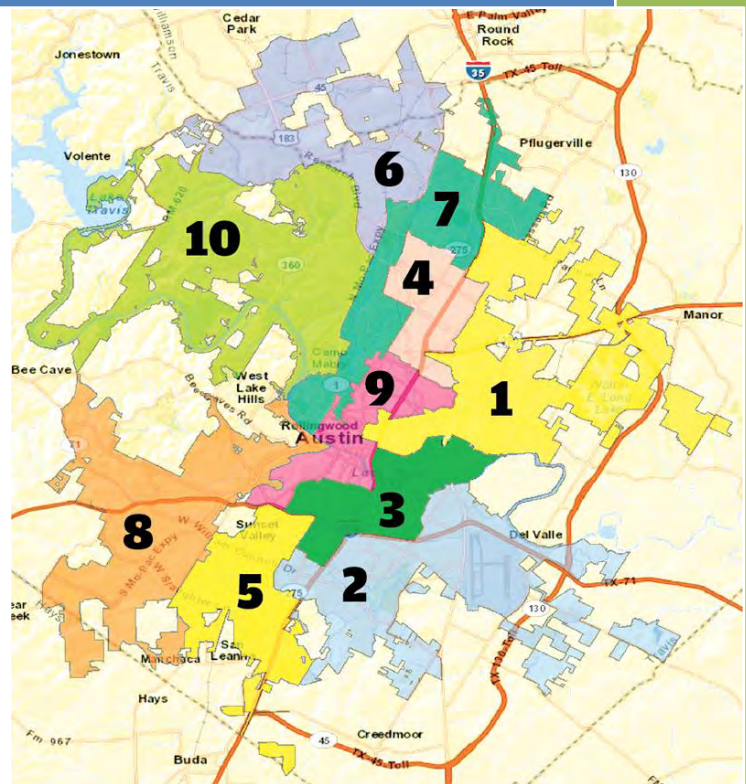


2015

City of Austin Community Engagement Current Practices



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Civic Collaboration
7/10/2015

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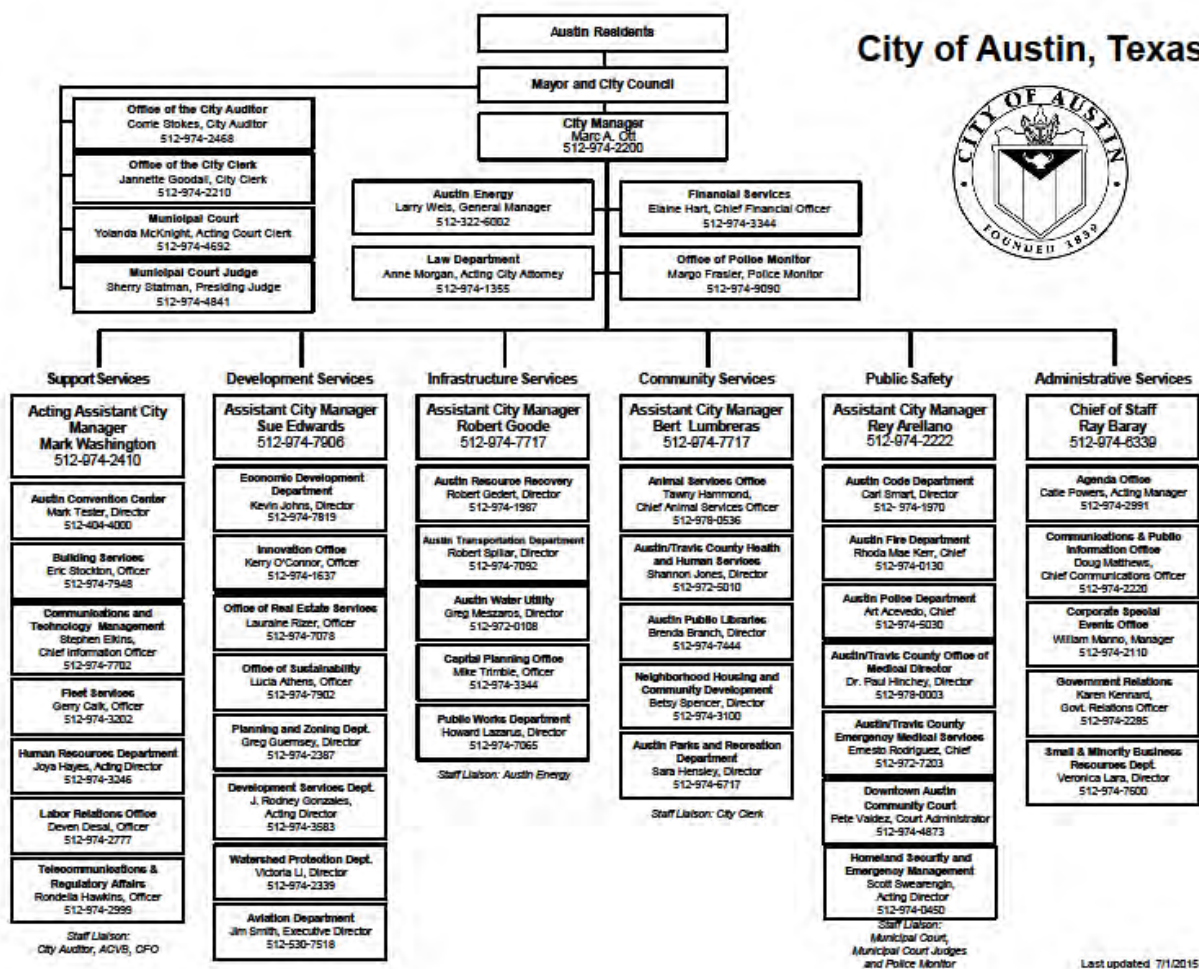
Background

