

Recommendation 1: Expand Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

- Problem: Federal data shows the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was two times higher than that for people without disabilities in 2018. Among people with disabilities who were employed, they were more likely than their peers to work part time and in low-wage positions. Under- and unemployment create challenges beyond loss of income, including higher rates of housing insecurity and stress-related health problems. Texas data shows the same lack of employment of people with disabilities. https://www4.esc13.net/uploads/transition/docs/EFTF_Report_Final.pdf. Indeed, in Texas, less than 30% of people with intellectual disabilities are employed. *Id.*
- Solution: Hire an employment liaison to specialize in expanding inclusive job opportunities for people with disabilities with the City of Austin.

The liaison will:

- Partner with local schools on transition planning and paid internship programs;
 - Coordinate with federal and state government entities to ensure Austin draws down all supports available to expand inclusive employment opportunities;
 - Analyze City hiring policies to eliminate unnecessary barriers to entry; and
 - Engage in community outreach to actively recruit people with disabilities.
- Alignment with Strategic Outcomes: Economic Opportunity and Affordability (including employment/unemployment, income equality, and training for better jobs)

Recommendation 2: Increase Parks Programming for People with Intellectual Disabilities

- Problem: Many recreational centers do not provide equitable access to programming for people with intellectual disabilities. Recently, the City expanded programming at the Dottie Jordan Recreational Center to include some recreational programming for adults with disabilities. However, this still leaves McBeth Recreational Center – a segregated facility in south-central-west Austin – as the only option available to some families for childcare and day habilitation for children with disabilities and the primary facility for adults with disabilities. McBeth has limited capacity to serve Austin’s high programming demands. For example, adults with intellectual disabilities currently have to wait three to five years for a spot in the day habilitation program.
- Solution: Increase the number of slots available for children with intellectual disabilities in seasonal camps and after-school programs, and for adults with intellectual disabilities in recreational programs, including day habilitation at McBeth and Dottie Jordan and other city recreational centers. Expand access across all of Austin to ensure residents can participate in valuable programs, no matter their zip code.
- Alignment with Strategic Outcomes: Health and Environment (including accessibility to quality parks, trails, and recreational opportunities); Government That Works for All (including equity of City programs and resource allocation); and Culture & Lifelong Learning (including appreciation, respect, and welcoming of all people and cultures)

Recommendation 3: Austin Police Department Disability Training and Community Liaison

Story: What did you learn from the community?

Austin, being home to both the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and Texas School for the Deaf and Criss Cole rehabilitation Center and the Austin State Hospital, among other smaller facilities, has a very large population of people with disabilities. In 2019, people with disabilities were 103,634 of the Travis County population including the City of Austin¹. The percentage of people with disabilities living within the City of Austin is expected to grow as the population both increases and ages. People with disabilities do not necessarily have the same needs and/or life experiences as a person without disabilities. The distinct need and culture of people with disabilities in the City of Austin therefore need to be acknowledged and considered including by the Austin Police Department.

The Austin Police Department was already providing and continues to provide Americans with Disabilities Act training both to all incoming cadets and active officers. In response to prior constructive criticism from the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities and acknowledged by APD management, internal revisions such as increasing counselor screening for mental health calls were implemented.

However, the disability community still experiences bias from APD and the City of Austin. This bias adversely impacts people with disabilities quality of life and access to justice. Officers currently give crime victims with disabilities cards without braille and/or TDD access. These cards provide no way for people who are deaf and/or blind to effectively communicate follow up.. Because they cannot directly communicate with APD deaf/blind individuals are treated 'differently' by APD even if this was not the department's and/or management's deliberate/conscious intention. There are other consequences

A 2019 report issued by the University of Texas Law School Human Rights Clinic had found that out of the 15 largest United States cities, the City of Austin had the highest rate of people with ID/DD who were being shot by law enforcement on mental health related calls. The Austin Police Department was then faulted for its limited use of appropriate de-escalation techniques when interacting with ID/DD individuals who might be unable to clearly understand and/or then comply with the arriving Austin officer's direction. The person the Austin Police Officer are working with may not be having a 'crisis' per say' but just may lack the cognitive/functional skills needed to properly comprehend the officer's directions in order to avoid being injured and/or killed according to conventional law enforcement norms. Culture is the shared norms, values beliefs of a group of people and police culture traditionally has operated with an 'us vs them mentality'. This miscommunication then by default places people with disabilities in an oppositional position. People with disabilities have a different experience with officers than people without disabilities,

An officer who is themselves fully fluent in disability culture could assist both their peers in the department and community groups who work with/for people with disabilities in developing and providing appropriate and comprehensive disability outreach trainings for organizations especially servicing people with disabilities. They would be the critical gap between the Austin Police Department and Austin Texas's disability community. Because they are part of the

department and the police culture, a designated community liaison can also help peers and the department understand that bias takes many different forms. One of those forms is ableism or discrimination against people with disabilities.

Problem: What is the problem you identify?”

People with disabilities continue being treated ‘differently’ by the Austin Police Department in interactions even while the police department currently does provide training to cadets and officers in the ADA and other applicable civil rights laws. People with disabilities then get viewed as the ‘other’ by an arriving officer who does not necessarily obtain proper familiarity and/or comfort with people with disabilities including an understanding of disability as being a distinct culture separate from the culture of a person without disabilities.

