

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board

One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Thursday, June 27, 2024

EOB members present:

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

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

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 De Paula then asked if there were any comments or corrections on last week's meeting minutes. Board Member Betsy Neptune noted that the meeting minutes should be updated to reflect the public commenter's sentiment regarding the budgeting for the PB process. Director Castelo acknowledged this comment and stated that it would be fixed in the minutes. Co-Chair De Paula 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, preparing for launch, and roles for Idea Collection. The July 16th meeting will host the City's Data Analytics team to share an update on the proposed approach for the analysis of community priorities. There will also be an opportunity for OPB and the Board to report back on their attendance of Idea Collection workshops during this meeting. The August 1st meeting will primarily focus on a debrief of Idea Collection month.

Director Castelo provided an update on the Contract Partners. OPB has confirmed nine (9) community organizations to assist with outreach, public education, and resident engagement through the Idea Collection workshops. Not all groups will host three workshops, but a combination of groups will host up to three with some in person and online. Board member Jarret Wright asked if contract partners will be hosting workshops in the same location. Director Castelo stated that organizations are still providing details to OPB and this information will be available by next week.

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, the PB Portal website, and the updated City webpage for Ideas in Action. Director Castelo clarified that the PB Phone line was tested and a message can be recorded for longer than three (3) minutes. Co-chair Kennedy asked to clarify the question regarding idea collection and community events on the PB portal. Board member Betsy Neptune suggested that the question should be more refined and clarified for survey takers. The Board discussed options for wordsmithing and framing the question. Director Castelo noted that the Office will revise and clarify the question. Board member Jarret Wright noted that there should be a statement that ideas that contain offensive or harmful language will be removed from the process. Director Castelo acknowledged this and will update the website. Ms. Lin then provided an overview of other updates pertaining to the PB evaluation, data analytics, visioning forums, and the voting platform.

Director Castelo provided an update on the branding guidelines and the media and marketing strategy. “Ideas in Action” is the PB brand and it will include a question campaign and tagline for branding. He walked through some of the print and digital material developed as well as the media and marketing strategy which includes radio, digital and print newspaper, and digital ads on buses and transit stations. Director Castelo noted other planning and coordination items including the City’s press release on the process as well as coordination with City departments on spreading the word about PB.

Ms. Lin then provided an update on logistics for the July workshops and included some guidance on the roles and responsibilities of Board members when attending workshop events. She provided an overview of OPB’s engagement strategy with non-profits outside of contract partner organizations and proposed a strategy in which Board members can assist in spreading the word about the initiative. Board member Betsy Neptune asked if OPB could provide some templates for social media posts and Director Castelo agreed.

Evan Kuras from Data + Soul Research, formerly MXM Research Group, discussed how the Idea Collection Workshops will be utilized to answer broader evaluation questions for the PB process. He discussed the various evaluation methods that the team will explore during workshops, such as an exit survey, workshop observations, and debriefing calls with workshop facilitators/ contract partners.

Co-Chair Kennedy asked about the attendance of the evaluation team, and Mr. Kuras responded that they expect no more than one team member will be at each meeting and at minimum the evaluation team will attend one per contract partner (for a total of nine meetings). Board member Betsy Neptune suggested that Board members refrain from sharing individual opinions during workshops in order to not influence the process. The Board then engaged in a larger conversation about Board engagement, specifically during small group discussions at the workshop. They agreed on introducing themselves and serving as a resource during discussions, primarily engaging through clarifying prompts and questions for the group at large rather than providing their viewpoints or opinions.

Mr. Kuras proposed hosting smaller focus group meetings with the Board after the Idea Collection workshops and outlined the specific learning goals for round one of the evaluation. He will follow up with Board members on scheduling in early August and will do another round of conversations later in the process. Board member Esther Weathers asked if the Board can reach out with additional questions and Mr. Kuras noted that the team will send questions in advance, but will make the questions available to all Board members and everyone can share individual reflections to the team.

There were no members from the public available during the meeting for public comment. Director Castelo then provided two additional updates. He noted that the Better Budget Alliance hosted a workshop with youth and the Office shared resources and access to the PB portal website for the workshop. The BBA had shared feedback and OPB will address these before the launch. He also noted that the office is looking into contracting with a videographer for the Idea Collection workshops. This will allow OPB to document people’s experiences with PB and a broader story about PB engagement. Board member Jarret Wright noted that the videographer should be mindful of what is being recorded during workshops, specifically if people may not be comfortable sharing their ideas on videos.

Co-Chair De Paula adjourned the meeting at 7:52PM

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