From May through June 2015, the consultants gathered information from City of Austin staff on the current state of community engagement. Most of this information came from the Communications and Public Information Office, which houses the Community Engagement Division. Another source was a February 2015 report to the Austin City Council compiled by the Office of the City Auditor entitled “[Special Request Report on Public Engagement in Peer Cities.](#)”

Key Points

- Community engagement activities are conducted through a decentralized system. Many, if not most, of the community engagement activities are designed and orchestrated within City Departments or Offices.
- The [Communications and Public Information Office](#) (CPIO) employs two full-time staff dedicated solely to community engagement. In addition, three other CPIO employees contribute some of their time to community engagement efforts. An average of four interns per year work in the Community Engagement Division.
- The most active Departments in terms of community engagement are Parks and Recreation, Transportation, Public Works and Planning.
- There are no data on the number or type of engagement activities handled exclusively by the City Departments.
- The Community Engagement team serves as a resource to the other Departments and entities. Departments and Offices are encouraged but not required to use the team’s resources.
- The two full-time staff members in the Community Engagement Division have facilitated a total of 431 events or activities from 2010 through May 2015, with an average of about 78 events per year. The precise number or characteristics of participants at these events is not known, though an informal estimate for participation is in the thousands.
- There is no documented City-wide plan relative to community engagement. CPIO does include community engagement as a key goal, and develops year-to-year objectives to support that goal.

City of Austin Organization Chart



City of Austin Public Participation Principles

These principles have been adopted by the City Manager's office. Formal adoption of such principles is uncommon among city governments.

Accountability and Transparency

The City will enable the public to participate in decision-making processes by providing clear information on the issues, the ways to participate, and how their participation contributes to the decision.

Fairness & Respect

The City will maintain a safe environment that cultivates and supports respectful public engagement and will expect participants to do so in turn.

Accessibility

The City will respect and encourage participation by providing ample public notice of opportunities and resources and accommodations that enable all to participate.

Predictability & Consistency

The City will prepare the public to participate by providing meeting agendas, discussion guidelines, notes, and information on next steps.

