Task Force on Community Engagement Meeting Notes: July 30, 2015

Created by Juli Fellows, Diane Miller, Pat Korbus

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Executive Summary

On July 30, 2015 nine of the thirteen Task Force on Community Engagement (TFCE) members attended the first TFCE meeting at the Street-Jones Building. Council Member Leslie Pool welcomed the group and thanked them for their generous contribution of time and talent to this important topic. She shared that the TF resolution, sponsored by herself and Council Members Gallo, Houston and Renteria, was passed unanimously and that the City Council agreed that, particularly in light of this new 10-1 structure, it is important look at new ways to engage the public that are meaningful and transparent and involve people throughout Austin. This will help insure Council is communicating well, recognizing problems facing all Austinites, and making well-rounded decisions. Two community members signed up to speak during Citizen Comment. Their remarks are found on page three.

Diane Miller provided an overview of the facilitators' roles and the meeting agenda. During brief introductions, the members identified one thing they hoped would happen as a result of this Task Force's work. Common themes included engagement of a broader cross section of the community, making it easier for busy people to engage, and having engagement make a positive difference in public policy.

Juli Fellows introduced the concept of collaborative problem solving, which will be at the heart of the group's decision-making process. She differentiated between a position (the action or solution each person prefers) and an interest (the unmet need or goal you are trying to accomplish.) The members each identified a position and an interest that they hold now. Many of the interests were very similar and shared by many, including more inclusivity, an equal voice for those who can't attend meetings in person, creating more inclusive decision making and having input make a difference.

The group all agreed to use the decision making process described on page four of the Group Guidelines. Pat Korbus provided a visual outline of the high level process flow the group may use. It includes the following major steps: Launch, Today's Picture, Best Practices, Tomorrow's Picture and Recommendations. The group discussed this flow and all agreed that it would be helpful to identify needs after understanding today's picture in order to know what best practices to explore.

The group began to brainstorm possible questions for the September Conversation Corps dialogues. The group would like some additional information on a few of the methods being currently used in the City. Specifically, Conversation Corps, Speak Up Austin, e-comment and CityWorks Academy were mentioned. They would like this information in an informal Q&A session. The members will continue to discuss and propose possible questions at the next meeting.

The group discussed the proposed Group Guidelines and asked for additional information on some topics. They reached consensus and adopted the Guidelines as presented with one additional discussion guideline added for the benefit of the hard of hearing, "Speak clearly and enunciate consonants." They also agreed on a meeting schedule as follows.

- ✓ Meet every other Thursday from 6-9 p.m. (Every other, not first and third or second and fourth.)
- ✓ Have small group work sessions if there's no large meeting needed.

City staff will set up a City message board for the Task Force so that members can share thoughts and potential discussion topics with one another while meeting transparency requirements. Content will be visible to the public. (Member notification of postings by email is not a feature of this software.)

In evaluating the meeting, the members advised they were pleased with the meeting preparation and that they got through the entire agenda. Some felt the consensus process felt odd and they wanted a better balance in participation among group members. This might be accomplished by varying the group processes.

Member Attendance List

Celso Baez	Richard Fonte	Irfan Syed
Jason Bram	Andrea Hamilton	Navvab Taylor
Mike Clark-Madison	Chris Howe	Sara Torres

Decisions Made

- Adopted the Group Guidelines and consensus decision making process with one change to section 10 by adding "Speak clearly and enunciate consonants" to Discussion Guidelines.
- Added step to high level process flow of identifying needs after understanding today's picture in order to know what best practices to explore.
- Set Task Force meetings to occur every other Thursday from 6-9 p.m.
- Agreed small group's work sessions (of less than 6 members) can be convened if full TF meeting not needed.
- Requested City staff set up a message board for the Task Force.

Action Items

Who	What	When
CPIO staff, facilitators	Seek a clearer meaning of the four topics given to the group by Council, in particular the last two.	ASAP
City staff	Have an informal Q&A session about current methods and tools such as Conversation Corps, Speak Up Austin, social media, e-comment, and CityWorks Academy, so that members have a shared understanding these tools and methods and both their intent and user experience.	8/13/15
DM	Send members a copy of the Resolution.	Next week
Facilitators	Seek additional clarity from sponsors or CM about what the phrase "fiscal implications" means in the resolution.	ASAP
CPIO staff	Research the options for members participating in meetings electronically and, if possible, set it up for the meeting on August 13, 2015.	8/13/15 if possible
CPIO staff	Report back to the members on the feasibility of attaching a hard copy of the messages from the message board that were posted since the last meeting.	8/13/15
Diane Miller	Send a "job description" of Chair and Vice Chair positions to members, along with some proposed qualifications and a process for deciding. The qualifications and process will be finalized by the group and used at the next meeting to make these decisions.	8/7/15
TF members	Send Matthew C. any changes in your email address, using the form he will send.	Ongoing
TF members	Let Matthew C or Diane Miller know if you haven't received any TF-related emails within the next week.	8/7/15
CPIO Staff	Send the City Auditor's report (referenced in the Current State document) to all members.	Next week

