

# Task Force on Community Engagement Meeting Notes: August 13, 2015

Created by Juli Fellows, Diane Miller, Pat  
Korbus

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## Executive Summary

On August 13, 2015 eight of the eleven currently appointed Task Force on Community Engagement (TFCE) members attended the second TFCE meeting at the Google Space in downtown Austin. They reviewed the July 30, 2015 official meeting minutes and approved them with one change (removing 12/31/15 as a possible meeting date.) They reviewed the action items from 7/30/15 and all were completed or are ongoing items. The group agreed that the detailed facilitator notes are useful, in addition to the formal minutes, as a point of reference and reminder of the full discussions. The group heard clarification of their charge via an email from CM Pool and learned that the Council had recently asked them to also look into processes for notifying the community about public hearings.

The group reviewed the job description for Chair/Vice Chair and added two qualities to the list of desired qualities (interest in serving and willingness to serve as the non-staff, non-consultant spokesperson for the TF back to Council.) They agreed that only a Chair was needed for such a small group that used facilitators and a consensus-process. The group reached consensus that Mike Clark-Madison would serve as Chair.

The group learned that there were unexpected consequences to the Resolution language referring to following the Texas Open Meetings Act that prohibit certain types of communication and group processes. After discussing the options, the group agreed that their intent was to be MORE open and transparent than required and, ironically, TOMA restricted certain processes that could be more engaging. They agreed to explore with CM Pool a “withdraw and replace” procedure to change this language in order to go beyond the expectations for openness and transparency.

They had an informal Q&A session with Larry Schooler of CPIO regarding current city engagement tools and methods, in particular, Conversation Corps, SpeakUpAustin, CityWorks Academy and a potential new tool for commenting on Council agenda items.

Each member wrote three responses to the question “What do we most need to know about the community’s engagement experiences and attitudes in order to do our work?” and then grouped their ideas. These thoughts will be shared with Conversation Corps, to help inform the questions they use in September when the topic is Community Engagement. The group then brainstormed methods or tools they might use to gather this information from the community. They used the same process to respond to the question “What do we most need to know about City Department’s engagement experiences and attitudes in order to do our work?” and identified potential methods for gathering that information.

The primary work at the next meeting will be to build a work plan for how to gather information from the community and from City Departments. The work plan will include timelines and who will do what. In evaluating the meeting, the members felt it was productive and they appreciated the information gained from staff. They appreciated having the option of virtual participation but felt the process or technology still needed tweaking to help it feel less disruptive and more like in-person attendance.

## Member Attendance List

Celso Baez

Mike Clark-Madison (video-conference)

Richard Fonte (video-conference)

Andrea Hamilton

Chris Howe

Irfan Syed

Navvab Taylor

Sara Torres

## Decisions Made

- Official meeting minutes approved with one change – delete 12/31/15 as a possible TF meeting date.
- Facilitators will continue to prepare detailed meeting notes, in addition to the formal meeting minutes prepared by CPIO staff.
- The group selected a Chair (Mike Clark-Madison) but felt having a Vice Chair was unnecessary. Subgroups or committees will select informal leaders/chairs. The facilitators will ensure that a quorum is present if the Chair is absent at a meeting.
- The group will ask Council sponsors to withdraw and replace the TOMA language in the resolution. Mike Clark-Madison will explore this with CM Pool.
- Questions and ideas generated by the TF about what they need to know from the community about their experiences and attitudes on community engagement will be shared with Conversation Corps.

## Action Items

Who	What	When
Mike C-M	Reach out to CM Pool regarding the TOMA issue. Facilitators can share their opinions.	By 8/27/15
Larry S.	Provide more background on the three entities being considered for the platform to comment on City Council agenda items. Consider beta testing the platform with the TF.	Next several weeks
TF members	Send ideas for Conversation Corps venues to Larry S. Look at the SpeakUpAustin.org web site. Send ideas for organizations that could share information to encourage participation on SpeakUpAustin.	Ongoing
Larry S.	Let TF members know how they can obtain district-wide information on NextDoor.com (the social media site for neighborhoods.)	ASAP
Diane M.	Coordinate follow-up with members who have missed the first two meetings (Margarita Decierdo and Christopher Ledesma).	By 8/27/15

