

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board

One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Thursday, May 23, 2024

EOB members present:

Carolline de Paula, Jim Kennedy, Betsy Neptune, Khalid Mustafa, Esther Weathers, Carla Stovell, Marilyn Forman.

Staff present: Ashley Groffenberger, Chief Financial Officer, Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting; Cynthia Lin, Chief of Staff; Blanca Teixeira, Finance & Contracts Manager

Board co-chair Carolline de Paula called to order the External Oversight Board meeting and conducted a roll call. Board co-chair Jim Kennedy shared an overview of the agenda for the evening. Co-chair Carolline de Paula then asked if there were any comments or corrections on last week's meeting minutes. With no comments from the Board, she called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo shared an update on the timeline for the next few meetings. Tonight's meeting will focus on a workflow update for the office, equity guidelines, and contract partners. The next meeting on June 6th will have office workflow updates and feedback from residents engaged in using the PB portal. The last meeting on June 20th will focus on workflow updates as well as preparing for the PB launch. The June 6th meeting will be held in person at the Civic Pavilion.

Director Castelo provided a brief overview of OPB's current workflow for the various components in the planning phase. He provided updates for the PB Portal, the Idea Collection Toolkit, branding and messaging, evaluation, data analytics, approach for coordination with City Departments and City Council, and determining an approach for the Visioning Forums. Director Castelo went on to provide a breakout of implementation costs for PB Cycle One, which included a high level overview of budget costs for OPB's contractors and FY24 fixed expenses for the Office. Director Castelo noted that the Office will be presenting at a Council Hearing on Tuesday May 28th, 2024 at 10am. He then shared a brief update on project funding and noted that in order to ensure the stability of funding available for PB projects for future cycles, it was determined that \$2 million will be available for the pilot year. Board Co-Chair Jim Kennedy reinforced that this option provides stability and solidity for a baseline that secures the program for the next few years. Board member Betsy Neptune echoed Jim's sentiment around making the pilot year successful to set the precedent and potential for more project funding in future cycles.

Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin presented an overview of the comments received from the Board and public on the equity guidelines presented on May 9th. OPB has updated the equity goals to best reflect comments regarding refining goals and clarity on definitions. Ms. Lin provided an update for each of the goal statements and guidelines to the Board. Board member Betsy Neptune noted challenges in specifying specific populations in equity goals from her prior role with the City. She shared that it is a delicate balance in both not showing bias while advancing equity, especially within the legal framework and the current political climate. Her department's approach was to not include explicit language but targeted outreach to historically unreached populations. Board Co-Chair Jim Kennedy agreed that the

equity language is strong and the Office should focus on the operationalization of the equity goals, especially through targeting outreach and engagement. The Board agreed to motion for approval of the equity guidelines following public comment at the latter half of the meeting.

Director Castelo provided an update on the Contract Partners. OPB will contract with community organizations to assist with outreach, public education, and resident engagement to ensure the participation and engagement of hard-to-reach populations. These partners will be responsible for co-hosting City-sponsored Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums. The Office's Idea Collection Toolkit will be deployed during these workshops and will also be available for the public to download and utilize. The Office is currently working on identifying these organizations and is drafting a scope of work for services. Director Castelo provided an overview of the scope and initial list of organizations. He noted that there will need to be some flexibility during this phase, as things may be modified to ensure participation and collaboration with organizations.

Board Co-Chair Carolline de Paula commented on the requirement to have a minimum of one idea submitted by attendee and asked how people are going to be oriented to submit ideas that represent priorities on an individual level rather than on a group or organizational level. Director Castelo suggested that residents will be allowed to submit multiple ideas that represent their priorities. He suggested that there is opportunity to brainstorm best practices to include in the Toolkit for Community Partners to reference.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy opened up the meeting for public comments at 7:48PM. One member of the Better Budget Alliance (BBA) suggested that the Board identify other opportunities to incorporate and refer to specific priority population groups in the equity guidelines. Director Castelo noted that the Department will be intentional about the operationalization of PB, specifically through outreach and engagement opportunities, for priority populations and groups, however the equity goals and guidelines will remain broad. Board member Betsy Neptune suggested that OPB commit to tracking how impactful outreach to specific populations is during the evaluation of the entire PB cycle process, which would help to operationalize the equity goals and the commenter agreed. The commenter continued in suggesting that having the Board or OPB be present at Idea Collection workshops and meetings to answer broader PB questions and not necessarily put onus on meeting facilitators or Community Partners on non-workshop related questions. The commenter made reference to a report that suggests there are only a few communities where project funding is under \$1.5 million dollars and urges that the process consider a higher funding amount for projects in the coming years.

Director Castelo invited Co-Chair Jim Kennedy to call for a motion to vote on the incorporation of Equity Guidelines in the PB Rulebook. Board member Betsy Neptune made note that she was comfortable moving forward with the note of the PB team operationalizing equity in terms of outreach and working with the evaluation team to track. Co-Chair Jim Kennedy called for a motion for the Board to adopt the Equity Guidelines in the PB Rulebook. The Board members approved the adoption of the guidelines.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:57PM

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