Creativity & Community Collaboration (*Inclusivity and Diversity*)

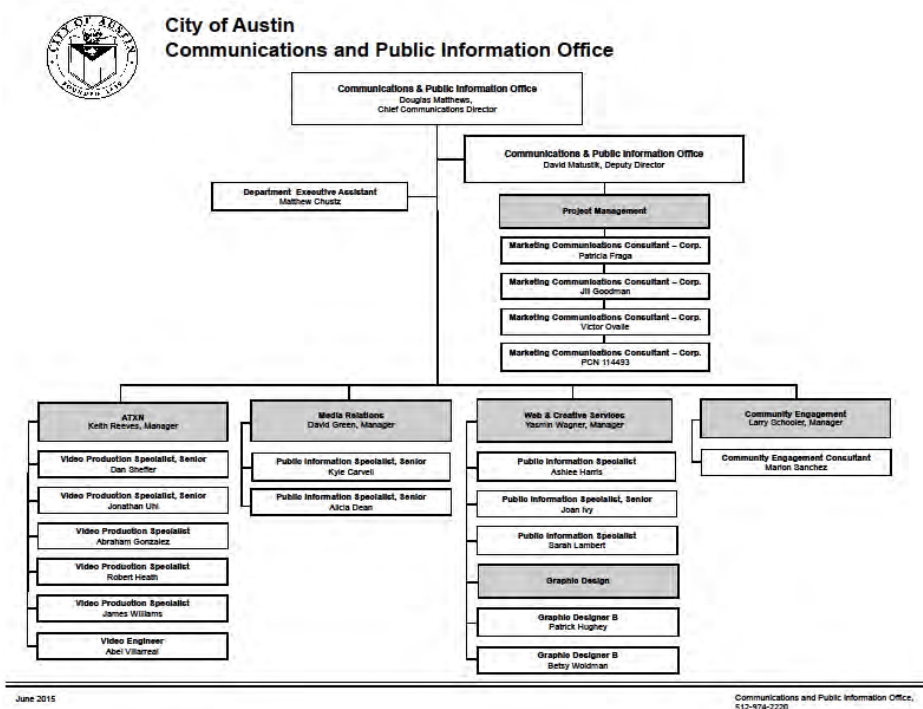
The City will use innovative, proven, and customized engagement solutions that are appropriate to the needs of the projects and the participants.

Responsible Stewardship

The City will balance its commitment to provide ample opportunities for public involvement with its commitment to delivering government services efficiently and using City resources wisely.

Community Engagement Division Services

- Design and implementation of large scale public participation activities.
- Design and facilitation of in-person events.
- Design and moderation of online tools.
- Development and implementation of alternative engagement, mediation and capacity building strategies.
- Development of strategies to diversify outreach...
- Facilitation of task forces, advisory groups
- Training for City Departments of effective community engagement and conflict resolution.




The two full-time staff members in the Community Engagement Division have facilitated a total of 431 events or activities from 2010 through May 2015, with an average of about 78 events per year. The precise number or characteristics of participants at these events is not known.

Appendix B contains more detailed descriptions of the variety of community engagement activities that are facilitated by the Community Engagement Division.

Types of Community Engagement Activities (as of February 2015)

This chart is based on the [International Association of Public Participation Spectrum](#) which is shown in Appendix A. As you move to the right, the public impact of participation increases.



Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Televised programs and meetings • Social media • Spokespersons • Open Data Portal • CityWorks Academy • Visits to community and neighborhood organizations • Community Forums • E-newsletters • Fliers • Nextdoor • ATXN.tv • Media • PSA's • Agenda Community Blog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public meetings • Field Trips, Walkabouts • Surveys • Forums • Speak Week • Meeting in a Box • Conversation Corps • Austin Youth Council • Community forums • Virtual town-halls (televised and streamed) • Feedback via text, phone, Twitter • Community Forums 	<p>In addition to practices listed under "Consult:"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design charrettes • Austin 311 • SpeakUp Austin • University engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Forces • Advisory Groups • Working Groups • Boards • Commissions • Partner with organizations to provide community-engagement training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting

Other Practices Tested/Considered by CE Division, but not currently active:

- Metroquest (interactive/visual surveys) – used during Project Connect, is a tool at the Consult level.
- HeartGov/Textizen (text-based feedback tools) – used once, is a tool at the Consult level.
- Bang the Table/MindMixer (similar to SpeakUpAustin) – used once and then replaced by SpeakUpAustin.org. A tool at the Consult, Involve and Collaborate levels.
- IdeaScale/ChangeByUs (social ideation, crowdsourcing) – used several times, is a tool at the Consult level.
- Coveritlive/UStream (live video and chat) – used several times, is a tool primarily at the Inform level.
- eComment (commenting tool) – considered but not used. CPIO is currently exploring alternatives for online commenting for City Council agenda items.

