

Task Force on Community Engagement Meeting Notes: December 17, 2015

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Executive Summary

On December 17, 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. Natalie Gauldin, Director of Friends of Austin Neighborhoods (FAN) addressed the group and encouraged the Task Force to continue to distribute the Community Engagement Survey to renters and other underrepresented populations so that the results more fully represent the diversity of Austin. She advised that FAN would assist the Task Force in the distribution of the survey to attempt to gather a more representative sample of voices. The group approved the November 19, 2015 meeting minutes.

Mike Clark-Madison reported on the preliminary results of the English-language community engagement survey, including topline from all respondents and cross-tabs for each of the stakeholder groups identified in question one, plus for respondents whose race/ethnicity is not “Caucasian or White” and those under 45. He also presented the data from the coding of responses to open-text questions based on “nodes” identified in the Task Force’s key elements of effective community engagement “bridge” diagram. Additional nodes were created to capture other recurring themes in the data and in total, 15 were used. The group reviewed and discussed the survey data and identified the specific needs that the responses revealed.

Each of the Task Force Workgroups then provided a summary of the methods used and the input gathered from their specific focus area groups, which included business, civic and nonprofit groups, under-represented populations, neighborhoods, city department staff and Boards and Commissions. The group discussed their major take-aways from this input process and identified the needs identified through this process. Based on Task Force review of the input gathered, to follow are the major themes of the needs that should be addressed to improve the City’s community engagement efforts:

- 1) Make information clear, relevant and easily accessible.
- 2) Make it easier for people to give input in ways that are convenient, accessible and appropriate for them.
- 3) Explain how input will be used and show how that input had an impact on the decision made.
- 4) Ensure that everyone who cares about an issue or is impacted has the opportunity to engage and that some voices don’t count more than others.
- 5) Ensure that City staff have the support, training, tools and resources to do engagement well.

The group decided to extend the deadline for all online surveys to January 31, 2016 to allow time for further distribution of the survey to underrepresented groups. Prior to the first week of January, each one of the themes that emerged from the identification of needs will be posted as an individual post to Bloomfire. By January 12th, Task Force members are asked to review the resources on Bloomfire, identify promising practices to address the needs and post their specific comments to the themes of needs identified. At the January 14th meeting the group will begin developing their recommendations.

Members in Attendance

Celso Baez

Mike Clark-Madison

Richard Fonte

Andrea Hamilton

Claudia Herrington

Chris Howe

Ken Rigsbee

Navvab Taylor

Sara Torres

Decisions Made

- The deadline for all of the online surveys will be extended to January 31, 2016.

Action Items

Who	What	When
Larry	Update the survey deadline to 1/31/16.	12/22/15
Diane	Let FAN know that we would like their help getting the word out about the survey.	12/22/15
Diane	Summarize TFCE discussion of themes from input gathering into main needs identified.	1/4/16
Diane	Create individual posts on Bloomfire for each of the themes of needs identified.	1/4/16
All	Task Force members review resources on Bloomfire, identify promising practices and post comments to each of the themes of needs identified.	1/12/16
Diane	Compile all workgroup input gathered and post as one post on Bloomfire.	1/4/16

Citizen Comment

Natalie Gauldin, Director of Friends of Austin Neighborhoods (FAN)

- Concerns about participation in survey from full diversity of neighborhood stakeholders and currently renters and individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino are underrepresented in survey respondents.
- Feels the Task Force should put continuing and significant effort to distribute the survey to renters and underrepresented populations.
- FAN is willing to assist the Task Force in continuing to distribute the surveys.

Themes/Discussion of Survey Data

- The “equity and proportionality” challenge is reflected in the survey and is similar to broader engagement issues.
- There is not an online tool that meets everyone’s needs and the City’s website is not meeting needs.
- People don’t feel that they are getting the information they need.
- There is a lack of trust:
 - Respondents say they get information from “word of mouth” and this may speak to the need for localization of information and that the source needs to be trustworthy.
- There is an issue with the timeliness, consistency and accuracy of information.
 - This can break trust and lead to concerns about accountability.
- People are not sure what the most effective way is to get information and give input.
- People want multiple channels and the City as a whole needs to provide multiple channels.
 - Consistency of information will help if it is going out over multiple channels.
- People want information about what is happening in their district or what directly affects them.
- People feel they are not being heard:
 - They want a summary of input.
 - They need to know that they were heard as well as what was said by others.
 - There needs to be follow up communication.
- There is a lack of understanding of the process for how people can engage more effectively with the city and with City Council.
- People don’t think they are having an impact.
- People think only certain people have a voice and that they don’t.
- There is a lack of responsiveness by the City.

