

Introduction

Young children are the future of our community. It is important to understand how public and private institutions either support or fail to support families as they raise their children. The City of Austin has authorized a study of the Quality of Life for families with young children, which is being directed by the City of Austin Early Childhood Council and the City of Austin Equity Office.

We define quality of life as living in a community that supports and empowers parents and other caregivers to raise healthy children in the best possible ways to thrive in childhood and adulthood and in congruence with their own goals for their children.

Several sources of information about this population currently exist: 1) the Parent Engagement study conducted in 2014 by the City of Austin (insert information); 2) the Success-by-Six Strategic Plans of United Way for Greater Austin since 2012; 3) Kids Count national survey of child indicators. Although these sources provide useful information, a comprehensive and current understanding of the supports and barriers facing families and other caregivers of young children is needed.

Goals of the Study

To learn how public policies and services as well as other entities and forces in the community help or impede families' ability to raise healthy children.

To produce actionable, specific recommendations for the city and county as well as for other organizations in the community.

To provide a strength-based assessment of resources and needs, not simply a needs analysis.

To identify city, county, and community entities that affect quality of life for families with young children.

Purposes

Describe the demographics of the population of young children in the City of Austin/Travis County (includes boundaries of both entities).

Identify the needs and the community factors that most impact the quality of life of young children and their caregivers.

Report the current state of those needs and community factors for different demographic and geographic groups.

Recommend metrics for measuring and reporting progress toward equity throughout the community.

Provide a report that is useful to policymakers, both public and private, now and in the future in making decisions on resource allocation, regulations, business practices, service delivery and City policies.

Definitions

Young children: age birth through five years old.

Caregiver: a person with *primary* responsibility for the care of one or more young children; can include parents, grandparents, foster parents, or others.

Geographic scope: City of Austin, Travis County, Extraterritorial Jurisdiction of City of Austin (ETJ).

Contractor's Responsibilities.

The Contractor shall develop a comprehensive plan for a Quality of Life study that includes the following:

Review a sample of quality of life studies from other City of Austin Commissions, as well as other cities' studies of quality of life and services for young children.

Review the City of Austin Early Childhood Council "ECC QOL Study Plan," and Work Group notes; meet with ECC and its Work Group to discuss ideas, goals, and feedback to date.

Explore subcontracting with expert organizations, local nonprofits, and/or community leaders to both inform the design of the study and meaningfully connect with the most marginalized populations in the community.

Use multiple data collection methods, particularly for reaching marginalized populations in the community.

Propose a detailed research plan and data collection timeline(s) to the ECC; explain factors that contributed to decisions and modify the plan according to suggestions from ECC commissioners.

Contractor's Plan

The Contractor will:

Form a plan for the study in collaboration with ECC that includes timeline, sampling methods, topics to be studied, multiple methods of data collection, analysis and reporting of results.

Conduct a quantitative survey of caregivers of children from birth through age five years using validated methods of question construction.

Consult with ECC and community members on survey questions to determine their appropriateness for different groups and communities.

Use both online and in-person methods of survey data collection to assure accessibility for populations with limited access to online resources.

Specify the needs for translation of study materials into languages other than English.

Recruit a sample of caregivers that is representative of the population of young children in the City of Austin/Travis County/ETJ. Use community groups and resources to assist in recruiting a sample.

Coordinate with other Joint Inclusion Committee member commissions conducting Quality of Life studies, specifically the Commission for Women, the Commission on Aging, and the Commission on Immigrant Affairs, to identify areas of overlap and possible intersections of their quality of life studies with early childhood.

Consult City of Austin Demographer to determine the content and wording of demographic questions.

Consider methods of identifying geographic locations of participants that might provide useful information about community resources available to them without compromising their privacy.

Recruit a sample of sufficient size to analyze subgroups by child age (0-1, 1-3, 3-5), ethnic group.

Provide a statistical power analysis of the analyses of different subgroups in order to determine sample sizes.

Obtain approval from a recognized entity for Protection of Human Subjects in Research, assuring the rights and privacy of participants in the study.

Conduct qualitative interviews of selected caregivers whose experiences are representative of different groups. Include primary caregivers whose experiences are infrequent (e.g., grandparents, foster parents, parents and/or children with disabilities).

Conduct focus groups selected in consultation with the ECC to offer insights into the lived experience of caregivers on topics to be selected.

Specify any needs for translators in focus groups and individual interviews.

Conduct one or more focus groups with adults who may be considering having children in order to identify possible incentives and barriers to decisions about having children.

Provide appropriate incentives and compensation for participants in the research and for community members assisting in the research.

Do periodic presentations to the ECC and/or its work group.

Create a timeline for sample recruitment, data collection, and deliverables.

Present a draft of a final report to the ECC and to selected community members, allowing for possible revisions.

Provide a de-identified copy of the survey data to the City of Austin for possible additional analyses.

Collaborate with the ECC to formulate recommendations to policy makers, non-profit organizations in the community and community business organizations. Recommendations should be prioritized and specific.

Use the categories of content outlined in the ECC QOL Study Plan to determine the content of the survey and the qualitative methods. Specifically, the following categories of content will be included (see details in ECC QOL Study Plan):

- Caregivers' employment and economic opportunities
- Caregivers' financial resources
- Child Care use, availability, affordability, and quality
- Housing quality, stability, and affordability
- Physical and mental health
- Transportation use and issues
- Digital access and use
- Community involvement
- Safety of home and neighborhood, concerns
- Experiences with pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum stress

Contractor Qualifications

Minimum of three years of experience conducting research with diverse populations of families with young children.

Experience and expertise in survey design, sampling methods, and quantitative data analysis.

Experience and expertise in qualitative research methods including focus groups and individual qualitative interviews.

Expertise in analyzing qualitative data (e.g., validated methods for identifying recurring themes).

Experience in co-creative and collaborative research with such community entities as nonprofit organizations and public policy organizations.

Capacity of staff, equipment, and electronics to conduct a large-scale study including recruitment of a sample of approximately 2000 caregivers from ethnically diverse communities as well as a sample for qualitative data collection in a timely fashion.

Technical capacity to record, store, and analyze complex data.