Data on Effectiveness of Community Engagement Efforts

During the summer of 2014, ETC Institute administered a survey for the City of Austin to gather input from residents to improve the quality of City communication with the public. The survey was administered by phone to a random sample of 460 residents in the City. The results for the full random sample of 460 respondents have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 4.5%.

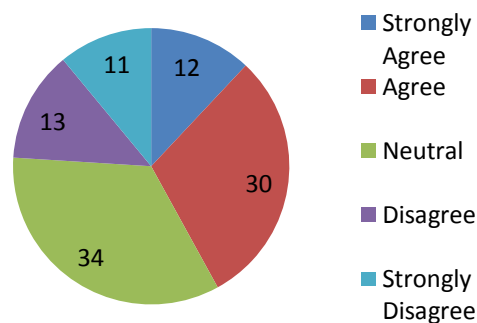
- Ninety-four percent (94%) of those surveyed indicated that they are at least “somewhat interested” in keeping informed about City events and City government.
 - 40% are “very interested”
 - 29% are “interested”
 - 25% are “somewhat interested”
- Forty-nine percent (49%) of respondents are satisfied with the City’s efforts to keep them informed about City services, issues, events, and programs. This was a decrease of 4 percentage points, from 53% in 2013 to 49% in 2014.
- The three topics for which respondents were most satisfied with the amount of information provided by the City were: (1) special events, (2) the environment, and (3) parks. Residents were least satisfied with the information available on the City budget. There were no significant increases and four significant decreases in satisfaction from 2013: special events (-9 percentage points), parks (-6 percentage points), water and public utilities (-7 percentage points), and libraries (-9 percentage points).
- Of the 193 residents (out of the 460 surveyed) who had accessed the City’s website, 56% were satisfied with the quality of information provided on that website. This was a decrease of 12 percentage points from 68% in 2013 (N = 167). These residents also reported a decrease in satisfaction with the visual design of the City’s website: 43% in 2014 compared to 51% in 2013. (Note: level of precision was not calculated for these smaller sample sizes.)
- Of the 347 residents (out of 460 surveyed) who had experience with any of the community engagement activities listed on the survey, 64% rated their experience with these community engagement services as “very good” or “good.” This compared to 63% of the 295 residents in 2013 who had had experience with any of the community activities.

There are no known data on the impact or outcome of City-run community engagement efforts.

CPIO has collected internal client satisfaction data for several years and their clients are satisfied with their services. CPIO has also recently developed survey instruments to collect feedback from the public about their services but the instruments haven’t been used long enough to serve as a reliable measure. It is not known whether the Departments or Offices collect any data on the impact of the engagement activities which they manage themselves.