Themes/Discussion of Workgroup Input

Civic and Nonprofit

- They feel the most effective way to address issues is to take them directly to City Council.
- There is an overall sense that it is challenging to engage the City (easy to get caught up in red tape/hard to advance the ball) and they need persistence to be successful.
- There is a lack of trust.
- They feel like their work and the City's are not aligned but should be.
- There is meeting fatigue.
- They would like to see the City use community liaisons to engage them so that they would know who to work with.
- If a non profit is raising money for the public good then the City should provide money also.
- It is important to meet people where they are, not have them come to you.
- We need to offer a variety of methods for people to engage.
- Action orientation is needed.
- Need to find ways for people who want to participate to be put to work.

Under-represented Populations

- People are not aware of communication and engagement tools.
- Principles of good community engagement are not necessarily known by people in the community and it impacts engagement.
- Accessibility is a challenge.
- Spanish translation needs vary – need to train more people so there is more capacity for translation and interpretation.
- There are trust issues.
- It takes too much time to participate, especially for those with families.
- We need to offer things at times when people can engage (in some cultures, the mom needs to be home in the evening).
- Every district is different. District-based outreach plans would help.
- Council needs to be made aware of what is happening in their district.

Business

- They feel the only way to accomplish things is to go directly to the elected officials.
- There is a concern that people are appointed to positions of power, such as Boards and Commissions, and they don't necessarily have technical expertise on the issue they are working on.

Boards and Commissions

- They feel their role is in flux because of new council system.
- Whether or not they communicate with Council varies.
- There is frustration because they don't know what happens to their recommendations – feedback methods vary.
- Differing views of whether they want citizen input at Boards and Commission – some feel that they are the appointed representative and are not inclined to gather further input.
- The ways that they interact with the public and whether, when and how they get input varies.
- They suggested an array of methods to get input.
- They are mostly hopeful that a 10-1 system will lead to more representation.
- The length of meetings and focus of committees vary.
- The impact and level of independence of Boards and Commissions varies.

- How they view their role varies.
- A big question is whether they are a forum for input or whether they are there to make recommendations.
- There is a lack of clarity on where input goes.
- The demographics of Boards and Commissions is noteworthy – there is more diversity and a higher level of education.
- Some Board and Commissions use non profits as their connections to initiate engagement – they don't do it themselves.
- Some question if their Board or Commission should exist.
- Some say lack of engagement with Council has an impact on decisions.

Neighborhoods

- The community registry could be a good tool but it is not.
- Getting things in the mail is not ideal because then they need to be scanned and distributed.
- There are trust issues.
- Need to meet people where they are at and with groups they are already involved with.
- Only contact with City is when they are having to defend against something being done in their area.

City Department Staff

- Culture:
 - It varies as to how much of a priority the leadership in departments and at City Hall give to engagement versus the other things that they have to do – for some the priority is not engagement.
 - They don't have the resources they need to do appropriate engagement strategies.
 - People in community come to efforts with negative attitudes and there is engagement fatigue.
- Process:
 - They often are trying to work through major engagement efforts but then get pulled off because priorities change.
 - They get inconsistent and fragmented direction.
 - It is a challenge to keep up with the multiple channels.
- Tools:
 - Bilingual and culturally appropriate processes are a challenge.
 - Don't have enough physical spaces / places around city to do engagement.
 - Working with the website and other online tools can be hard.
 - PIO is overtaxed so they can't fulfill all the needs.
 - The community registry is an issue and needs to be updated.
 - There is not enough value placed on building the skills needed to do engagement well – need training.
 - There are no structures to make sure that the results of engagement are followed.
- Need to meet people where they are and make engagement more fun – unique approaches have worked.
- Need to manage expectations – if what people want is outside the scope of an engagement, we need to tell them that.
- Needs to be organization-wide plan to coordinate efforts, leverage resources and do more than one thing when we are engaging people.
- Alignment and focus on engagement has to happen at the department head level.
- Because of hands off structure and silos, everything is a recommendation rather than putting the processes and structures in place that are required.
 - There is no dictate that decision making should include certain kinds of engagement.
- When only hearing from people you have always heard from, then the challenge is knowing what needs are for everyone.

Additional reflections on potential recommendations

- Going forward, the City may need to do a statistically significant poll with the community on community engagement issues.
- We may want to outline the kinds of engagement services that are needed by basing them on what the various departments do.

Meeting Evaluation

What we LIKED about today's meeting	What wasn't so great, what we would change
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Great notes.• Helpful because we heard lots of commentary.• Glad we have a facilitator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need people to speak up.• Three hours feels too long.• Don't feel that six months is enough time for this work.

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