

**CITY OF BOSTON**  
**Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board**

One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Thursday, June 6, 2024

**EOB members present:**

Carolline de Paula, Jim Kennedy, Betsy Neptune, Esther Weathers, Carla Stovell, Lisa Hy, Jarret Wright

**Staff present:** Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting; Cynthia Lin, Chief of Staff

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

Director Castelo shared an update on the upcoming board meeting schedule. Tonight's meeting will focus on a workflow update for the office and the resident feedback on the PB portal. The next meeting will be held virtually on June 27th and focus on office workflow updates and preparation for the PB launch in July. He proposed July 18th and August 1st, as future meeting dates during the middle and end of Idea Collection to provide the Board the opportunity to debrief and give feedback on workshops.

Director Castelo provided an update on the Contract Partners. OPB has confirmed six community organizations to assist with outreach, public education, and resident engagement through the Idea Collection workshops and is currently in discussion with a few more groups. Not all groups will host three workshops, but a combination of groups will host up to three with some in person and online. The Director suggested that for future cycles, OPB will consider making this more of an application based award, where groups across the city will be able to apply to host workshops. Co-chair Carolline De Paula and Jarret Wright asked what outreach was being done to organizations outside of the contract partners. Director Castelo noted that the Office is focused on securing contract partners for workshops, but will reach out to City Departments to assist in outreach and connecting with community organizations. A training for facilitators will be held in mid-June for contract partners.

Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin provided a brief overview of PB's Idea Collection campaign components. She provided updates for the Idea Collection Toolkit, PB Corners, PB Phone Line, and PB Portal website. Co-chair Carolline De Paula made a suggestion to translate a few documents in the toolkit in multiple languages. Director Castelo agreed to translate the workshop guides other than the facilitators agenda in other languages. Co-chair Jim Kennedy suggested coordinating with librarians to help guide people through the PB corners, and Director Castelo agreed that the Office will create a summary guide and speaking points for librarians.

Ms. Lin then provided an overview of other updates pertaining to the PB evaluation, data analytics, and the voting platform. Board member Esther Weathers suggested the analytics team join the Board to discuss how they are using the Cambridge data sets to inform their analysis of the Boston data, and the Director agreed. Board member Betsy Neptune agreed and also suggested that training materials for contract partners illustrate OPB's approach with technology to conduct data analysis, and the Director

agreed. Board member Jarret Wright suggested exploring tagging ideas to see the lifecycle of ideas, in future cycles to assist with transparency and trust and also ensuring data integrity. Director Castelo noted that a confirmation email will not be sent after an idea is submitted, because providing an email is optional and not required for idea submission. The Board discussed the validity of requiring an email, and agreed that not requiring an email will reduce barriers to submission, especially with no age limit for Idea Collection, and the Office will explore more data security during the voting stage.

Director Castelo provided an update of planning and coordination items, including visioning forums, coordination with city departments and city council, and upcoming press releases for the PB kick off. He discussed updates on the branding and media strategy. Board member Lisa Hy asked about how often newspapers would be publicizing content and if the translation text would be provided in simplified or traditional Chinese. Director Castelo noted that this is something the Office will follow up on. Board member Jarret Wright noted that there were not a lot of English radio stations identified in the plan, and the Director noted that they would be engaged through earned media- through interviews, op-eds in newspapers, and social media ads. Board member Esther Weathers suggested utilizing contract partners as opportunities to engage in the outreach through flyers and social media. Board member Carla Stovell noted that for future cycles, it will be good to start publicizing a month before launch.

Director Castelo provided feedback from testing the PB portal in-person on Friday, May 31st in the field. They interviewed 6 people and asked them to test out the website on their phones. He noted several user improvements that will be adjusted in the portal to assist with resident accessibility, such as including language selection options from the start, shortening the intro text, removing fields for idea title, and making the zip code optional. He noted that the question around equity was a barrier for survey takers because they did not know how to answer, and proposed that the question be shortened and be optional. Board members discussed this suggestion and agreed. Board member Carla Stovell asked how long the residents would have to leave a message on the PB phone line, and the Director noted that the Office will look into this.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy opened up the meeting for public comments at 7:32PM. A member of the evaluation team provided comments about the PB Portal testing, noting it underscored the importance of having low barriers to idea submission and the value of having in person discussion to help generate ideas. He noted that it may be good to clarify how to spend the \$2 million dollars as the question prompted, as some residents may think they need to identify large scale projects in order to submit an idea, rather than several projects that add up to \$2 million. Another member of the public suggested that the office engage with Boston's Youth Employment and Opportunity department for outreach. He noted that the language model and data analytics should be tested among several data sets and the outcomes should be compared to what people have come up with. He noted that the \$2 million dollar prompt is broad and may be useful to think of prompts through this in a more thematic way and creating more specific prompts for marketing materials to capture what people are interested in ahead of time. He also made note about his disappointment on the decision for a \$2 million dollar budget for the PB cycle and the communication of this message to the community.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:36PM

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