

## **Meaningful Community Engagement**

Centering the voices of those most directly harmed by systems in Reimagining Public Safety conversations by creating processes and opportunities for disproportionately impacted residents to offer up their experiences and own thoughts on what they need to feel safe. The input will ensure task force working group proposals and recommendations are informed by community members and not just organizational representatives.

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### **Presenting Members**

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### **Background & Context**

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

The Meaningful Community Engagement Workgroup gathered testimony from the most directly impacted community members on their experiences trying to engage with the City Council and influence decision making that impacts their lives. Resident feedback was gathered through public virtual listening sessions as well as a set of online surveys. From this information we have determined that the main areas of focus for the City Council to remedy the current system and procedures for engaging directly impacted constituents in decision making should be:

1. Community Outreach

- a. Ensure information communicated by the City is transparent and language accessible
2. Community Engagement
  - a. Ensure residents are centered and engaged prior to, during and after all decision making
3. Accessibility
  - a. Language (translation + interpretation)
  - b. Time/location
  - c. Technology
4. Investment
  - a. Ensure equitable community investment to support improved involvement of directly impacted constituents in the City decision making processes

With these main areas of focus, we constructed a set of community centered recommendations that are essential for the City Council to implement to better engage with the constituents they represent. The recommendations are intrinsically linked to the ~~at large~~ Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Guiding Values which we, not only as Task Force representatives but also constituents and community members, firmly maintain should be at the center of all City Council operations.

### **Recommendations**

#### **A. Recommendation 1 - Prioritize community access to decision making in city council meetings that is transparent and culturally responsible with the diversity of cultures, accessibilities & languages of constituents:**

- Utilize paid commercials, TV, Radio, social media, billboards & busses, bus stops (in multiple languages) to notify the community about City Council conduct prior to, during and post any city council meetings
  - Community members don't all have access to and/or know how to navigate the City of Austin website to find information about the City and City Council therefore, it is essential to use a variety of communications tools to notify the public. During the Project Connect campaign, we as community members have observed how capable the City of Austin and City Council can be with regards to publicizing information and community outreach. The Meaningful Community Engagement Workgroup recommends that the City Council utilize much of the same strategies and systems employed during the promotion for Project Connect to publicize all City Council meetings.
  - All information being publicized should be translated in all the most spoken languages, taking into consideration geographic areas that have specific communities with high limited English proficiency. All information should also be ready to be immediately translated if requested by community members. During City Council Meetings, before each council vote takes place, publicly name how many community members (registered/spoke against/for) an item.
  - i.e. Even though 367 people registered against this item, City Council is voting unanimously to approve, etc.
- Report back re: [Actions taken by City Council Meeting](#) after each meeting to include:

- 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 describing what the vote means, so they are 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

**B. Recommendation 2: Make City Council meeting processes more accessible to community members to participate in while centering the voices and experiences of those most directly impacted.**

- Implement a Tier System that allows people who are the most impacted by an upcoming City Council decision to share testimony first, working with CBOs and the Equity Office to identify relevant tiers for the particular decisions being considered
  - i.e. In the RPS Task Force Community Listening Session the speaker tier system we created prioritized those who have been most directly impacted by actions taken by APD
- Significantly improve the current translation and interpretation service system by offering a larger variety of languages spoken by our community members in real time during City Council meetings and make the audio recordings available for community members to visit at any time.
  - Burmese
  - Spanish
  - Korean
  - Arabic
  - Chinese (Mandarin)
  - Vietnamese
  - Urdu
- Make speaker registration and speaker waiting process more efficient and 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 meeting and simultaneously interpreted on the spot
  - Reducing dial-in waiting time by allowing registered speakers to leave voicemails for virtual meetings
  - Creating a system that allows community members to dial into city council meetings at any time
  - Eliminate the rule of people having to pre-register to speak; council meetings should be open for everyone to participate at all times
  - Eliminate the rule of people that will need translation having to request interpretation and registering 2 days before everyone else

**C. Recommendation 3: - Require City Council members to develop a robust community engagement strategy to actively engage and center community members in their district most impacted by city council decisions.**

- 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 for each city council meeting.
- Publicly identify \*actual\* connections that were made with community organizations or groups to solicit input and expertise from community members on proposed items.
- Invest 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 matters. 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.
- Invest in and engage with existing community centers and neighborhood “hubs” proposed by other Reimagining Public Safety Task Force work groups.

**D. Recommendation 4: IMMEDIATELY invest \$5M for the Communications & Public Information Office (CPIO) budget to cover translation and interpretation services, and every city department must:**

- Include a base budget line item for community engagement, flexible funds to pay partners (community organizations) for the following (including/but not limited to):
  - translation/interpretation services
  - child care
  - venue support
  - remote access support
  - request community organization(s) to provide facilitation
  - community person(s) who can provide above
  - stipend for resident(s) with lived experience to support above
- engage community partners (organizations) who are already engaged with and center residents; and,
- \$250K, annually, added to the base budget of the Equity Office for 2 new staff members (salary/benefits for 2 FTEs).

**Additional Data and Supporting Material (Optional as Needed)**