

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board

One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Thursday, August 1, 2024

EOB members present:

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

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, conducted a roll call, and shared an overview of the agenda for the evening. He then asked if there were any comments or corrections on the last meeting's minutes. He made a suggestion to update the minutes to accurately reflect the number of ideas for Cambridge's first cycle. Co Chair Kennedy then called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes with the update.

Director Castelo shared an update on the upcoming board meeting schedule. Tonight's meeting will focus on updates on the Idea Collection process and an opportunity for the Office and Board to debrief on observations and reflections on the Idea Collection workshops. The next meeting will be held on September 5th, which will focus on Idea Collection review, present initial findings for community priorities, and discuss the concept for visioning forums. The following meeting is proposed on September 19th and will focus on addressing any feedback and further discussion refining the concept of visioning forums as well as date and times. The next October meeting, date still to be determined, will focus on providing an update on the visioning forums.

Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin provided an update on July's idea collection month and discussed the deadline extension to August 15th, 2024 for the PB Portal, Phone Line, and PB Corners. She provided a preliminary number of ideas collected to date. She discussed the ongoing and upcoming media advertisements and interviews in the upcoming weeks. Board member Betsy Neptune asked if there was an expectation for a number of ideas to be collected. Director Castelo stated that there wasn't a specific goal for the pilot year, but 1,000 ideas would be ideal. Board member Lisa Hy noted some discrepancies on the Sampan website advertisement links as well as language ads. The Office acknowledged this and will follow up to correct this. Board member Neptune asked if there was a way to gauge which sources of media are the most effective based on where ideas are coming from. Director Castelo noted that the media consultant will be providing a performance metrics report on advertisement and in future cycles the Office can ask how people heard about the process.

Board member Neptune commented on the City's outreach strategies in engaging community organizations, noting that some organizations want to hear directly from the City. She noted that the Office is primarily leveraging community partners that have extensive networks to engage organizations in the process and as well as reaching out directly to organizations. She suggested that messaging could be refined to better clarify these approaches and demonstrate the City's commitment to engaging all organizations. Director Castelo acknowledged this. Board member Hy asked if the Office could analyze and identify what neighborhoods have participated to date and where outreach could be focused on. Given the team's capacity in the next few weeks Director Castelo and Board member Hy suggested that this be considered for future cycles. Board member Neptune asked for this data to be shared with the Board after the meeting and the Board may be able to share through their networks.

Director Castelo then provided some overall reflections from the workshops attended to date including thoughts on the timeline and structure of the workshop and overall PB process and contract partner model. Co Chair Kennedy reinforced additional training time for community partners. Board member Neptune commented that it would be helpful to hear from community partners on their feedback about their experience during workshops and Director Castelo noted that the Office will be holding debrief calls later in August.

Co Chair Kennedy then led the Board discussion about workshop reflections. Overall the Board shared their reflections which included recommendations on: additional training for contract partners specifically on the PB process, instructions on workshop activities and materials, and facilitating idea generation during table discussions; streamlining and ensuring ideas are submitted at workshops; evaluating the effectiveness of workshop materials and activities for participants; flexibility in workshop materials and planning for contingencies such as technology issues; as well as sharing ideas that are generated during workshops with the right entities, especially those not within the City of Boston.

Director Castelo then shared an update on next steps for evaluation. The Office will be hosting debrief meetings with each community partner in late August. Data + Soul will set up an evaluation meeting with Board members in August. The evaluation team will also be collecting and analyzing evaluation surveys and producing a draft mid-cycle evaluation report with findings from the Idea Collection phase.

Co Chair Kennedy opened up the meeting for public comments at 6:58PM. One member from the Better Budget Alliance shared that she had hosted and facilitated a number of Idea Collection workshops in the community. She shared that the process of shaping ideas is sometimes challenging and that sharing examples from other cities and processes is helpful. She acknowledged Board member Neptune's comment regarding organizations wanting to hear directly from the City. She shared the BBA's framing that the PB initiative came from the community and is co-designed by community members and that the goal is to have the community as co-leaders and co-holders of the process. She also noted that some residents have been submitting project ideas that earmark money toward specific organizations to implement ideas. She suggested that the general project ideas should remain intact, without the affiliated organization because that is not part of the eligibility process. She also suggested more lead up time for outreach and marketing for PB is helpful for future cycles, ahead of Idea Collection.

Another member of the public shared their experience at one of the Idea Collection workshops and positive remarks about the attendance and effectiveness of facilitation during the meeting. The last member of the public provided remarks on the number of the ideas presented to date in the presentation. He noted that the number of ideas is not necessarily the best metric, but rather the quality, topic, alignment of equity, and neighborhoods where ideas are coming from are better measures. He also asked about the format of developing project ballots after the visioning forums, and how that would be carried out. Director Castelo acknowledged this and noted that the Office will be working on the format and sharing with the Board at the next meeting.

Co Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:10PM

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