

CITY OF BOSTON
Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board

One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201

Thursday, May 9, 2024

EOB members present:

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

Staff present: Ashley Groffenberger, Chief Financial Officer, 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, 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, he called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo shared an update on the timeline for the next two months. Tonight's meeting will focus on the branding and messaging aspect of PB and the equity guidelines. Future meetings will continue to be bi-weekly. He noted that the topics for upcoming meetings may be adjusted depending on work progress. Once the agenda is confirmed it will be uploaded on the City's website.

Director Castelo provided an overview of the OPB Budget to provide clarity on timeline and budget investments for the Office. He noted that the City had originally allocated \$2 million to the PB in July 2022 (FY23 Budget,) when the Office was not established. The Office was then established in Winter/Spring 2023 and in July 2023 (FY24 Budget,) the City allocated \$2 Million for the Office of Participatory Budgeting, transferring the unspent FY23 money (\$2 Million) to the Office's Special Revenue Fund for PB projects. This gave the Office a total of \$4 Million for Fiscal Year 2024. In the Spring of 2024, the recommended FY25 budget for OPB is a level allocation of approximately \$2.13 Million, which is adjusted compared to prior years to support the additional Office staff. Money from the Special Revenue Fund will continue to be available for FY25 (\$2 Million) and the Office is exploring opportunities to roll over unspent money from the FY24 budget into this Special Revenue Fund. The final FY25 budget has not been adopted yet but will be finalized in July 2024.

Board member Betsy Neptune asked for a breakdown for what the Office has spent to date and the ongoing operational expenses, which includes consultant contracts in order to get a sense of what money is left over for projects. Director Castelo will provide an update to the Board at the next meeting.

Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin introduced the Blackmath, the team assisting with the branding, messaging, and creative aspect of PB to help better engage with residents during the kick off year. She noted Blackmath will help develop content to set the vision and tone for the PB campaign and the team will work in parallel with another marketing firm on multicultural outreach with media partners.

Stephanie from Blackmath provided an overview of her firm and then led the Board through a brainstorm session. She asked where board members get information and what channels they may learn about PB? Board members noted local and bi-lingual newspapers both printed and online, neighborhood and main streets newsletters, radio, billboards on public transit buses or stations/ stops, information from community group communications, from City communications and departmental touchpoints in the community (such as tabling or festivals), and the City's social media. Board members suggested outreach efforts such as in neighborhoods like Mattapan, Roxbury, Dorchester, the workforce in Boston, youth, seniors, and residents in public housing, religious communities, spaces where people are naturally engaging and have trust in one another.

Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin led the Board through a presentation of a draft of the PB Equity Guidelines. She provided an overview discussing the context of equity in Boston's PB process, noting that the guidelines were developed with the PB Ordinance and Rulebook's goals and guiding principles in mind, and that equity guidelines will differ based on the local context factors. These guidelines were also developed in parallel with the evaluation questions that will be conducted by MXM over the course of the PB process, in order to evaluate how equity is being met.

She discussed that the PB equity framework would include an equity statement, goals, and guidelines, which would be adopted into the Rulebook, while details for operationalizing PB will be refined. Ms. Lin provided an overview of the research methodology for reviewing equity guidelines in other peer cities and within the City of Boston's department initiatives and programming. The research and key takeaways from this research scan helped inform the development of PB's equity guidelines which were developed in tandem with the Equity and Inclusion Cabinet and the City's legal team. Ms. Lin presented the equity statement, which sets the overall vision for how equity is valued in PB, equity goals, which sets the outcomes and objectives, and equity guidelines, which will be used to operationalize equity at various stages of PB. She then discussed examples on how the guidelines were operationalized during PB stages such as Idea Collection, Visioning Forums, and Funding Projects. She noted that the specific evaluation criteria would need to be developed further with the legal and procurement department to ensure that procurement guidelines are in compliance with City guidelines.

Board member Jarret Wright noted that the first sentence in the second goal should be revised and that the first and third goal slightly overlap and should be rewritten to clarify goal titles and definitions. Board member Betsy Neptune asked to clarify what civic means, as it can mean different things for different people. For example people can be active in civic life such as their religious community or neighborhood groups, but not a part of local government.

Board member Carla Stovell asked a clarifying question about how peer cities Seattle, WA and Louisville, KY PB processes work in comparison to Boston. Director Castelo provided an overview of Seattle's PB implementation process and outcomes, which will not continue after their first cycle. Ms. Lin provided an overview of Louisville's PB process and outlined their process was not a city-wide process, but focused on two specific districts. Board member Jarret

Wright discussed the importance of reviewing evaluation criteria, as this will provide concrete guidelines on how to evaluate proposals, and looks forward to reviewing them when ready.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy opened up the meeting for public comments at 7:45PM. One member of the Better Budget Alliance (BBA) noted that the two topics for tonight's meeting connect to each other and would like to encourage the Office to think about how the PB promotion and outreach can be rooted in social and racial justice and equity goals of PB. For example, how can promotions be concentrated and to connect to communities that have been underfunded and disempowered in the City. Another member of the BBA asked to clarify and name specific priority populations in the equity guidelines, to assist in evaluating if equity goals were reached. She also asked that the equity guidelines for goals one and three be more specific in reframing how the City can build trust with residents and turning decision making over to residents through this process.

Director Castelo asked the Board to provide written comments on the draft equity guidelines to the Office by Tuesday COB to consider before the next board meeting. He noted the meeting minutes will be uploaded early the week after every bi-weekly Board meeting for those to reference. Slides for the upcoming Boarding meeting will be posted as soon as possible on the website prior to each Board meeting.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:51PM

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