

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board

Thursday, October 3rd, 2024

EOB members present:

Jim Kennedy, Lisa Hy, Carla Stovell, Betsy Neptune, Jarret Wright, Marilyn Forman, Esther Weathers

OPB 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 member Betsy Neptune clarified two points from the last meeting minutes and asked they be corrected. Co-Chair Kennedy then called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes. Director Castelo provided an overview of the agenda.

Director Castelo introduced the Data + Soul team, Min Ma and Evan Kuras, to share preliminary findings from the mid-cycle report. Ms. Ma shared that the team gathered 270 surveys from Idea Collection workshop participants and 36 responses from the online portal. Mr. Kuras continued with an overview of the Idea Collection findings. He shared that neighborhoods that submitted the most ideas were East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Dorchester and Allston/Brighton. Idea submissions grew over time because of more workshops, community meetings, and expanding the deadline to submit ideas. Mr. Kuras explained the different types of media coverage that led to the big push at the end of Idea Collection. Board member Wright asked how our media strategy campaign compared to other city media campaigns. Director Castelo responded that he was unsure, but given the different target audiences for outreach it may not be comparable. Mr. Kuras continued with feedback on the Idea Collection workshops, engagement and outreach that each Community Partners did and the backgrounds of the residents that participated.

Board co-chair Kennedy had a clarifying question about the finding that workshops participants heard about the program from community partners, which contradicted the finding presented about media campaign impact on idea submissions. Mr. Kuras clarified that the finding reported numbers for participants that attended an in-person workshop. Mr. Kuras concluded his presentation by reporting residents' feedback on how attending a workshop benefited them. He stated that participants felt positive about the process and he also highlighted how participants enjoyed doing this process together and building communities around these issues and building shared power in the process. Board member Neptune stated that she appreciated all the work to date and echoed Board member Wright's question about how we compare the various reaches of advertising we did. She was pleased to see that the workshops were able to target the populations that were talked about in our meetings.

Director Castelo updated the Board on the office's engagement with City cabinets to attend the Visioning Forums, as well as the training the office will provide to Community Partners for facilitation. Board member Neptune raised a question about extending our contracts with the

community organizations to help with the voting phase, and Director Castelo shared that it is an option that should be discussed further. He shared that the office will look to partner again with BPL to have voting locations at the different branches. For in-person voting, library staff can monitor handing out the ballots, and potentially the role of community partners is to inform residents of voting online and in-person locations. He added that the online voting platform will require a level of security to ensure residents only vote once. Most likely a telephone number where residents will receive a text with a code to enter the online platform to vote.

Chief of Staff, Cynthia Lin presented on Community Priorities and Subtopics. She reminded the Board of the nine priorities and shared how the team and Data Analytics came up with more detailed subtopics with clusters of ideas to help read through ideas. Ms. Lin shared that each table at the Visioning Forums will have their own booklet with a designated priority, walking residents through the cluster of ideas specific to the priority.

Director Castelo provided details on Visioning Forums and Online Engagement. He started by listing out all the forums scheduled, where they are being hosted (Maverick Landing & NUBE, Union Capital Boston, and Center for Teen Empowerment) and what priorities will be discussed at each forum. He shared that the team scheduled a virtual public meeting for November 7th to present the 15 draft proposals. The public will be able to share comments during this meeting and also in written form for a week.

Director Castelo circled back to the last Board meeting, where Board member Jarret Wright pointed out the need of using the Equity guidelines in a more purposeful way during Visioning Forums. Mr. Castelo shared a proposal that addressed that issue, further incorporating equity prompts as residents narrow their idea selections. He mentioned that the team will use this first forum as a learning opportunity on what worked and what did not and will adjust the approach as needed.

Board member Neptune had a question about the trade of starting the meetings between 5:30 PM or 6:00 PM to be sensitive to the time participants get off of work and commuting to the meeting. Mr. Castelo acknowledged the concern, and added that the timing of meeting was consulted with community partners. Also, because these are 3-hour meetings, starting at 6:00 PM and ending at 9:00 PM would be too late for some people.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy informed the Board that he will be putting in an Information request and a recommendation for a Board to discuss Cycle 2 funding. All Board members express that they will join Mr. Kennedy on this request.

Co-Chair Kennedy then opened up the meeting for public comment. A member from the BBA highlighted a Board member's comment about the importance of hiring Community Partners for the voting phase. They made a comment to give Community Partners more notice on when events will be happening so all the organizations can potentially hold workshops during the weekend, when more community members may be able to attend. The next commenter asked a question to Data + Soul about how all the questions were framed in evaluation surveys. Mr.

Kuras responded by reading the four statements and stated that they asked participants to rank on a scale, and tried not to introduce bias in questions. The commenter also suggested showcasing example ideas before having residents choose subtopics at Visioning Forums. Director Castelo responded that facilitators will provide examples to residents, and that residents will have access to the booklets of ideas at the events.

The member of the public suggested for future evaluations having a giftcard or raffle be offered to better gather demographic and survey information. They continued to comment about the Equity and Impact criteria under the rubric section to be more specific about priority populations that would benefit from projects. They suggested providing data or maps at forums to show if an idea does positively impact a population or a community. They also commented about the need to consider the amount of times ideas were submitted through the process for “priority ranking” because it shows how an idea is needed or wanted since our process does not have a needs assessment.

Co Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 8:00PM

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