## Additional Information Regarding the TF Charge

Council Member Pool provided some additional clarification regarding the Council sponsor's request for the TF to look at the fiscal implications of their recommendations. She advised it would be helpful to know how much funding peer cities have invested toward enhancing their community engagement efforts, such as new technology purchases, etc., or any particular community engagement events that proved highly successful, and how long they've been investing in community engagement efforts. Regarding the other Council topics of interest, she advised that the January 22, 2015 telephone town hall lead by CPIO provided an example of the kinds of virtual/online participation they would like to see more of, both citywide and in specific communities, and this could also apply to the Council's interest in District/neighborhood-centered engagement alternatives. She advised CPIO has offered to provide live coverage of individual council members' town halls.

**Q: Can staff help us contact peer cities?**

A: Yes and TFCE members should first decide which cities are most important or will be considered benchmarks before gathering budget data. TFCE members themselves may also be talking with representatives of some peer cities. It will be an iterative process.

**Q: Are peer cities those mentioned in the Auditor's report?**

A: Those cities might be considered but the group is in no way limited to those.

At a recent public hearing on housing, no community members attended. Council members asked how the community was notified and was told that it was through the Council agenda. Council members asked "Is there no other way to notify people?" and decided that the TFCE should also look into this issue of notification of public hearings.

**Q: AustinNotes is a daily e-newsletter available to those who sign up on the City's web site. What gets into these and could they be more informative?**

A: This can be discussed at a future meeting.

**Implications of TOMA Discussion**

- No message board is possible for the group.
- Virtual, video-conferenced participation doesn't count towards quorum.
- Requires language of motions, seconds and votes in the documentation, which doesn't fit our structure and decision making.
- No small group processes can be used during meetings.

**Q: Can the group decide not to comply with the language of the resolution?**

A: Because this is a Task Force and not a Board or Commission, there's a level of flexibility allowed. The group can ask the sponsors to revisit the language and modify it to better fit our needs, to allow us to be more flexible in doing our work. The group is deeply committed to meeting the spirit of open meetings without the limits it imposes. We can ask the sponsors to "withdraw and replace" this language.

**Q: How will the group frame this request?**

A: The Task Force is deeply committed to the spirit of TOMA and, if anything, intends to go beyond current state requirements to model best practice public engagement of the future. The group wishes to be fully open and transparent and to ensure that the community has access and meaningful input to its deliberations and recommendations. This includes ensuring access for those who have barriers to participation. We intend to have meetings open to the public, make meetings accessible, solicit meaningful public input and make public the summaries of what was discussed.

- The City Innovation Department has set up a Bloomfire site where people can post documents and images, comment on them, etc. If the TF is able to change the language of the resolution, the City can establish a Bloomfire site for the Task Force.

**Selection of Chair**

- The group added two qualities to the list of desired qualities of the Chair/Vice Chair.
  - Interested in the leadership role.
  - Serve as a spokesperson for the TF back to Council who isn't either staff or paid consultant.

- The group reached consensus that having a Chair was sufficient and that a Vice Chair wasn't necessary for such a small group who also had facilitators.
- Mike Clark-Madison expressed interest and willingness to serve as Chair.
- The group reached consensus to select Mike as Chair. They also agreed that subgroups or committees will select informal leaders/chairs. The facilitators will ensure that a quorum is present if the Chair is absent at a meeting.

## Discussion of Current COA Community Engagement Tools

### **Q: How do you advertise Conversation Corps?**

A: We use existing channels, social media, flyers, web site, SpeakUpAustin email addresses. We're planning bookmarks to be distributed at libraries. We're also gathering a community journalism database to identify media outlets that are more neighborhood focused or "non-traditional". We don't have an advertising budget. We're pursuing a grant to fund a full time assistant to oversee outreach. We missed an opportunity to advertise through schools, but plan to do that in the fall. We've had 200 attendees and have trained 65 hosts.

