

Task Force on Community Engagement Meeting Notes: November 19, 2015

Created by Juli Fellows, Diane Miller, Pat

Korbus

November 20, 2015

Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Members in Attendance	2
Decisions Made.....	2
Action Items.....	4
Citizen Comment.....	4
Preliminary Survey Data on Online/Virtual Engagement	4
Themes/Discussion of Data.....	4
Conversation with CPIO	5
Q&A with CPIO.....	6
Priority Areas for Improving Online/Virtual Engagement	7
Ideas for How to Improve Online/Virtual Engagement.....	7
Task Force Next Steps/Schedule.....	8
Meeting Evaluation.....	8

DRAFT

Executive Summary

On November 19, 2015 nine of the currently 12 appointed members of the Task Force on Community Engagement (TFCE) members attended the regularly scheduled TF meeting at the Street-Jones Building. Jeff Jack addressed the group and encouraged the Task Force to focus on quality information, accountability, closing the feedback loop, weighted input and meaningful metrics. The group approved the November 5, 2015 minutes with one change – adding Koreena Malone to the attendee list. Diane told the group that Joe Green had resigned because he has taken a job in San Antonio. She introduced Claudia Herrington, who has been nominated by CM Renteria to fill that slot. Claudia Herrington is an engagement specialist with Central Health. She will formally join the group after her appointment by City Council but plans to observe before that.

Mike Clark-Madison reported on the preliminary survey data that relates to online or virtual engagement. Online sources, both neighborhood-specific and City-wide are some of the leading sources of information cited by these respondents. There are two attitudes reflected in the comments, which are not mutually exclusive. One is that the City should do more in the online space, with some specific suggestions about how to do that. The other is that the City should invest in more “high touch” engagement that reaches those who don’t engage online. Some other major themes in the discussion of these preliminary data include:

- Being able to filter for information on issues you care about, having **curated** information, not a “fire hose”.
- Creating a system that **closes the feedback loop**, so after you engage you find out what decision was made and why.
- Finding ways to maximize the impact of City communication that is put out by our **strategic partners**, e.g. neighbors and other organizations.
- The drawbacks of a **decentralized system** that results in inconsistency, information being scattered and hard to find, reinventing the wheel each time and no city-wide database of people who engage and what they care about.

Doug Matthews and Larry Schooler of CPIO spoke at length with the group about what they have done using online or virtual tools and some barriers they’ve encountered. They are particularly interested in online engagement that doesn’t just solicit comments or likes, but engages people in deliberation about trade-offs, so that the result isn’t just a laundry list of wishes. They have tried some blended events, that are both in-person and virtual. The decentralized system and a lack of resources are two major barriers to more effective engagement.

The group reviewed a list of next steps, including the homework that needed to happen between sessions. That list is shown on page eight.

Members in Attendance

Celso Baez

Margarita Decierdo

Mike Clark-Madison

Richard Fonte

Andrea Hamilton

Chris Howe

Koreena Malone

Ken Rigsby

Navvab Taylor

Sara Torres

Decisions Made

- The online survey will close on December 31, 2015.
- Mike will provide a summary of the survey data to the Task Force members and post it to Bloomfire by Dec. 1. Members will review this prior to the Dec. 3rd meeting.

11/30/2015

TFCE11.19.15Notes_V2

Action Items

Who	What	When
Mike CM	Provide a summary of the survey data to the Task Force members and post it to Bloomfire. Include information that allows the TF to understand where the survey sample isn't representative.	12/1/15
Doug M	Send Margarita the raw data from the Spirit of East Austin sticky notes.	11/30/15
TF Work Groups	Provide a preliminary summary of what you have learned from focus groups and/or interviews. Post these to Bloomfire.	12/1/15

Citizen Comment

Jeff Jack

- Concerns about sub-optimization and bias confirmation.
- Concerned about quality versus quantity of information.
- Accountability and people not knowing what happened with their input.
- No weighting of input.
- Recommend making a list of the most important City processes and small ones. Get people who participated to say what worked and didn't. Have meaningful metrics.

Preliminary Survey Data on Online/Virtual Engagement

- Online sources, including both neighborhood and City-wide, are one of the leading sources of information cited.
- There's a divergence of attitudes about online engagement. Some (who may be more tech-oriented) think we don't do enough or don't do it well enough and others think we rely too much on electronic communication and there's not enough "high touch" to reach those who don't regularly use online tools.
- Suggestions included:
 - Different ways to comment on Council agenda items.
 - Setting up filters so that information you care about can be "pushed" to you.
 - Some have preferences for kinds of online engagement, such as Twitter or Facebook.
 - Use multiple (asynchronous) avenues for online participation.
 - Lots of people like NextDoor.
 - People say they would know more if more information was pushed to them. They only look for what they already know is there.
 - Emails are too long.
 - What's the space that isn't a 3-minute comment at a Council meeting or total reliance on high tech? For those who aren't tech savvy, can we better leverage strategic partnerships with other organizations?
 - Some level of consistency helps but don't tell me everything the City does (fire hose approach).
 - I get information about things that aren't important to me, e.g. through SpeakUp.
 - Some detailed suggestions, for example about a searchable database.

