

Community Engagement Workgroup
Reimagine Public Safety Task Force
Draft Proposal

Working group members:

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Problem Statement

The current system and procedures Austin City Council has in place for engaging the constituents they serve is neglecting to meet the need for the community to feel heard and involved in the decision making process. The Reimagine Public Safety Community Engagement Work Group strongly recommends that the City Council significantly improve the process in place as it is essential for our community to have input on actions that affect our everyday lives. This is especially true for community members that are the most impacted by decisions the City makes around public safety, ie. our undocumented, homeless, disabled, LGBTQIA+, low income and/or of Color community members who are not represented in the City Council and are often disregarded.

For the duration of the Community Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce, the Community Engagement Workgroup has been working to gather testimony from the most directly impacted community members on their experience with trying to engage with the City Council. The testimonials the Community Engagement Workgroup collected were received via a public virtual listening session as well as a set of online surveys. From the surveys and public virtual listening session we have determined that the main areas of focus for the City Council should be:

1. Language accessibility (interpretation + translation services)
2. Communications (information publicizing)
3. Community Outreach and Engagement

In centering these main areas of focus, The Reimagining Public Safety Community Engagement Workgroup has constructed a set of community centered

recommendations the City Council should implement to better engage with the constituents they represent.

Recommendation 1

Prioritize community access to life altering decision making in city council meetings by

- Prioritizing community outreach that is culturally responsible with the diversity of cultures, accessibilities, & languages - both prior and post any city council meeting.
 - Paid commercials, TV, Radio, social media, billboards & buses, bus stops (in multiple languages)
 - Report back re [Actions taken by City Council Meeting](#) after each meeting that includes:
 - Votes and how each member voted
 - The public response/commentary, i.e. how many folks registered or spoke in opposition & for items
 - Both reports shall be written in accessible language of what the vote means, so easier to read and understand
 - Revise the City of Austin website with *help from x* that could ensure it is professionally translated, much easier to navigate, more user-friendly
 - Create an language accessible and transparent process to engage with City Council meeting agendas AND message board
 - Create City council “civic engagement” videos in partnership with community organizations that practice and understand cultural diversity of cultures, accessibility and languages

Recommendation 2:

Make speaker sign-up registration and speaker waiting process more accessible for virtual or in-person city council meetings, including:

- Allowing registered speakers to testify in whichever format they chose, including submitting video, audio, voicemails, and written testimony to be played during the actual city council meeting and simultaneously interpreted on the spot
- Reduce dial-in waiting time by allowing registered speakers to leave voicemails for virtual meetings

- Creating a system in which anyone can dial into city council meetings at any time; utilize one number and have interpretation available at any moment of the meeting.
- Create a process that ensures that **ALL** (different language submissions/ audio/video) testimonies are being included on the record; process should also include a way that allows for people to go and see if their submission did indeed go on the record
- Require that before each council vote takes place, it is publicly named how many community members (registered/spoke against/st/for) an item.
 - I.E. Even though 367 people registered against this item, the council is voting unanimously to approve, etc.

Recommendation 3:

Require that council members have to have at least 1 community listening and feedback session, and 1 Q &A session (available in multiple languages, accessibility formats, etc.) on items they are sponsoring/co -sponsoring before each city council meeting.

Require that council members identify ways and or develop a process in which they **actually** connect with community members, organizations or groups to solicit input and expertise from community members when they propose items. Such identified ways or process should center:

- Investing in community -based organizations who have relationships with people most impacted by decisions and create a rich two -way communication to assure that you make constituent informed decisions.
- Given the strong oral tradition in many communities, holding sessions where people can discuss issues firsthand will support a feeling that their opinion is being heard.
 - Optimally these would be more intimate events held where people live/or in small community -based Zoom sessions and could be co-sponsored by the CBOs. Building positive relationships with the community is central to assuring community engagement.

Recommendation 4

City Council offices need to develop accountability for timely responding to community questions and or inquiries.

- Develop an email process to receive council meeting reminders that shall include:
 - Council meeting agenda
 - A clear list of what specific items the council member is specifically sponsoring and co-sponsoring

Notes for Wednesday:

- CEW group members
- Why we focused on city council accessibility; what we learned during covid
- Problem statement
- How we collected information
- Recommendation