

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board Meeting
Thursday, September 18th, 2025

EOB members present:

Jim Kennedy, Marilyn Forman, Lisa Hy, and Jarret Wright

OPB staff present: Renato Castelo, Director; Alexandra Mackay, Community Engagement Fellow

Board 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 schedule for the next meetings.

Director Castelo provided implementation updates for the winning proposals from Cycle One. Four out of the six winning projects are already in the implementation phase; while the remaining two (community gardens and food access) are still in the planning stage.

Director Castelo presented a recap of the Idea Collection phase. A record 19 community partners hosted over 30 events, leading to a total of 1,203 ideas submitted, similar to Cycle One. Nearly half of the ideas came from City-sponsored events with community partners. The top ten neighborhoods for submissions were East Boston, Dorchester, Brighton, Jamaica Plain, Chinatown, Roxbury, Rosindale, Fenway, Downtown, and Mattapan. Evan Kuras, evaluation consultant with Data+Soul, presented key findings. Demographic questions were embedded directly into the online portal this year, leading to higher response rates. The process was particularly effective at engaging residents from Chinatown and East Boston, as well as those who identified as Latina, Asian, lower-income, and younger (ages 11–19). The optional evaluation survey revealed that 92% of participants were first-time participants in Ideas in Action, and nearly 43% did not identify as being civically active. Common suggestions for improvement included increasing program visibility and providing updates on Cycle One projects.

Board member Lisa Hy asked how the current participation numbers compared to the last cycle and expressed concern about the low number of returning participants (8%), asking about strategies for retention.

Director Castelo detailed three key improvements for the proposal development phase. Three forums in October will focus on prioritizing ideas, and two forums in November will be dedicated to developing proposals. OPB will handle all logistics and facilitation to ensure a more consistent experience, with community partners focusing on recruitment. This improvement will allow residents to focus on subcategories of ideas rather than broad categories. Ideas will be consolidated into clusters to avoid redundancy.

The October forums are: October 24th in Mattapan, October 23rd in East Boston, and October 27th in Brighton. The two proposal development forums will be held at City Hall on November 13th and November 18th. The events will aim for 35 to 40 people each to ensure full participation. For the November forums, City departments will provide relevant data on pre-selected projects. Following the in-person meetings, there will be a public comment period online, and final drafts of proposals will be reviewed by the City's legal team, relevant departments, and the CFO's Office.

Board Chair Jim Kennedy noted that the process improvements are valuable, particularly the two-phase approach and the increased engagement with City departments.

There were no public comments. Board Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:30 pm.

###