Themes/Discussion of Data

- Curated rather than fire hose approach. Know when and to whom it matters. Filter for issue-specific information.
- If neighborhoods or other organizations to which people belong are a major source of information, how can we maximize the impact of these organizations' communication?
- Some people get information about City through media (TV, print), others have no contact with those sources.
- Take some real examples of issues in front of the Council and think about how the system has and hasn't worked around those issues.

11/30/2015

TFCE11.19.15Notes_V2

- How can we get real time information to the community about the Council decisions? Council members get thousands of emails which are catalogued. Use that information to communicate back to those people to say “here’s what we decided and why”. Give those who engaged a sense of closure. It’s good to just get a response to your email, it’s even better to know what happened.
- City employees may be an untapped resource – prepare/train them to be good stewards.
- There is no one easy-to-find place to choose how to engage. It’s either way too much or so scattered you can’t find it. There’s no consistency in how engagement happens across Departments. We aren’t building a database of people who do engage. We reinvent the wheel with each initiative.
- CrowdBrite is a clean, project-specific online tool that might be useful for very big issues but it’s very expensive.
- Andrea said that budget considerations would be important in their recommendations. Doug Matthews encouraged the group to solve for the need and not for the specific tool to meet the need. What will help staff the most is to look at the structure that is needed to accomplish the goals, the HOW not the WHAT.

Conversation with CPIO

- CPIO has worked in different categories.
 - Phone-based (either outbound calls or call in)
 - Text-based (polling like HeartGov)
 - Online/mobile (such as SpeakUp)
 - In-person/blended (those who participate remotely can watch and send in questions to moderator.)
 - Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Google Hangouts)
 - Neighborhood-centric (NextDoor, My Sidewalk, Every Block)
- We’ve been able to leverage the fact that we are Austin to work with vendors.
- In 2010, \$1.25 - \$1.5 million of City funds were spent on outside engagement firms. For example, recently Aquatics was persuaded to bring that engagement in-house, rather than continue to hire consultants.
- We want to find tools that can engage people in all the ways they want to be engaged.
- We’d like to use 311 so people can give input by phone, in part because they have extensive translation capabilities.
- There’s a high degree of mindfulness to do this well and we’re extremely fortunate to have a team that goes above and beyond.
- **Challenges or barriers** we’ve faced
 - Cost of tools (e.g. Peak Democracy costs \$32,000/year.)
 - Shifting space – it’s not easy for tech vendors to be sustainable. They dissolve or get different priorities.
 - Budget for engagement office is not able to currently cover these costs, have to go to Departments to get funds.
 - There’s a critical gap in staff resources, especially for 2-way engagement. CPIO is stretched too thin. They use unpaid interns but they require training.
 - Some Council members have expressed concerns about the cost of engagement.
 - People don’t consider the full implications of what it’s going to take to “finish” an engagement.
 - Right now we’re a highly distributed system and we don’t have a systemic or structural approach that involves Departments thinking about engagement daily.
 - We need to be clear about what we’re committing to do at the beginning.
- **Specific tools** used by CPIO
 - **Interactive Town Hall (Jan 2015)**. They charge by connected call. Robo-called 50,000 households to invite them to participate. Had both Spanish and English language. Did text-based polls during the event and a moderator on the phone. Also took Twitter comments. Total cost, excluding staff costs, \$15,000 to engage about 6,000 people (not including those who watched it on TV).
 - Would like to use something like **Maestro Conference** so that people can talk in small groups.
 - Would like to use Google Hangouts in spaces like libraries.

- The **Spirit of East Austin event** was very resource intensive but is the kind of engagement we'd like to do more. Council members convened it and attended. Having your Council member physically present made people more likely to attend and believe they were heard because they could talk to them directly.
- **SpeakUp** is rooted in social ideation theory, which says that good ideas rise to the top. But there's no input or deliberation about trade-offs or reality-testing.
 - Threaded discussions have more opportunity for such deliberation but they take a lot more work.
 - Having to register is a barrier for some people but it builds a database that can be useful.
 - We are looking at redesigning the SpeakUp site and hope we can find local vendors so it can be customized.
- **Engagement HQ**
 - Contracted with them for a short time in 2010-2011. There were challenges with the technology and also it required funding from the Departments, so we discontinued it.
- **Insights**
 - Used by Austin Resource Recovery. The challenge is that it's limited to just asking for ideas but there's no give and take or deliberation about trade-offs.

Q&A with CPIO

Q: Is it possible to get vendors to use/build open source platforms for the City?

A: Don't know what Doug Matthews would say about this but Larry says they are open to it. We'd need processes in place to get it.

Q: How was the City website done?

A: The City's programmers laid things out. Any collaborations with outside groups was on the periphery.

Q: Why don't some organization like the Texas Municipal League work on this? All cities are facing the same engagement challenges, so it seems like something they could tackle that would benefit their members.