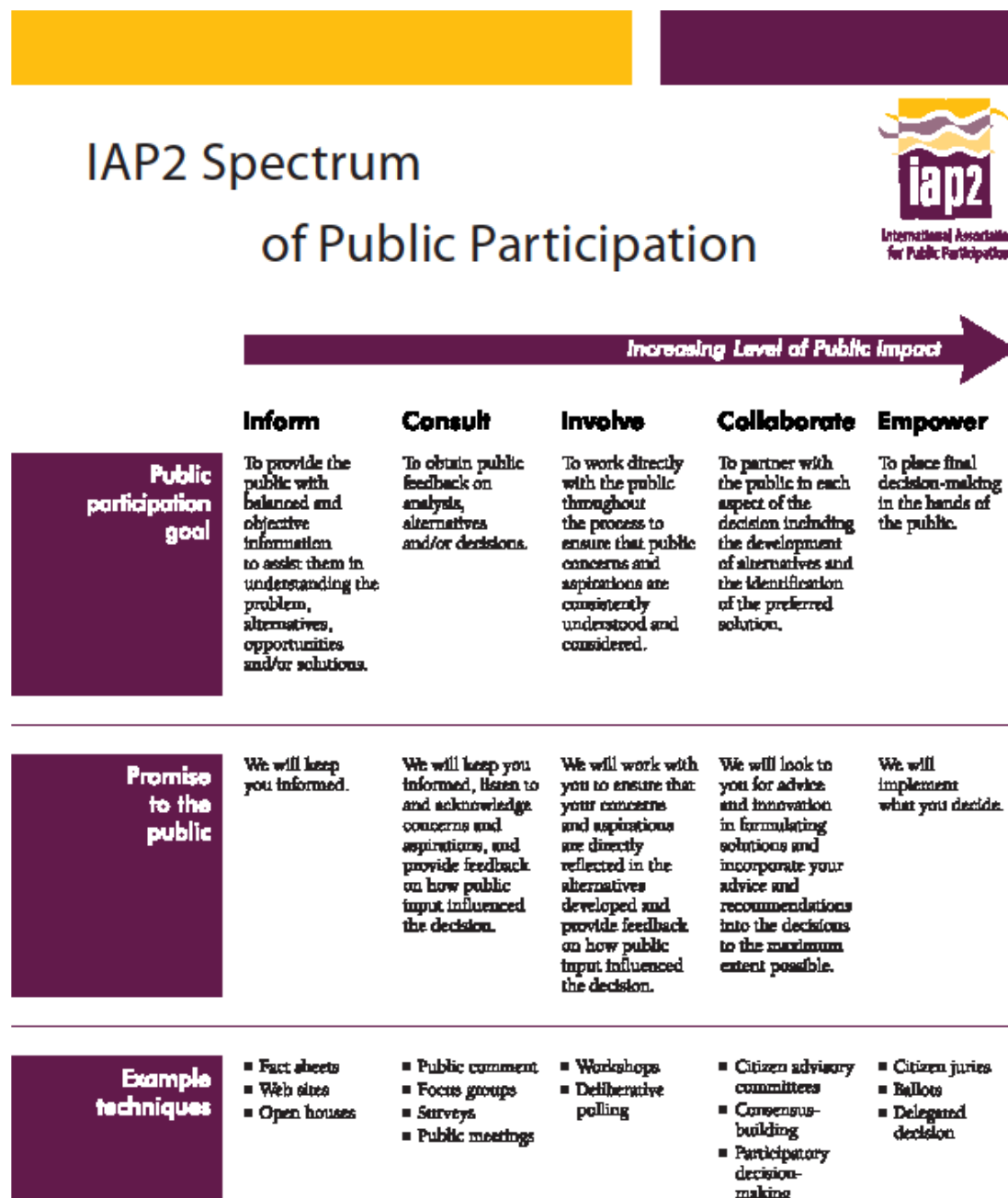
The chart to the right shows the 2014 responses to question 3 of the ECT survey, “The City of Austin values dialogue between residents and government.” Appendix C shows the questions asked by ECT and data trends from 2013 to 2014.

Q3: City values dialogue with residents
2014 responses



Appendices

Appendix A: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



Appendix B: Memo Describing Community Engagement Activities Facilitated by CE Division

MEMORANDUM

TO: Councilmember Leslie Pool

FROM: Doug Matthews, Chief Communications Director
Ray Baray, Chief of Staff

RE: Community Engagement Inventory

DATE: January 23, 2015

In response to your request, and in light of the discussions regarding community engagement, our office is providing you with a general overview and inventory of the work done by our community engagement team. This is inclusive of the work that our team has led or contributed to, and does not include peripheral engagement programs that may exist within departments.

The Community Engagement Division assists departments in designing and implementing public participation and community outreach strategies. Our efforts are guided by a core set of community engagement principles (Attachment A) and the Public Participation Spectrum used by organizations like the International Association for Public Participation (Attachment B).

The department currently has two engagement professionals with extensive background in community involvement. **Larry Schooler** is the past president of the International Association for Public Participation, an Annette Strauss Fellow, certified mediation professional and an adjunct professor at Southern Methodist University. **Marion Sanchez** has 20+ years of private practice experience in outreach, engagement and communications with a specialization in minority/foreign-language engagement. Our services include:

- Design and implementation of processes for large-scale public participation activities.
- Design and facilitation of community workshops, educational programs, open houses, virtual town hall meetings and other in-person events.
- Design and moderation of online tools to engage the public, including SpeakUpAustin.org, text message-based polling and live chat capability.
- Development and implementation of alternative engagement, mediation and capacity-building strategies.
- Development and implementation of strategies to diversify outreach and reduce barriers to participation.
- Facilitation of task forces and advisory groups designed to take a closer, more extended look at a particular issue or initiative.