Citizen Comment (oral and written)

John Woodley

- I'm an advocate for the disabled, I'm hearing impaired. I go to 7-15 Board and Commission meetings a month to push for more access for the disabled. My position is that the City needs to change its meeting logistics to better meet the needs of the disabled. My interest is helping the City become proactive about disability access to prevent non-compliant processes and lawsuits.
- I believe the City should provide in-person captioning services. Some places have no internet access. Remote captioning doesn't always allow me to understand what is being said. Please consider better addressing accessibility issues.
- Need to create timely responses to citizen compliant processes. Compliant processes need to be documented.
- Need more inclusive policy/decision making to allow collaborative and non-biased information process.
- Posting Committee members emails online for communicative reasons for those that cannot use a phone.
- Boards and Commissions are usually blind copied, as in "first name.last name@austinTexas .gov"
- Emails for these Commission members fall under Open Records and need to be accessible for that reason.
- Allow questions and comments for items on the agenda from the public. Large meetings may limit this.

Natalie
- I'm an ordinary citizen. Thanks to Council Member Pool for starting this Task Force. I appreciate your work. My primary concern is that some groups are underrepresented. I hope when you gather information you will gather proportionate responses among the different groups. The Citywide survey on communication didn't include information on the types of respondents.
- We need tools to effectively engage those usually not engaged. The demographics for different neighborhoods should be taken into account, for example age, race, gender, household status, household characteristics, etc.

One Thing We Hope Will Happen as a Result of this Group's Work

Andrea: we find a way to reach young, busy families. City business is getting lost in the busyness of their daily lives.

Celso: I hope we get participating citizenry.

Jason: I hope it becomes easier to engage with the City, both to consume information and to give input, especially for those who don't have time to come to meetings.

Irfan: I hope we get the immigrant community more involved with the City.

Sara: I hope we engage the Latin American and Mexican communities.

Navvab: I hope people don't just learn what's happening in the City but how to make changes in their lives, access the programs and services that are available.

Richard: develop improved ways to communicate across all areas of the community, so people are consulted and feel part of the process. Find ways to complement the new district Council system.

Mike: get more clarity among citizens and the City about why and how to engage.

Chris: develop a better understanding so that people can be engaged earlier in the decision-making process. City agendas are often over people's heads, help them get their foot in the door.

Differentiating Positions from Interests

Positions	Interests
Baez – evaluate current policies and methods	• Let people know what power they DO have.
Bram – Make city forums easier to access	• Achieve a more representative and fair "pulse" of the community.
Clark-Madison – help the City figure out a way to tell those who are over-represented to engage others	• Help different forums for feedback carry the same weight.
Fonte – have our actions get to the policy makers	• Have more ways for people to communicate so that those who can't attend in person have a voice.
Hamilton – the feedback process needs to be more inviting.	
Howe – more information in the Council packets about the background on resolutions, how did it come about, what was considered?	• Better, more inclusive policy making. • Create more inclusive decision making.
Syed – Use more social media	• Engage more people because they believe it has an impact. Have people continue to engage, not drop out of the process.
Taylor – more information on how community input led to a result.	
Torres – Better information, push that information so that people stop just complaining and feel able to take action.	• Help individuals influence the process earlier.

Discussion of the Proposed Decision-Making Process

Q: Do we know about parameters within which we can make recommendations?
A: The group will establish criteria for selecting recommendations.

Q: There are four topics assigned to the group by the Council members, e.g. disability accommodations. Can we get these defined? In particular, what do the last two mean?
A: Action item taken. Information will be provided to the group.

Q: How will topics for discussion be identified by the group?
A: You can't email among group members. The group will consider use of a message board on which you can post ideas. Because these message boards are open to the public, they meet the transparency requirements. (Group later agreed to try this.)

Q: How much lead time is needed to propose meeting topics?
A: Whenever possible, the group will identify topics for the next meeting at each meeting.

Q: Could we get Council consensus on our recommendations, e.g. close the feedback loop?
A: After the group has made the recommendations and reported to Council their work is done and the group will be dissolved.