### **Q: How does Conversation Corps influence policy?**

A: The best example is the budget process. In the first month, Conversation Corps conducted a quantitative exercise to provide hard data that was reported to Council. We also plan to report back to participants about what was heard and what was done with your input. Sometimes the input is used by staff and sometimes by Council. We want to set up feedback loops to participants, either through email or Austin 311 if people don't have internet access.

### **Q: Are Council members feeling in the loop about Conversation Corps?**

A: We've tried and they have a lot on their plates. We need to let them know if conversations are being held in their district and even encourage them to attend.

### **Q: Can SpeakUpAustin and Conversation Corps be topically linked more often?**

A: It's our intention to do so, but it's not always possible. Topics are generated by the City Departments or by Council. We're continuing the experiment.

### **Q: There were 150 applicants for CityWorksAcademy for 35 slots. Is it possible to offer a spring semester as well as a fall to accommodate the demand?**

A: Staffing is the limitation. We think smaller classes offer more interactivity and chance for closer personal connections. If we found a partner, we might be able to offer a spring class. We also coordinate a high school version of CityWorks Academy called "Austin Corps".

CPIO is piloting a **platform to allow the public to comment on City Council agenda items**. There are three entities under consideration for this platform. Civinomics is farthest along and could replicate the Santa Clara, CA platform for Austin.

### **Q: How are these comment systems integrated with existing agenda management systems?**

A: You can upload content in seconds but it goes to a new window. It's easy and efficient to capture the content.

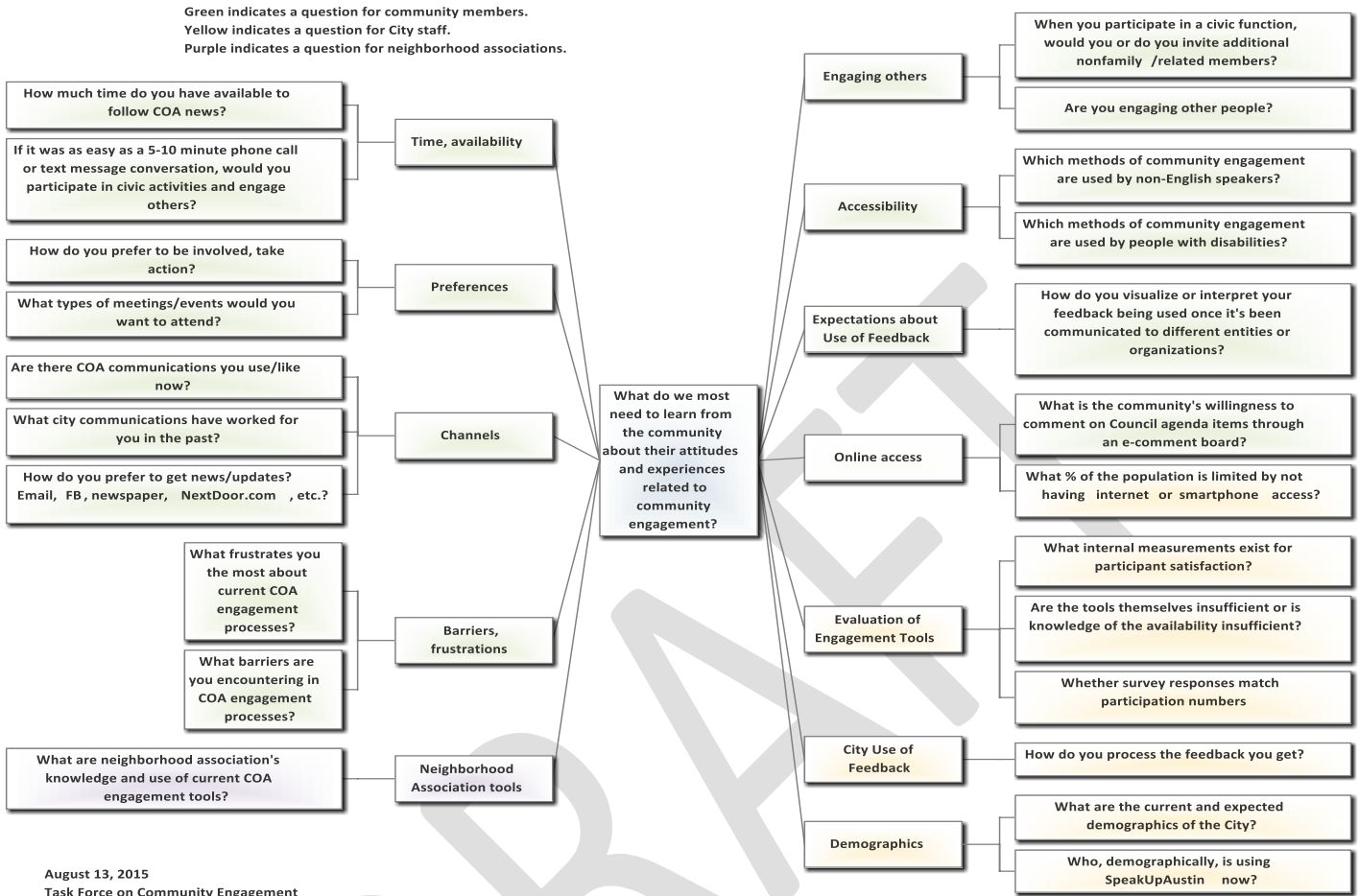
### **Q: What efforts are you making to publicize to the non-English speaking community?**