- Training for departments on effective community engagement and conflict resolution strategies.

The Department has a demonstrated history of innovation and experimentation in community engagement, and has been recognized as a leader in the field for those efforts. Following is a summary of the tools that the Community Engagement Division has employed over the past few years. It is important to note that our office works closely with our partners to ensure that the mix of engagement opportunities is appropriate to the goals, the audience and the timing of the matter at-hand.

While we've made an effort to be all-inclusive in this list, the community engagement landscape (and the tools supporting it) is constantly evolving.

Community Engagement Events

Community Forums: CPIO works with clients to innovate and customize forums to meet the identified needs of the particular engagement. That has included “games” where participants work to prioritize items or balance a budget; facilitated small group discussions; interactive open house booths; moderated forums with subject-matter experts; “open” discussion spaces (where participants choose their own topics), and blended forums that may incorporate television, telephone, text/social and live polling.

To enhance the quality of dialogue and participation, CPIO has launched a pilot program with the Dispute Resolution Center, engaging their trained volunteers to assist in table discussions where staffing may be limited.

Design Charrettes: Participants may participate over multiple hours or days to contribute toward a vision for a large piece of land or area of the City.

Field Trip/Walkabouts: Participants visit an area germane to the topic at hand (a park being master-planned, etc.) to learn more about it and provide preliminary feedback.

Neighborhood/Organizational Meetings: City staff visit neighborhood and other community organizations to discuss topics with stakeholders in the context of an existing organizational meeting (neighborhood association, business group, etc.).

Task Force/Advisory Group/Working Group: A broad mix of stakeholders may engage in facilitated dialogue over multiple meetings to develop recommendations for City Council.

Focus Groups: Intentionally targeted, guided group discussions around a particular subject or activity. These may include specific interest groups, demographic groups or organizations.

Alternative Methods for Participation

Speak Week: Staff and/or volunteers position themselves at popular local events and destinations (ACL, UT West Mall, Barton Springs Pool, etc.) and solicit input via tablet computers, posters or other short-form input gathering tool. Used for large citywide projects.

Meeting-in-a-Box: Conversion of public meeting elements into portable form so that individuals can host their own localized conversations about city topics. These can be downloaded or picked up from City locations, and allow for self-directed input gathering with groups of friends, interest groups, or other small groups not normally reached by broader processes.

Conversation Corps: Newly launched initiative will enable Austinites to participate in facilitated monthly conversations at locations all across Austin on rotating topics. Used for citywide discussions; facilitators will be trained community volunteers. This is a cooperative partnership between the City of Austin, Capital Metro, AISD and Leadership Austin.

Austin Youth Council: The Community Engagement Division works in partnership with the Youth and Family Services Division to administer a program to involve leaders from local high schools in the discussion of relevant and timely projects.

CityWorks Academy: An intensive, 11-week program designed to introduce residents to City government operations. This is an application-based program that builds civic capacity. Graduates have been called upon to participate in focus groups to complement engagement activities on a number of issues.

SpeakUpAustin.org: Online hub for engagement in multiple forms, including:

- Surveys
- Discussions
- Forums (review of a finite set of ideas and comments on those ideas)
- Crowdsourcing/Social Ideation

Mediation: On several occasions, staff has been called in to facilitate and mediate discussions between parties (on amplified music permits, as an example).

University engagement: The department recently launched an effort to regularly engage student leaders at local universities to enhance engagement and involvement.

Other social media: Twitter and/or Instagram hashtags for specific projects allow for targeted input gathering. We have also used Reddit forums to post and gather feedback.

Austin 3-1-1: Those who may not be able to participate by other means can now call 3-1-1 to provide feedback on active discussions. They may also submit feedback via the 3-1-1 mobile application.

Survey Administration: This may include telephone, mail, online, in-person, intercept or Web intercept surveys to collect feedback.