Discussion of High Level Process Flow

The group agreed that between identifying "today's picture" and "best practices" there needed to be a step called Needs Assessment. This will help frame "best practices for what" and will help focus us on what we will explore in more detail.
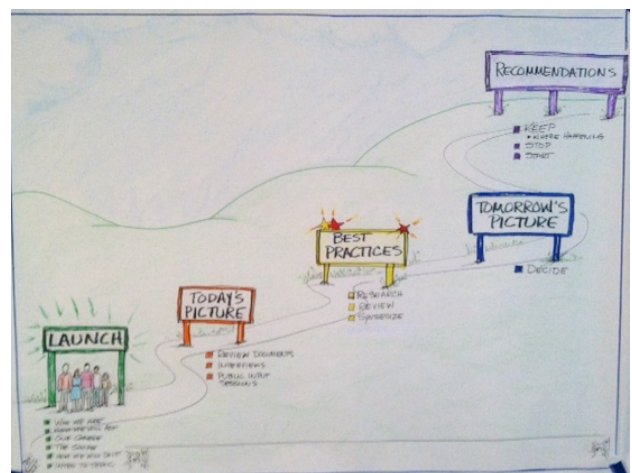
Initial Brainstorming about Conversation Corps questions for September events

- How do groups communicate their opportunities for input?
- How do you successfully engage with other organizations you are a part of? How are you getting information and how's it working for you?
- For those who don't regularly provide input to the City, do you feel intimidated? If so, what would make you feel more comfortable?
- On a scale of 1 – 10, how engaged are you in local civic process/City business?

Collaborative Problem Solving Around Group Schedule

Interests

- Make it easier for the community to know when we meet
- Maximize attendance by members
- Have regularity, so it's easy to remember.
- Complete our work on schedule.

Brainstormed Options (Those in bold represent group consensus.)

a. Meet every other Tuesday.
b. **Meet every other Thursday from 6-9 p.m. (Every other, not first and third or second and fourth.)**
c. Don't meet unless it's truly needed. Don't meet for a single agenda item.
d. **Have small group work sessions if there's no large meeting needed.**
e. Follow-up with the Council member who appointed Jose Velasquez to find out what we might do to ensure that we've communicated with him effectively.
f. We won't have .austintx.gov email addresses.
g. Set up personal email accounts just for this work (e.g. a separate gmail account).
h. **Set up a City message board for this group. The content will be visible to the public. (Member notification of postings by email is not a feature of this software.)**
i. Explore electronic participation (e.g. Skype, Google Hangout) that meets the requirements of open meetings.

Discussion of Draft Group Guidelines

The group discussed the sections listed below. They had no questions or concerns about the other sections.

1. Goal and purpose
Q: What does it mean that we are to include "fiscal implications"? What are Council's intentions regarding this? What are we really qualified to provide?
A: We will seek clarity on this. CPOI staff can assist with this.

2. Topics of interest to CM sponsors
Q: Where did these bullets come from?
A: Many came from Council members' discussion of the resolution during Council meetings. This is not intended to be an exclusive list nor an exhaustive one.
Q: What do bullets #3 and #4 mean?
A: We will seek clarity on this.

3. Participants
Q: There are three members not present tonight. Was this a bad time for them?
A: One said "might make it", another didn't respond to the Doodle poll, one was expected to attend.

6. Responsibilities of members
Q: Are ad hoc or subcommittee meetings also considered public meetings and need to meet Open Meetings requirements?
A: No, so long as no more than 6 members are present at such sessions.

Q: Can we establish a method to participate in meetings electronically when we aren't available in person?
A: Yes, it's possible depending on certain conditions. Staff will research this.

Q: Is the group comfortable with the language "make a good faith effort to attend all meetings"? Do we want to be more explicit or set criteria?
A: The group felt this language was adequate and everyone wants to be here.

7. Conflicts of interest
Q: What's an example of a conflict of interest for this group?
A: If you have a connection to a proprietary tool, method or process that you want the group to recommend the City adopt.

9. Schedule
Q: Can there be regularity of meeting schedule and public posting of that schedule in advance?
A: Yes. See page five for discussion and decision about schedule.

10. Discussion guidelines
To better accommodate those who are hearing impaired, the group agreed to add a discussion guideline that says "Speak clearly and enunciate consonants."

Discussion of the Group's Work Plan

Interests
- Get clear on the steps we will take.
- Begin to build a schedule to get the work done, on time.
- Know as much as possible in advance what topics will be discussed when.

Brainstormed Options (Those in bold represent group consensus.)
a. Clarify our desired outcomes first and work the plan to get there.
b. **Identify the gaps first, then develop our work plan once we know the gaps.**
c. **Some of the work plan will be based in discussions to happen on August 13.**
d. **City staff research how to videoconference in members who can't be present in person.**
e. **Send the City Auditor's report (referenced in the Current State document) to all members.**

Future Agenda Items
- Finish proposing questions for Conversation Corps dialogues
- Select Chair and Vice Chair
- Begin to plan how to gather input from City Departments and community members.
- Learn more about what the City does (through brief Q&A, not a formal presentation) so that the members better understand the current picture. Specific methods to cover include Conversation Corps, Speak Up Austin, e-comment, and City Works Academy.

Meeting Evaluation

What we LIKED about today's meeting	What wasn't so great, what we would change
• The preparation for the meeting, materials • Scribing the discussion, using charts. • We got through the whole agenda (even a few minutes early.) • Good location	• Consensus feels odd (no yes or no) • Better facilitation to encourage the quieter members to participate more, more balanced participation. • Invite everyone to participate by using a range of different methods like small group discussions.