A: We're creating the community journalism database. We have connections with two Quality of Life projects that we use. We use social media. It needs some cohesion but we're getting there. There's a gap because we don't have a meaningful database of community organizations and groups that is MAINTAINED.

### **Q: What is CPIO's capacity to use NextDoor.com?**

A: CPIO and the Police Department can post things on this tool and can select targeted areas.

## What We Most Need to Learn from the Community

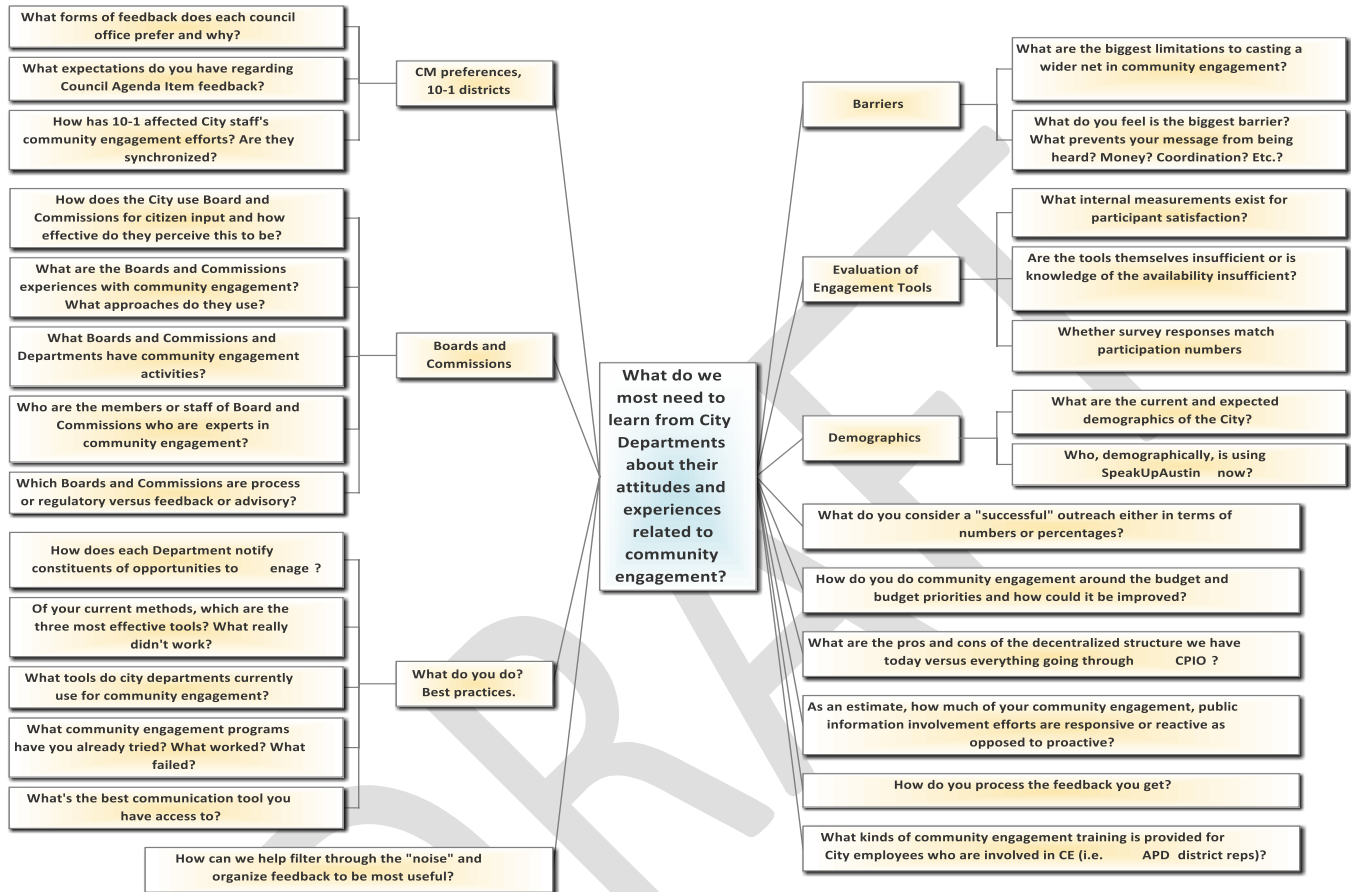


## Brainstormed Methods for Gathering Information from Community

- Use SpeakUpAustin.org to ask some of these questions.
- Get information from the September Conversation Corps conversations.
- Use our connections to neighborhood associations to hold small scale, in person neighborhood meetings. Convene them with the intention to reach "not the usual participants".
- Use the NextDoor.com tool to ask questions at the neighborhood or district level. This gets a broader range of people.
- Get in touch with the City Contact Teams.
- Use Community Registries to ask for input or invite people to meetings we convene.
- Examine whether NextDoor.com is useful as a collaboration tool or only for informing people. Find out who sees it. The polling feature on this tool may be a useful option.
- Don't open a Twitter account but create a hashtag to inventory a category of comments.
- Do social listening. What are people talking about now?
- We have 60 Boards and Commissions. Talk to them.
- Host a Town Hall type meeting when we have something to show the public.
- Do a straight-up survey.
- Use all we know about and currently do PLUS reach beyond to communicate with people who don't usually participate.

- n) Use COA listserves and email databases to send surveys out.
- o) Use Council members' "pulpits" to cohost Town Hall sessions, communicate via their newsletters to constituents.
- p) Partner with minority publications and media.

## What We Most Need to Learn from City Departments



August 13, 2015  