Additional Tools/Pilots: The department has piloted or reviewed a variety of engagement tools, and continues to do so actively. This has included Metroquest (interactive/visual surveys), HeartGov/Textizen (text-based feedback tools), Bang the Table/MindMixer (similar forums to SpeakUpAustin), IdeaScale/ChangeByUs (social ideation/crowdsourcing), Coveritlive/UStream (live video & chat) and eComment (commenting tool for Council agendas).

We have also partnered with a number of outside groups to provide training and perspectives on community engagement, including the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning (Bleiker Method), The International Association for Public Participation (Certificate in Engagement Program), the Study Circles Resource Center/Portsmouth Listens (Study Circles) and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (Deliberative Dialogue).

Hopefully you will find this information helpful as you explore further engagement opportunities with a new, district-based Council. We stand ready to assist, and are available as needed. Please contact me should you have any questions.

CC: Mayor and City Council
Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Assistant City Managers

Appendix C: Citywide Survey on Communications, Trends from 2013 to 2014

2014 Survey

Participants (N) = 468 (random selection)

Precision = +/- 4.5 percentage points

2013 Survey

Participants (N) = 405 (random selection)

Margin of error = +/- 4.8 percentage points

Trends from 2013 to 2014			
	2014	2013	Change from 2013 to 2014
Combination of "Very Interested" and "Interested"			
Q1. How interested are you in keeping informed about City events and City government?	68.3%	68.1%	0.2%
Combination of "Very Satisfied" and "Somewhat Satisfied"			
Q2. In general, how satisfied are you with City government efforts to keep you informed about City services, issues, events, and programs?	49.4%	52.9%	-3.5%
Combination of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree"			
Q3. The City of Austin values dialogue between residents and government	39.4%	44.0%	-4.6%
Q3. The City of Austin is customer-oriented	40.2%	46.3%	-6.1%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Public Safety	48.7%	51.0%	-2.3%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on The Environment	50.4%	52.7%	-2.3%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on The City Budget	27.6%	27.3%	0.3%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Economic Development	38.9%	41.9%	-3.0%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Infrastructure Activities	37.8%	35.3%	2.5%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Water and Public Utilities	45.4%	53.0%	-7.6%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Public Health & Welfare	44.1%	47.4%	-3.3%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Transportation and Traffic	45.1%	50.4%	-5.3%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Libraries	41.4%	51.3%	-9.9%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Parks	50.1%	56.0%	-5.9%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on the Austin Animal Center/Animal Services	48.0%	52.3%	-4.3%
Q6. The City Provides Enough Information on Special Events	71.3%	80.0%	-8.7%
Q11. Satisfied with the quality of information provided on City's website	56.3%	68.3%	-12.0%
Q11. It is easy to find the information I am looking for	49.2%	51.3%	-2.1%
Q11. City's website is easy to navigate	50.0%	51.0%	-1.0%
Q11. I like the visual design of the City's website	43.2%	51.4%	-8.2%
Combination of "Frequently" and "Occasionally"			
Q9. Frequency with which Group E-Mail from the City is used to stay informed about the City	13.6%	11.3%	2.3%
Q9. Frequency with which Person to Person/Word of Mouth is used to stay informed about the City	79.0%	72.2%	6.8%
Q9. Frequency with which Non-City Media is used to stay informed about the City	95.0%	93.0%	2.0%
Q9. Frequency with which The Internet is used to stay informed about the City	65.8%	65.1%	0.7%
Q9. Frequency with which City's Social Media is used to stay informed about the City	18.2%	19.0%	-0.8%
Q9. Frequency with which City Staff is used to stay informed about the City	29.7%	28.8%	0.9%
Q9. Frequency with which Public Meetings is used to stay informed about the City	35.9%	36.5%	-0.6%
Q9. Frequency with which City of Austin Website is used to stay informed about the City	46.4%	41.9%	4.5%
Q9. Frequency with which Radio Broadcasts of Council Meetings is used to stay informed about the City	17.5%	23.6%	-6.1%
Combination of "Very Good" and "Good"			
Q17a. Overall, how would you rate your experience with this (or these) community engagement activities?	64.3%	66.9%	-2.6%
Combination of Ratings "9" and "10" on a 10-point scale, where a rating of "10" Meant "Very Warm/Positive"			
Q21. How would you describe the way you feel toward the City of Austin today?	22.5%	40.8%	-18.3%