

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board
One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 4, 2024

EOB members present:

Carolline Pontoppidan, Jim Kennedy, Betsy Neptune, Carla Stovell, Lisa Hy, Jarret Wright, Khalid Mustafa, Marilyn Forman

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

Director Castelo called to order the External Oversight Board meeting, did a roll call, and shared an overview of the agenda. He then asked if there were any comments or corrections on last week's meeting minutes. With no comments from the Board, Director Castelo called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo shared an update on the timeline for the rulebook development. He explained that tonight's discussion will be focused on reviewing feedback received on the Rulebook from the prior meeting and the response. Next week, the April 11th meeting will be the Rulebook adoption. Meetings held April through June 2024 will focus on planning for PB implementation.

Chief of Staff, Cynthia Lin began reviewing the first set of feedback received. She provided an overview of the first comment regarding the incorporation of equity goals and guidelines into the Rulebook. She noted that the Office is currently reviewing and researching guidelines from other City departments and peer cities and will work with the Board and public on defining equity guidelines. These will be incorporated into the Rulebook when completed.

The next comment was in regard to the incorporation of an equity focused question in the Idea Collection Phase. Ms. Lin noted that the Office revised the original prompt to add an equity component. Board members agreed on the merits of incorporating this question but discussed whether or not this should be a required or optional question, and if it should be split into two. The final decision was made to incorporate the revised prompt but follow the suggestion of Board Member Carla Stovell, who recommended having residents test the Idea Collection survey to determine if it should be changed in any way to prevent barriers to participation. Board member Lisa Hy suggested adding hyperlinks to provide more information and definitions about equity, and Director Castelo agreed.

Director Castelo reviewed the next comment, regarding the incorporation of a needs assessment into the PB process. He stated that there is the potential to evaluate this option for future cycles, but will not be implementing it in the Pilot Year. He noted the tradeoffs regarding utilizing prior studies to identify needs and the impact of incorporating this formally into the PB cycle at this stage in time. Several Board members agreed on evaluating this option for a future cycle year.

Director Castelo clarified the process and need for the Review of Community Priorities phase, specifically how Community Priorities are derived in the PB process and what happens to ideas that are not identified as a Community Priority. Next, Ms. Lin clarified the process and outcome of the Visioning Forums. During this phase, residents attending forums will draft a statement to define what ballot proposals should look like for each Community Priority. For residents who cannot attend these Forums, an online option will be available to provide feedback. During the Proposal Development Phase, a PB ballot with the 15 proposal statements drafted by residents will be finalized by OPB and the Board by reviewing and incorporating relevant online feedback. All Board meetings are open to the public.

Ms. Lin clarified that during the Review and Award of Proposals Phase, all proposal evaluations from Community Organization will need to comply with the City's policies and regulations for contracts and grants. The Office and Board will consider standardized criteria, such as equity guidelines, to evaluate proposals and will consider letters of recommendations or references as a supplement to proposal submissions. Board member Carla Stovell asked who would be eligible to apply for grants and Director Castelo noted the types of community organizations, but would investigate if private institutions or individuals would be eligible based on contracting regulations. Board member Jarret Wright and Betsy Neptune agreed that letters of recommendation or references should be considered in the proposal submission.

Next, Ms. Lin discussed and clarified the comment of retaining individual ideas throughout the proposal development process. Director Castelo reviewed additions to the Rulebook, which included adding a glossary of terms, incorporating specific guidelines into the ineligible projects for funding section, and clarifying community organization/ partners terminology. Board member Jarret Wright suggested adding specific verbiage to the ineligible projects guideline.

Director Castelo noted some updates such as the decision for OPB to contract with five (5) Community Partners during Idea Collection and merging the Transportation and Streets and Sidewalks categories for internal sorting. Board member Jarret Wright provided feedback on the new definition and Director Castelo suggested the Office review and incorporate it into the Rulebook.

Director Castelo reviewed the key takeaways from the feedback received. He noted that the additional comments have strengthened the Rulebook framework and it has also helped to surface planning phase considerations that will be discussed further in the planning process.

Director Castelo opened up the meeting for public comments at 7:32PM. There were no comments from the public in attendance.

Director Castelo adjourned the meeting at 7:34PM

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