A: Larry speaks to municipalities about how important engagement is and what they're actually spending on things like lawsuits, recall elections, etc. that might be prevented if better engagement happened. Larry thinks San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth are all doing decent engagement. He also likes what he sees in Portland, San Francisco, Boston, Salt Lake City, New York and Minneapolis.

Q: In open platforms like Twitter, how is the information curated?

A: The media relations team has responsibility for Twitter city-wide. Other Departments may monitor other projects or specific issues. Facebook is not as consistent – no one person has responsibility for monitoring that. The 311 staff are trying to be social-listening agents, but this is still evolving.

Q: I saw tons of "get to know your code officer" TV commercials. Couldn't that money be better used for engagement around really important issues?

A: CPIO's original priorities included consistent organizational branding and a PIO structure that was manageable. Currently decision-making happens at the Department level and CPIO has no authority over those decisions. CPIO worked to influence policy by getting Public Engagement Principles established that should be used to hold Departments and Vendors accountable. But often engagement efforts happen that CPIO knows nothing about.

Q: Does CPIO charge Departments for the training they deliver?

A: There's not a training-specific charge but the funding for CPIO comes from a Support Services Fund charged to each Department.

Q: The input from the Spirit of East Austin event that was presented to Colony Park was not the full text. Is there a way to see the full text of the sticky notes?

A: Yes, Doug will send Margarita the raw input.

Q: Have Council constituent liaisons asked for engagement training and are all PIO staff (e.g. at Departments) trained in engagement?

A: We do quarterly meetings of everyone with a PIO role but it's more trying to connect them and steer or manage them towards more consistency with the Engagement Principles, best practice, etc. There's one person in CPIO who spends 80% of her time working with Council offices.

Q: Do we know how much Sound Check cost?

A: No. We've been advising the Planning Department but we didn't think their approach fit the needs of the project. But there is a value in framing an event as fun that gets people to attend who normally wouldn't.

- We start engagement well but don't finish well. Improve how we finish (e.g. close the loop).

Priority Areas for Improving Online/Virtual Engagement

- Improve searchability and easy access to key information on the main web site.
- Sufficient resources, funding and staffing to do community engagement well. Pay attention to the structural requirements.
- Consolidate different platforms on a given topic so they work together.
- Content curation.
- Creation of metrics for successful engagement efforts – communication, events, online, etc.
- Improve the feedback loop so people can easily learn the impact of their engagement.
- An easy system for commenting on Council agenda items that don't require physical presence.
- Helping Departments effectively analyze the data they get.
- Consistent messaging across Departments for community engagement (e.g. so you don't get 5 Survey Monkey links from 5 different departments).
- More realistic evaluation of completion on 311 calls that reflect resolution of the problem (so that transferring the caller to another Department doesn't constitute completion).
- Improved linkages between CPIO and those in the community who care about engagement.
- Increased information about the individuals who make comments, so that their standing can be determined. "Who are these people?" (Note: there has been a lot of pushback on this item)
- ADA compliance for all web sites and presentations.
- Upgrade City internet infrastructure.

Ideas for How to Improve Online/Virtual Engagement

- Have to have sufficient funds to do engagement right.
- Having staff specialized in online engagement.
- Look for ways to not just replicate a public hearing (e.g. 3 minute comments). Find ways to build in more give and take so you don't just get a laundry list of wishes but people deliberate and identify trade-offs.
- Vary the tools by the level of concern among the community (deeper tools for bigger issues).

- If we knew the total budget spent on communication/community engagement, we could better resource things, set priorities, make them consistent and standardized.
- Need to account for the resources it will take to do robust engagement.
- Add Council constituent liaisons to some meeting with CPIO. (Some know very little about what’s going on vis-à-vis communications and community engagement.)
- Not all Council members feel community engagement is important or worth spending money on.
- Invite people who have participated in events to give feedback.
- What can we do to improve the dynamics of a very decentralized system?

Task Force Next Steps/Schedule

Date	TF Homework before Meeting	Meeting Topic(s)
Nov. 19	Data gathering – focus groups, interviews	Virtual engagement: areas for improvement
Dec 3	Review survey and other data	List of major gaps/needs beyond the 5 in your charge.
Dec 17	Read articles about one of the major gaps or needs	What we learned from talking to City Departments. Discuss what we read about how other places are meeting these major gaps or needs.
Dec 31	Online Survey will close	
Jan 14	Think about what you would recommend.	Brainstorm options for recommendations.
Jan 28	Think about the options and the interests in the group.	Seek agreement on recommendations.
Feb 11	Think about the options and the interests in the group.	Seek agreement on recommendations.

Meeting Evaluation

What we LIKED about today’s meeting	What wasn’t so great, what we would change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “short course” with CPIO. • More group discussion and less facilitator presentation. • Talking directly to CPIO now that we have more background. • Meaningful conversations and being further down in our process. • Speaking more with each other, less facilitation. • Like the timed agenda. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wish we’d had conversation with CPIO sooner. • We got stuck downstairs because the elevator was locked. • We need to focus more on how to measure performance for engagement. • I get tired after two hours.