

## Brief Summaries of Initial Thinking on Recommendations

*as of Jan 13, 2016*

### Theme 1: Make information clear...

1. **Redesign the City website** to make it easier to find information, including working well in a mobile interface. Improve the search function. Perhaps Salt Lake could be a model.
2. **Move the "connect with the city"** tab on the front page to the top right, and get rid of the "best managed city" tab. Add City Council tab.
3. **Improve the community registry** - work with Code for America volunteer brigade to develop a better interface for this data.
4. **Provide closed captioning for ATXN** (public access tv) live streaming service. Make ATXN available on an over-the-air channel.
5. **Real website translation into Spanish.** Set an appropriate population percentage **threshold for translating the main pages of the website into other languages.** Documents posted to website could be translated on request. Promote Austin311 heavier in Spanish speaking neighborhoods,
6. **Expand the role of neighborhoods in City Government,** perhaps making a Department of Neighborhoods, like Seattle.
7. **Utilize re-usable meeting signs** to get the word out, where there is a community meeting.
8. **Designate public places** in each community where **public meetings can be held,** that are properly equipped for such the purpose. Whenever possible, these locations should have bus service.
9. **Introduction to Austin City Government for newcomers,** perhaps a "Welcome to Austin" video that is easy to find on the website.
10. **The map of agenda items prototype posted to Bloomfire** could be really cool and useful, but more physical addresses would have to be included to make it really useful. It would be cool if the map **generated emails to the Community Registry,** using a similar radius as the Public Notices require.
11. **Expand CityWorks Academy** to include online and virtual classes and modules. Request each department that participates in the program to do a video presentation for their department, or perhaps film the presentations at CityWorks 2016.
12. **City staff who deal with the public should also be more familiar with how the city works.**
13. **Develop a Community Engagement Handbook for both staff and residents** to use. Clearly outline when community engagement is needed, provide guidelines to set expectations for both sides, and help ensure more consistency and measurable results across departments .
14. **Create a central place on the City's website for all of the ways to connect.**
15. **Consistency across channels** and a single place to learn about all of them would be helpful.
16. **Austin Notes newsletter by District,** perhaps publish messages from Council here also. Central Community Calendar with filters for areas, Districts, type (engagement, family, music, etc.). set guidelines so non-profit and neighborhood groups can contribute appropriately to calendar.
17. **Partner with Community Organizations to share information, build trust, and capitalize on their existing networks.** Meet people where they are.
18. **Move towards a centralized system of community engagement,** where consistency of methods and message can be ensured, demographic information from all City engagement activity is aggregated, and results of how representative the engagement was can be measured.
19. **Find a good system for PIO and Council Constituent Liaisons to work together** effectively and consistently.

20. Create and give both Council and Dept. PIOs **access to an email database of both individuals and groups in their districts who have signed up** to participate. Offer Austin Notes recipients the option to receive District-specific headlines, rather than by department. Perhaps a variation on CityNotes?
21. Give the **Community Registry to Neighborhood Assistance Center to update and use**. Use the email list to email all public. Every email address on the Community Registry automatically receive Austin Notes, with the option to Unsubscribe.
22. Any **website redesign needs to be done with the aid of a user experience (UX) professional** with a target of someone who does not regularly engage with the city.
23. **Regular users need to be pushed off into specific portals or partner/affiliate sites.**
24. To **foster the creation of partner sites**, more focus needs to be towards having consistent data structures being published as close to live as possible through the open data portal.
25. Consistent data means that the **data is in a machine readable format that can be parsed easily.**
26. There needs to be a **content creation policy** that is implemented throughout all departments that maintains fields on all content including a meta description and meta tags so that SEO optimization can occur which will help people find the data.
27. If consistent data is available, **content curation will be possible through partners or even volunteers** under the city's guidance (at libraries, etc.) An example of this is the calendar.
28. It takes real - continued effort to do disability and foreign language accommodation right. The city needs to **find nongovernmental partners who have more passion and focus to create and maintain the solutions. The city needs to set its obligation at "reasonable accommodation"** and encourage nongovernmental actors to make for "extraordinary accommodation".
29. Covering the bases of having **consistent data that is published in a timely manner** will go farther in engaging specific communities than any new technology solution.
30. **Public hearing notification - the city should adopt a process similar to the Texas Legislature.**
31. I don't have much opinion as to what communication channels the city uses to push information out or how consistent that message (vs tailored for the desired audience) so long as **it ends up on the Open Data Portal in a near real time manner** so that others can utilize the information to reach their audiences.
32. I echo Navaab's recommendations for this topic except in regards to the over the air recommendation. **OTA should be subject to a cost-benefit analysis.**
33. **Explore whether Channel 6 content is a priority of the City of Austin.**

## Theme 2: Easier to give input...

1. Opportunities for **face-to-face conversation with Council**, e.g. mobile office hours. Could use to gather input on specific topics or be open-ended.
2. **Council member town halls** could be a great opportunity for localized community engagement.
3. **Allow online/phone/social media comments on Boards and Commissions and City Council agenda items.**
4. **Find a tool to organize online input.**
5. "Open City Hall" is a tool used in Salt Lake City to **allow citizens to comment on agenda items**, provide a **system for council members to aggregate feedback** they receive via email, once the comment went into the system, the person who sent the email initially, could then receive **automatic updates on the issue**, which would help close the feedback loop.
6. Investment of **resources to allow for simple input mechanisms in places where people already gather**: libraries, schools, grocery stores, rec centers, places of worship, YMCA, etc...