Task Force on Community Engagement

## Brainstormed Methods for Gathering Information from City Departments

- a) Ask CPIO what information they already have on our questions.
- b) Organize lunches to talk with CPIO and other Departments about the qualitative information.
- c) Attend Board and Commission meetings, talk informally with the members about community engagement.
- d) Ask Boards and Commissions to put community engagement on their agenda to discuss.
- e) Each of us ask our appointing Council member the relevant questions. Have individual conversations and report back to the group.
- f) Survey the Boards and Commissions appointees (about 500 of them.)



## Future Agenda Items

- Get more information on which Departments do their own public engagement without working with CPIO, who does it on their own and why. What training are those staff receiving in public engagement? What skill levels do they have?
- AustinNotes is a daily e-newsletter available to those who sign up on the City's web site. What gets into these and could they be more informative?
- What communication vehicles are possible and legal to use in notifying the community about upcoming public hearings? How much time is needed to announce a public hearing? What's the protocol?

## Meeting Evaluation

What we <b>LIKED</b> about today's meeting	What wasn't so great, what we would change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was productive.</li> <li>• Liked content from staff.</li> <li>• The thumbs-up method at least lets us communicate our support or lack thereof.</li> <li>• I was glad I could participate virtually.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We had the same 8 members attend tonight. Have we had any contact with or from the others?</li> <li>• The thumbs-up method is still "voting".</li> <li>• The online participation technology is distracting and doesn't feel like true participation.</li> <li>• We need to work out the virtual participation better.</li> </ul>