

# STAFF RESPONSE TO TASK FORCE ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

---

## 1) Make information clear, relevant and easily accessible.

### a. Implement a website redesign.

*This work is currently funded and underway. CPIO has been working with Communications and Technology Management (CTM) on the migration of both the employee Intranet and the external-facing website to a third-party provider that has deep experience hosting sites that use our current Content Management System (CMS). The redesign will provide an opportunity to address concerns regarding mobile compatibility, ADA accessibility, site search, improved calendars and dynamic content. CPIO hired a specialist with user interface design experience in February, and is currently recruiting for a digitally-focused design professional to assist with this work.*

*Providing natural-language translation of the website is not funded, but would be a priority for CPIO given the resources to do so. We estimate, based on the current site content, a contract cost of \$300,000 to \$400,000 for initial translation and annual costs of \$70,000 to maintain, add and alter translated content over time.*

### b. Publish content in a standardized machine-readable format to an open data portal in real-time.

*Discussions with the Task Force centered on publishing content related to the proceedings of Council and related boards and commissions. Some of this may become possible as we evaluate new agenda management systems this year. In addition, CPIO has begun to experiment with publishing aggregated feedback from engagement activities on the data portal. If this proves successful, we hope to make it a matter of practice for future engagement activities.*

### c. Recreate the Community Registry.

*As it currently exists, the Community Registry fulfills a core requirement (development notifications) but falls short as a tool for capacity building, general notifications or opt-in notifications for interested groups or individuals. Part of this could be the lack of specific guidelines regarding the Community Registry, either in the code, by local resolution or through administrative policy. This presents a compelling opportunity for innovation and possible local development partnerships. Our best estimate to develop a more robust online resource is \$30,000 to \$50,000 using a combination of internal talent, open data and local partners.*

### d. Aspire to effective, useful, consistent accommodations for those with disabilities.

*Some of the items mentioned have already been addressed (like captioning during presentations). The estimated cost to provide closed captioning for all ATXN videos (meetings, original programming, press conferences, etc.) is an additional \$120,000 annually. Staff is currently examining options for user-controlled scrolling of caption transcripts in real-time, but don't have sufficient information to provide a reliable estimate on required resources.*

e. **Create Austin 101/CityWorks Academy online coursework.**

*Successful development of online coursework requires specific expertise that does not exist within the CPIO team at this time. We have discussed providing online versions of the coursework for several years but refrained due to resource limitations. There are local companies that specialize in this work, but may be cost-prohibitive. Our recommendation would be recruitment of a part-time/contract employee with instructional design/e-learning expertise for a defined period (6-9 months) at a cost of \$70,000.*

f. **Implement a content creation policy using plain-language standards.**

*CPIO is currently examining the Federal “plain language” standards to determine how a policy may be implemented locally by administrative policy.*

g. **Create better ways for people to curate/filter information they want from the City.**

*The best course of action is to integrate these ideas with the initiative to recreate the Community Registry as a more comprehensive information/notification tool (Recommendation 1c). Filtering the current Austin Notes distributions by district could present some unintended consequences resulting in multiple notifications going to the same individual on a single item. Currently, users can subscribe to news feeds via RSS or subject-specific newsletters via Austin Notes.*

**2) Make it easier for people to give input in ways that are convenient, accessible and appropriate for them.**

a. **Encourage Councilmembers to have regular localized contact with groups and individuals.**

*No additional staff comments.*

b. **Create designated meeting space that is accessible to all in each District.**

*This item would have to work through the facilities and budgeting process for the relevant departments in order to ensure that the appropriate accessibility and technology is in place. CPIO is willing to work with departments to identify appropriate locations according to a “baseline” set of accommodations and technology and itemize any required investments. Cost is not known at this time.*

c. **Systematically work to engage and partner with community-based organizations.**

*As a matter of practice, the Community Engagement Division currently makes efforts to involve and leverage community networks based on the engagement target and goals. Building and maintaining a more robust list of potential partners would be helpful, and may be streamlined through the reinvention of the Community Registry.*

**d. Experiment with non-traditional methods of community engagement.**

*This is something that CPIO does regularly, as evidenced by more “place-based” engagement efforts at locations where the community gathers. To specifically staff and equip a mobile unit for the purposes of this type of outreach could cost up to \$120,000 annually. Alternatively, to equip the Community Engagement Division with iPads for “checkout” to support engagement in the field would cost approximately \$8,000. We have had success with this model, providing interpretation equipment for checkout as needed by departments.*

**e. Ensure engagement methods are designed in a simple, welcoming format.**

*Some of this may be addressed by the adoption of plain-language standards. Other requirements (ease of use, staying informed) can be addressed through the design of a new engagement portal (see Recommendation G, below) and resourcing the department to allow for a more comprehensive focus on “closing the loop.” Both are contemplated as initial funding requests in the FY2017 budget.*

**f. Sufficiently find, prioritize and implement an online agenda commenting system.**

*CPIO is currently working with several developers on initial solutions related to online agenda commenting, and will likely be ready to run public Beta tests over the summer. There may be some long-term options with the acquisition of a new agenda management system, but that isn’t known at this point. A conservative year-to-year cost for maintaining such a system would range from \$12,000 to \$25,000 annually, depending on the range and number of meetings that may be open to online comments. This does not include any staff time that may be required to manage and run reports on a regular basis.*