Limited personal experience with disability and disability culture can make an arriving officer more likely to shoot at people with disabilities despite receiving initial and ongoing training in ADA and other disability laws. Laws have not necessarily mean de-escalation will be used and/or used appropriately by the arriving officer. Unlike a person without disabilities an individual with I/DD may not be able to otherwise cognitively understand the arriving officer’s directions and/or clearly process what will in fact actually happen to them during the incident if they do not immediately comply despite actually wanting to be a ‘good person: and please others. People with disabilities who are not ID/DD also experience unequal treatment since they cannot tell the officer what is happening/has happened to them in mutually accessible language or obtain timely follow up. Law enforcement needs to understand not every person encountered has the same processing skills even if somebody is physically an adult.

Considering all of the information you have or have not collected above, how do we solve for this problem?

The Austin Police Department should be given a designated and permanent disability community liaison who is multilingual in English American Sign Language and Spanish. This liaison would be modeled after the community outreach liaison position already funded and provided to other communities such as African American, Asian, Seniors, LGBTQ, Immigrant. Effective policing requires establishing, building and maintaining trust with historically underserved/marginalized communities. A permanent and designated disability community liaison will demonstrate an acknowledged commitment to address both conscious and subconscious bias.

Preference hiring for the permanent active/non-desk duty position should come from the disability community itself. The community liaison will work with the Austin Police Department the City of Austin and the Office of the Police Monitor to appear at events and facilities throughout the disability community to promote and maintain better outreach to/with/throughout the disability community. This hired APD disability community liaison will promote improved community relations between the entire disability community and Austin Police Department.

¹ People with Disabilities: A Texas Profile Texas Workforce Investment Council (March 2019) Retrieved from <https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/twic/People-With-Disabilities-2019.pdf>

Recommendation 4: Improve City Hall Accessibility

- **Problem:** Several physical barriers inside City Hall prevent people with physical disabilities from accessing the building fully and equally. For example, the lack of automatic door buttons to the Boards and Commissions Room, as well as workrooms throughout the building, prohibit people with disabilities from independently accessing spaces that are necessary to engage with City representatives and impact City policies. In addition, adults with disabilities who use incontinent supplies currently must lay on the unsanitary floor of the public restroom so a parent or personal attendant can assist with changing a diaper. Over 18,000 people with self-care disabilities reside in Travis County. Without equitable bathroom access, they are often left with an unfair choice: either risk going into the community knowing they will not have proper bathroom accommodations or stay at home. City Hall should represent the standard in building accessibility and challenge the rest of the Austin community to rise to the measure.
- **Solutions:**
 1. Add automatic door buttons to the interior and exterior of the Boards and Commissions Room and other workrooms to ensure equitable access for all Austinites.
 2. Create a single-stall, gender-neutral, accessible bathroom with an adult-sized changing table. Room should be large enough to accommodate an adult with a wheelchair and a caregiver.
- **Alignment with Strategic Outcomes:** Government That Works for All (including condition of City facilities and technology, and public engagement and participation)

Recommendation 5: Sidewalks at high traffic intersections

- **Problem:** The community expressed concerns about the accessibility of sidewalks for people that use mobility supports or that are visually impaired. Issues identified included a lack of accessible corners and lack of audible crossing beacons. As the population and traffic in Austin increases, the risk to these populations increases.
- **Solution:** Add audible crosswalk beacons at high pedestrian traffic intersections.
- **Alignment with Strategic Outcomes:** Austin developed and adopted the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan to address transportation and mobility over the next 20 years. This plan included plans to improve sidewalks and pedestrian crosswalks. Sidewalk prioritization was identified in that plan based on public use (proximity to schools, public transit stops/stations, parks, etc.). Key features of the improvements include universal design when building or re-modeling sidewalks and adding various amenities (vegetation, shade, handrails, benches, etc.). Adding audible beacons would immediately benefit those people with visual impairments.

Recommendation 6: Austin Police department to re-integrate braille onto identification cards

- Problem: In the 2010 Census, it was recorded that there are around 30,000 individuals living in the Austin area (and surrounding cities) that have some type of visual impairment. In addition, individuals who are blind and visually impaired from other cities in Texas that are receiving vocational rehabilitation and public education services are temporarily taking residence at the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Formerly, the Austin Police Department utilized identification cards adapted with Braille to assist citizens of Austin who are blind and visually impaired in verifying the legitimacy that the Officer is employed with the police department. It has been brought to the attention that the City of Austin Police Department no longer utilizes identification cards adapted with Braille. This presents a barrier to individuals who are blind and visually impaired in properly identifying the officer and preventing the risk of an individual or individuals impersonating as a police officer that could potentially put the citizen at harm.
- Solution: Fully fund the modification to all Austin Police Department identification cards to be adapted with Braille to ensure equity in the identification of all APD police officers.
- Alignment with strategic outcomes: Safety (including physical and emotional harm prevention to individuals who are blind and visually impaired perpetrated by individuals posing as police officers) and government that works for all.