7. **Invest in temporary or part-time community outreach workers who can have local knowledge, trust, and culturally competent means for gathering feedback** from residents who are typically harder to reach. If the workforce doesn't exist, consider partnering with DSHS to create a continuing education practicum or curriculum related to gathering feedback. (See Calgary article.)
8. **Create very appealing community and family events** that incorporate chances for residents to learn about city programs, services, and provide feedback or participate in un-intimidating or ("gasp") fun ways. (Examples include Oakland and Houston.)
9. **Develop a language and cultural competency resource vendor pool** for city departments to access easily with a simple evaluation tool that could rate the quality of the service provided.
10. Ensure that **all city employees who work in the creation of any public facing materials, communications, or with website content creation responsibilities** be encouraged to **participate in training related to literacy, cultural competency, and effective messaging** for diverse audiences. COA could leverage local resources such as the Literacy Coalition training to do so.
11. When investing in city-wide campaigns or opportunities for participation, **reserve a percentage of the funds to be distributed equitably to reflect the Austin population or the target audience within the campaign.**

### Theme 3: Explain how input used...

1. **Use a tool that captures comments from a wide spectrum of input methods and records them in one place or platform which could then be viewed by or shared with the public.** When comments are captured in person they could be typed in and uploaded on the spot with a mobile device.
2. **Create city website location to view public comments.**
3. **Post meeting results in days, not weeks.**
4. **Ask for email addresses at meetings and follow up** with them.
5. **Create a dashboard to track progress towards goals/metrics.** Have Council with public input develop the dashboard.
6. At a minimum, the staff **liaison should give formal report to board and commission at each meeting** and also provide formal minutes if relevant of how issue was handed by city council, if they made a recommendation.
7. **Boards and Commissions should be encouraged to seek public input,** hold hearings, forums, etc as a regular part of their efforts.
8. The **agenda of Boards and Commissions should be freed up of minor items or micro-managing** operations of departments and should focus on bigger picture topics.
9. There should be a **clear tie-in between boards and commissions** (and for that matter ad hoc committees and other advisory bodies) **to the council's committee system.**
10. **Rather than creating temporary committees** or task forces on a continuing basis, the **current Boards and Commissions should be charged with exploring issues related broadly to their mission,** rather than creating new entities--a good example, is in the area of water, where there are multiple entities.
11. **Major policy items, should not go directly to the council without having opportunities for serious public engagement.** This should involve more targeted use of council committees, the boards and commissions, and a much more effective system of on-line engagement at many levels prior to items coming to the full council.

#### Theme 4: Ensure that everyone who cares/is impacted...

1. **Set guidelines for public input**, e.g. one comment per person, requiring commenter "standing", loaning of allotted time to others.
2. **Offer longer comment period at council committees and boards and commissions and shorter time (i.e. 1 minute) at full council meeting.** Individuals could be given chance to "extend" their remarks at meeting through some form of electronic messaging (texting or whatever).
3. **Real effort should be made to change the public commenting process to encourage longer and more thoughtful discussion at council committee or board/Commission level or through social media and other communication systems.** Council members, should then be given all comments in a report on issue, prior to meeting in which they are voting, so they will have chance to review.
4. Adopt process like Texas Legislature and **set a clear time table for addressing issues.**
5. Items coming to council should have a **report on level of community engagement** that has happened.
6. **Support community engagement and service opportunities in schools**, e.g. Austin Youth Council.

#### Theme 5: Ensure city staff have...

1. **Partner with trusted, attuned nonprofit community liaisons or neighborhood leaders for community engagement.**
2. **Shift attitudes towards community engagement**, starting at the top, so departments aren't just going through the motions.
3. **Require an introductory community engagement training session** and provide continuing education requirements tied to incentives.
4. **Require review of progress on our TF recommendations/plan.** Incorporate a scorecard or dashboard to track implementation of the recommendations.
5. **Make sure staff have time to do community engagement.** Remove duties that compete with other businesses or nonprofits that do it better.
6. **City Council should define success metrics for all new programs. Retire those that don't meet the metric.**
7. **Identify all city staff that perform community engagement** (PIO's, APD District Representatives, Constituent Liaisons, etc.), and **require they receive some level of on-going CE training.**
8. There needs to be a very aggressive **pruning of Boards, Commissions and "temporary" Committees** that are no longer relevant or have overlapping responsibilities with others. .
9. **Some activities currently being done by city may divert from core responsibilities. It is on these" core responsibilities" that we need to significantly increase the community engagement efforts.** Particularly, relationships with AISD or ACC on educational activities should be reviewed.
10. **Determine whether the city should be taking a lead or secondary role (rather than the county or not-for-profits) on some social welfare activities** is another. For example, why is there a Early childhood Council?
11. Better integrate and involve the Community Liaisons (localized) in each Council office in the City's engagement process so they can use city engagement tools, and work together with CE professionals from other departments. **CE specific to a particular District should be coordinated with that Council office.**