Task Force on Community Engagement Meeting Notes: September 10, 2015

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September 10, 2015

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Executive Summary

On September 10, 2015 nine of the eleven currently appointed members of the Task Force on Community Engagement (TFCE) attended the meeting at the offices of Leadership Austin.

The Task Force had an exploratory group conversation about the purpose of public engagement. The general consensus was that quality public engagement offers opportunities for all voices to be heard and respected, which leads to better representation of the community, which in turn results in better decisions and policies.

Workgroups then reported on the questions they are interested in asking their assigned target groups. This led to a decision about creating a common set of questions for all target groups, with some additional questions specific to each target group. The questions will be reviewed at the next meeting, along with action plans for each workgroup to gather responses from their target groups.

The offer from a UT class to assist, or partner with, the Task Force was considered. The decision was to (1) provide the class the final set of questions and request they concentrate on the Higher Education population, or (2) ask the students to be "helpers" to the Task Force workgroups as they execute action plans for gathering information from the target groups.

Member Attendance List

Mike Clark-Madison
Richard Fonte (video conference)
Irfan Syed
Navvab Taylor
Sara Torres
Margarita Decierdo
Christopher Ledesma
Andrea Hamilton
Koreena Malone

Decisions Made

Who	What	When
Task Force workgroups	• Send Mike Clark-Madison all work-group questions by 9/13 • Identify which working groups are seeking input from masses and which from organizational leaders	Sept 13
Mike Clark-Madison	• Mike will review questions and identify core questions and send to group by 9/16, along with list of all questions submitted.	Sept 16
Task Force workgroups	• Send Mike ideas for questions to ask the general public	Sept 13
Task Force members	• At 9/24 meeting, ratify questions and have info needed to launch process	Sept 24
Task Force members	• Work groups start laying groundwork for launching the input-gathering process.	Sept 14
Task Force members	• Send target groups' contact names and information to Diane Miller	No date set
Diane Miller	• Diane will compile target groups' contact information in a spreadsheet for Task Force review and use	No date set
Mike Clark-Madison and Diane Miller	• Contact UT professor regarding options for using class to help with civic engagement research	No date set

Meeting Notes

Citizen input

- No comments made.

Old Business

- From 8/28 minutes related to resigning members talking with their Council Member, strike the phrase "to discuss potential replacement."
- Jason Bram has advised that he is resigning from the Task Force due to additional work commitments and travel.
- Next Door: Jill Goodman from City of Austin Public Information Office provided information about Next Door.
  - A private, social network for neighborhoods
  - Participants can "opt out" of email newsletters
  - Can be used to communicate by neighborhood, by district, or city-wide
  - A good way to push-out information; not as robust at polling to gather information
  - Comments can be captured
  - All districts have lots of users
  - Any resident can download the app
  - The app is free

Exploratory Conversation: What is the purpose of Public Engagement?

- More representative
- Level the playing field
- Hearing from people who don't normally engage
- Legitimacy: ensure representatives are being representative
- End up with better projects/policies if you can tap into knowledge and commitment of communities
- Tailor engagement for communities and build trust. Be culturally relevant
- For those interested, provide them avenues easy for people to access

Workgroup Plans: Investigative Questions and Methods

The six working groups presented their draft questions, methods for gathering input and potential target groups to gather input from. Task Force members the provided feedback on the draft plans regarding any concerns or suggestions for improvement.

Business Groups

Concerns:

- Be precise with survey
- Models other than focus group
- More like discussions, than like formal focus groups

Suggestions:

- Work together across workgroups to develop common set of questions
- Develop additional targeted questions for specific stakeholder groups
- Ask people if they want to participate in a discussion session

Civic & Non-Profit Groups

Suggestions:

- Google document of list of non-profits
- Create spreadsheet; each TF workgroup add to list

  - Name of contact
  - Name of organization
  - Contact information (caution: public document, thus any contact info needs to be "public-facing" info)
  - Send all information to Diane; she will update spreadsheet

Under-represented Populations

Concerns:

- Translation to other languages (City PIO can help make this happen)
- Phone equipment to reach out to hearing impaired?
- Method to reach disabled?

Suggestions:

- Is there a natural divide in relation to asking the questions? For instance:
- Business groups: send to all their members?
- Representative groups (i.e., non-profits) Address the questions to the leaders of the non-profits
- How to reach the under-served populations? All of the above groups probably do represent the underserved (i.e., boards and commissions)
- How do you access the non-English speakers?
- Ask Board/commissions who might represent access to underserved (which boards/commissions are most likely?)

Neighborhood Groups

Concerns:

- What about renters in the neighborhoods?
- Who consider themselves part of the neighborhoods?

Suggestions:

- Get information from "individuals" from the person's point of view, in addition to the "organization's" point of view.
- Ask leader what he/she thinks, and have leader send questions on to individuals.
- Speak-up: plan time for public to respond.
- Making a survey available is quick to do. But plan 3-4 weeks lead time to publish and get responses.

City staff

Concerns:

- Contractors who are outside of City employment but conduct surveys don't always know our city.

Suggestions:

- How to capture consultant groups who are handling public engagement for departments?

Boards and Commissions

Concerns:

- What about Advisory Councils? How to include them and others who are not official "boards and commissions"?

Suggestions:

- Perhaps Boards/Commissions who are involved with underserved would be better lumped with the "underserved" workgroup, rather than lumped with the Boards and Commissions workgroup.

General comments about plans for gathering information:

- The usual suspects (those already engaged) will respond to a general survey.
- Speak Up: lead time for creating survey is very short
- Dissemination of and response to surveys: plan for approx. four weeks.

Offer of Assistance: UT Class

The Task Force discussed the offer made by an instructor at the University of Texas At Austin's School of Information to have graduate students her fall project-based course on design thinking support the work of the Task Force in some way, as the topic of the class is Citizen Engagement. The Task Force discussed the offer and explored concerns, interests and possible options regarding this request. The consensus decision of the group was to suggest that the students focus on higher education institutions, as that is not a target group identified by this Task Force.

Concerns/Interests

- Uncomfortable being a "laboratory"
- Want thinking to be fluid and my voice heard
- Don't want to take time to "train" the students
- Using the students would free up some of our time

Optional responses to the offer:

- ✓ ***First Choice:*** Have them concentrate on Higher Education institutions. Provide our questions to them to use.
- ✓ ***Second Choice:*** Use class as "helpers" for our workgroups, as needed.
- Use the class as a 7th workgroup that is helpful to us (part of First Choice)
- Could use them to research Best Practices
- Could give class same charge we got and see what they come up with. We can compare and contrast and use whatever we want, or not
- Give them particular/specific tasks that will help us and our work

Next Steps

- Send Mike Clark-Madison all work-group questions by 9/13
- Identify which working groups are seeking input from masses and which from organizational leaders
- Mike will review questions and identify core questions and send to group by 9/16, along with list of all questions submitted.
- Send Mike ideas for questions to ask the general public.
- At 9/24 meeting, ratify questions and have info needed to launch process.
- Work groups start laying groundwork for launching the input-gathering process.