**g. Sufficiently fund, prioritize and implement a new online engagement platform.**

*We are currently in the process of using the provided standards, along with our own previous research and experience with SpeakUpAustin to formulate requirements to either select (or build) an updated digital engagement portal. There are two cost models in the marketplace for these systems – a “per engagement” model and an “open” model. The prior can run as high as \$2,500 per engagement and the latter could have up to \$40,000 in startup costs with annual recurring costs of \$40,000 to \$50,000. The annual budgeted amount in CPIO for the current system (no longer being supported by the host) is \$7,200.*

**h. Use innovative meeting practices that allow for online/virtual participation.**

*This is something the department has actively done for some time, including text, live polling, social feeds/hashtags, live/streaming video, call-in/call-outs, Reddit AMA, Google hangouts and other methods – with varying degrees of success. Scaling these activities would be a challenge, as they are resource-intensive, but not impossible given the appropriate staffing. There are also certain guidelines/limitations outlined in state law regarding virtual participation in Council proceedings.*

**3) Explain how input will be used and show how that input had an impact on the decisions that were made.**

**a. Always provide feedback to participants in a timely manner, and make the information easily available to the public.**

*Effectively “closing the loop” on engagement has admittedly been a persistent challenge across the organization, and would be a primary focus of a new FTE proposed in the “initial funding requests” for FY17. That cost is estimated at \$112,500 in year one including associated operational costs. We have begun to experiment with use of the data portal to compile and publish feedback from engagement activities as well. CPIO will include this as a core component of future organizational community engagement training.*

**b. Use technology more effectively to provide feedback (electronic voting).**

*This is included as an available option for current and future agenda management systems. Implementing would require support and concurrence from the Mayor and Council, and would likely require a more uniform and consistent method for taking up, amending and voting on items on the posted agenda(s). If done, votes could be pushed to the data portal and automated as a feed for public use/aggregation. Cost for inclusion of such a module are unknown at this time.*

**c. Structure all boards and commissions to take public input and include this directive in bylaws.**

*This item is at the discretion/direction of the Mayor and Council.*

**d. Enforce board and commission bylaws.**

*This item is at the discretion/direction of the Mayor and Council.*

**4) Ensure that everyone who cares about an issue or is impacted has the opportunity to engage.**

**a. Invest in creating capacity and trust with under-represented communities.**

*While partnering with organizations as contemplated in Recommendation 2c is supported by CPIO, implementing a system by which organizations are paid for engagement activities in which they may have a stake could be more problematic. Investing in capacity building through a staff-level position (or positions) could help in a variety of ways to both leverage existing organizations and assist others in formation for the purposes of meaningful dialogue. An alternative may be to contract with neutral third-party organizations where appropriate to assist in the convening and facilitation of dialogue, which is similar to the work of the Dispute Resolution Center and – to some extent – our partnership with Leadership Austin and the Conversation Corps program.*

**b. Financially support, expand and strengthen public conversational, dialogue opportunities for input beyond Council meetings.**

*CPIO supports any meaningful efforts in this area. As indicated in the report, a number of the other recommendations address components that may contribute toward this goal.*

**c. Develop and follow a consistent, trackable policy development process.**

*The included recommendations may present logistical/operational challenges or costs better addressed by the Agenda Office or the City Clerk. Linking all boards, commissions, committees and Council proceedings in a unified agenda management system may provide for more visible tracking of specific items/issues through the legislative development process.*

**5) Ensure that City staff have the support, training, tools and resources to do engagement well.**

**a. Provide ongoing training to public-facing City staff.**

*This can be addressed in a variety of ways, and in some cases is already being addressed. Staff is currently in the process of implementing customer service training across the organization, which may help in regard to front-line personnel. CPIO provides periodic community engagement training to departments to help develop consistency and best practices in the implementation of input gathering, and we will continue to provide this (and refine) for the foreseeable future. To provide organization-wide training from outside professional organizations would likely cost \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually.*

**b. Executives should model best practices in engagement and participate in trainings.**

*A number of executives have participated in our current training programs, but there is not explicit requirement to do so. These programs are open to any staff member (including executives) who elects to participate.*

**c. Bridging the gap between being involved and feeling involved in developing and implementing departmental programs and services.**

*In our experience, any department involved with engagement in a meaningful way is doing so with this idea in mind. Implementing other recommendations in this report, particularly those focused on closing feedback loops, will help meet the goal.*

**d. Develop a database of local grassroots leadership that all staff can access.**

*This could be addressed through a more robust Community Registry, as discussed in Recommendation 1C.*

**e. Design engagement efforts to be reflective and inclusive of the intended population, and include satisfaction metrics with engagement activities.**

*This is currently part of the planning process for any engagement initiative that CPIO is involved with. Consistently measuring satisfaction as part of the process, though, has been inconsistent. To this end, the Community Engagement Division is currently working to develop additional administrative guidelines and tools to help departments gain more meaningful measures as a matter of practice. Achieving full, representative involvement of limited-access populations remains challenging but remains the goal, as indicated by our department's recruitment and hiring of professional staff with specific experience in this area. Quite often, meeting that goal requires a significant investment of "on the ground" resources to achieve.*