

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board Meeting

Thursday, May 15th, 2025

EOB members present:

Jim Kennedy, Carla Stovell, Lisa Hy, 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. With four members present, there was no quorum for adopting meeting minutes. Director Castelo provided an overview of the agenda and the proposed schedule for the next Board meetings.

Director Castelo introduced Alyssa McBryar, a consultant from Archipelago Strategies Group (ASG), who is supporting the development of the marketing and communication strategy for Cycle Two. Ms. McBryar shared lessons learned from the previous cycle and presented the updated media approach, emphasizing the importance of increased interaction between the office, community partners, and media outlets. Board member Kennedy inquired how ASG calculates bus advertisement views. Ms. McBryar responded that ASG partners with outlets that provide estimated reach data for bus lines, but they cannot confirm the exact number of viewers. Board member Hy suggested confirming the use of Traditional versus Simplified Chinese with media outlets to ensure translations are appropriate for the intended audience.

Mr. Kennedy asked about the status of Cycle One winning projects. Director Castelo reported that some departments are further along in planning than others. A few departments expect to begin implementation this summer, while others expect to roll out their plans later this year. A more formal update will be shared in upcoming Board meetings.

Board member Weathers emphasized that all City departments involved in these initiatives should be featured in media stories highlighting resident participation. Mr. Kennedy inquired about targeted neighborhoods and how to expand print media coverage citywide. Ms. McBryar said she is working with Mr. Castelo and Ms. Lin to explore how to maximize reach across the city.

Board member Hy asked if the transit ads used a lighter color to make it easier to read. Director Castelo pointed out that ASG is just starting to look into the branding and can test the colors of the messaging to ensure maximum visibility.

Evan Kuras, evaluation consultant with Data+Soul, opened his presentation by sharing that the evaluation report for the inaugural year is complete. It includes a PDF of the report and an appendix with detailed information about the cycle. He then outlined the plan for Cycle Two. The goal is to integrate evaluation into all phases of the Idea in Action process, allowing the team to learn at each stage. High-level findings will be shared with the Board through three presentations. A new evaluation format will also be developed to monitor the implementation of the winning projects, including tracking costs, the groups served, and project outcomes.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy asked how the proposed changes will improve data collection compared to last year. Mr. Kuras explained that moving some evaluation questions from the optional survey to the Idea Collection Form will enhance collection of demographic data.

Board Member Weathers asked how the evaluation team will collect demographic data given the current political climate. Mr. Kuras said that surveys are not categorized by group or favor any particular demographic.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy asked the other Board members to review Mr. Kuras' report and prepare for a discussion to provide feedback. This feedback will be included in the upcoming annual Board report.

Director Castelo provided updates on Cycle Two. He shared that more community partners are collaborating this year. He plans to share all planned activities for idea collection from these partners by the next board meeting. Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin discussed efforts to re-engage City departments and Boston Public Libraries for outreach. She mentioned that the office has been participating in the Mayor's coffee hours and will attend more of these events. She also noted that the office will have a hearing with the City Council meeting in two weeks.

Board member Stovell expressed that it was a good meeting and was happy that she was able to join.

There were no members of the public in the meeting. Co Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:42 PM

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