

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board
One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 14, 2024

EOB members present:

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

Staff present: Ashley Groffenberger, Chief Financial Officer, Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting, Cynthia Lin, Chief of Staff, BlancaTeixeria, Finance & Grants/ Contracts Manager

Director Castelo called to order the External Oversight Board meeting, did a roll call, and shared an overview of the agenda. He then asked if there were any comments or corrections on last week's meeting minutes. With no comments from the Board, Director Castelo called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo shared an update on the timeline for the rulebook development. He noted that tonight's meeting will focus on process refinements on the PB framework. No meeting will be held on March 21st. A presentation of the draft rulebook and public comment is scheduled for March 28th. The April 4th meeting will focus on discussing and assessing feedback for the Rulebook and the subsequent April 11th meeting will be held to adopt the Rulebook.

Chief of Staff, Cynthia Lin, provided an overview of feedback on the refinements to the PB process. OPB received comments both on the content of the Rulebook and on the PB process as a whole. She noted that Rulebook specific comments would be addressed in the next draft iteration. Overall feedback received on the PB process has been incorporated into the revised PB process which will be presented tonight.

Director Castelo provided an overview of the "revised" PB process. The revised model retains the overall PB framework, as originally proposed, but simplifies the process, both public-facing and internally, and creates meaningful public engagement. He provided a brief overview of each phase and the revisions. The Director then walked through an example of an idea from "Idea Collection" through "Proposal Development." Board Member Jim Kennedy and several other Board Members expressed appreciation for revising the process to be more simplified, approachable for the public, and making the process more transparent and conducive for building trust for this first pilot year.

Director Castelo, then led a comprehensive review of each of the revised PB phases. He noted that the goal and implementation of the "Idea Collection" phase remains the same. Board Member Khalid Mustafa suggested considering Boston Centers for Youth & Families for in-person Idea Collection locations. Board Member Jarret Wright asked if there was a budget in mind for the 21 in-person idea Collection workshops. Director Castelo stated that these costs

will be determined during the planning phase. Board Member Lisa Hy asked if the Rulebook will be translated, and if the next meeting will have interpretation services. Director Castelo noted that the full Rulebook will be available in Spanish and a two-page executive summary will be translated into the City's threshold languages. If there is a request for the Rulebook in another language, the Office can accommodate. Director Castelo will look into providing specific language interpretation services for the meeting.

Director Castelo then reviewed the next phase, formerly "Data Analysis", which has been revised to "Review of Community Priorities". This phase is being expanded to two months to ensure an adequate review of all ideas. During this phase, the Office and Board will review and identify 15 community priorities based on similar eligible project ideas submitted. Board Member Jarret Wright suggested incorporating community guidelines in the Rulebook that denote project ideas that have offensive language may not appear.

The next phase, "Visioning Forums and Online Engagement," formerly "Idea Selection and Community Engagement," will focus on hosting five (5) In-Person Visioning Forums across the City in Partnership with Community Organizations. During these forums residents will engage with City Departments, the Office, and the Board to review and assess all ideas under each community priority and discuss impact, feasibility, and identify a short list of project ideas that best reflect the intention/purpose of the community priority. Residents will be able to access the list of 15 community priorities and their associated ideas online and be asked to provide feedback.

Board Member Betsy Neptune asked if a needs assessment would be incorporated to create community priorities. Director Castelo noted that for this pilot year, Idea Collection is technically a needs assessment, as residents will propose projects they want the City to prioritize in their communities. OPB can reevaluate this approach after the first year and make adjustments as needed.

During the "Proposal Development" stage, OPB, supported by the Board, will reconcile and draft proposals based on in-person & online resident feedback and assess feasibility, evaluate with equity guidelines, and add estimated costs. Proposals will be developed in parallel with the Visioning Forums and be finalized in December. Board Member Betsy Neptune noted that this is a critical point to showcase the lifecycle of an idea and that it is communicated to residents, especially which ideas make it into a ballot proposal. Board Member Esther Whether made a suggestion to the comment about developing proposals in tandem with the Visioning Forums. She suggested holding EOB meetings between workshop forums to develop proposals and allow the public to attend and provide feedback in the development stage and provide for more transparency. Director Castelo agreed with the comment and suggested that the specifics will be figured out during the planning phase.

Chief of Staff, Cynthia Lin reviewed the "PB Voting" and "Funding" phases, which have not changed from the last framework. Board Member Carla asked what happens to community ideas that are not funded. Director Renato clarified that OPB will share community priorities with city departments, especially during the Idea Collection Phase, which will help inform departmental budget investments and decisions for future years.

Director Castelo opened up the meeting for public comments at 7:22PM. Three (3) attendees from the public provided comments. Director Castelo suggested that the Board and OPB take time to process the comments and provide sufficient feedback at the next meeting as part of the protocol.

A representative of the Better Budget Alliance (BBA) made note of creating more defined goals in advancing equity and inclusion through the PB process. She suggested creating a needs assessment in the Idea Collection phase to help problem set and create more detailed proposals for the community. Another representative of the Better Budget Alliance (BBA) suggested clarifying the racial and economic goals in the Rulebook. She asked for more detail about conducting outreach that incorporates communities that are underfunded and underrepresented, as this may be a way to factor equity into the design. She suggested using public assemblies, as a large convening to debate and discuss, as opposed to public forums, stations or tables. The commenter is interested in learning more about how feedback on budget priorities from the PB process gets communicated to the City departments and City Council. She also wanted to emphasize preserving resident agency and transparency in the PB process.

Director Castelo adjourned the meeting at 7:32PM

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