

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

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 25, 2024

EOB members present:

Jim Kennedy, Betsy Neptune, Lisa Hy, Jarret Wright, Khalid Mustafa, Esther Weathers, Caroline de Paula

Staff present: Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting; Cynthia Lin, Chief of Staff

Board member Caroline de Paula introduced herself and Jim Kennedy as the co-chairs of the Board. She called to order the External Oversight Board meeting and performed a roll call. Co-chair Jim Kennedy presented an overview of tonight's agenda. Co-chair Caroline de Paula then asked if there were any comments or corrections on last week's meeting minutes. Co-chair Jim Kennedy noted that the meeting minutes reflect the next meeting to be held on May 2nd; however, it should be revised to May 9th. Director Castelo agreed that this is an update that can be fixed. She then called for a motion and Board members approved to adopt the minutes.

Director Castelo shared an update on the schedule of meetings for the next two months. Tonight's meeting will focus on the idea collection toolkit and the evaluation approach. The Office had originally proposed that the next meeting be held on May 2nd; however, it will be shifted to May 9th. Meetings will take place every two weeks. He noted that the topics of upcoming meetings are a road map of the areas the Board will be discussing before PB implementation, but that some topics may shift order depending on work progress.

Chief of Staff Cynthia Lin introduced the Northeastern University Center for Design, the team assisting with the development of the PB Idea Collection Toolkit. Michael Arnold Mages introduced himself and Estefania Ciliotta Chehade as the co-leads on this project, both of which focus their research on designing PB processes in various contexts. Mr. Arnold Mages provided an overview of the Center for Design and context about the toolkit. The toolkit is meant to support the network of community partners to host meetings in a way that is generative. It will focus on people and understanding their priorities and values and should be a flexible resource guide that organizations can adapt to their specific needs. He noted that this is still in development and looking forward to comments from the Board.

Mr. Arnold Mages provided an overview of the meeting format including the arrival, opening remarks and overview of PB, small group deliberations, creative bridge card game, idea submission, and social departure. Mr. Arnold Mages and Ms. Ciliotta Chehade walked through the various toolkit elements and noted that two (2) training sessions would be held for meeting workshop facilitators to get an overview of PB and practice using the toolkit.

Board member Betsy Neptune asked if the card game would be available in multiple languages. She noted that explaining the PB process will be a challenge and asked if there was a clear way to present this at workshops. Mr. Arnold Mages stated that the game and worksheet materials will be prepared in multiple languages. Ms. Ciliotta Chehade explained that there will be a presentation at the beginning of the meeting to provide PB goals and process. Director Castelo noted that the materials will be shared with the Board ahead of time for feedback. He noted that the training will be recorded and put on the website for reference, especially for those hosting their own workshops outside of the contracted community partners.

Board member Jarret Wright supports the idea of not prescribing how the process goes, however meetings should feel the same. Director Castelo clarified that there will be clear expectations set with the Community Partners on the city-sponsored meetings, however individuals may be able to host their own meetings with the toolkit. Mr. Arnold Mages added that there will be Community Partners expectations, however each will conduct their own meetings to some degree and it is welcomed.

Board member Esther Weathers asked to clarify the learning objectives for community residents and how that is being threaded with the overall PB pedagogy in the workshops. She also asked for clarification around the generating ideas based on cares. Ms. Ciliotta Chehade shared that the workshop will provide a brief overview of PB, but will not focus heavily on the details before diving into the idea generation process. Mr. Arnold Mages added that the intent of the workshop is to allow residents to understand their agency in the process, what they can do tonight, and what is the process. Ms. Ciliotta Chehade responded to the second question, stating that the team tried to frame “needs” in a more positive manner and connected this during the creative bridge card game.

Board member Lisa Hy asked to make the train facilitator workshop a requirement for community partners. She also suggested that the Board attend these meetings in July to observe and report back as well as answer any questions. Director Castelo agreed to both points. Board member Betsy Neptune asked how we are ensuring consistency in community workshops but allowing for creativity. Director Castelo stated that we have a set of objectives that the group will commit to in terms of attendance and outcomes, but still allow for flexibility. Ms. Ciliotta Chehade suggested being in communication with community partners and seeing what works best for them in facilitating workshops.

Director Castelo introduced the MXM Research Group, the team assisting the evaluation for the PB process. Evan Kuras shared that the goal of the presentation is to share the vision for evaluation and seek feedback to inform its final design. He provided an overview of the firm, which specializes in thinking about the human experiences and relationships as part of evaluation in their approach. He shared that the evaluation is intended to learn about the effectiveness of PB during its pilot year and inform and improve future PB cycles. Mr. Kuras shared the specific evaluation questions that the team will be exploring and the quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods that will be used. He shared a timeline of how the evaluation team’s work would overlap with the overall PB timeline, which would be broken up into three phases of Scoping and Design, Round One Learning and Reporting (focused on idea collection campaign), and Round 2 Learning and Reporting (focused on Visioning forums and Voting).

For the next two months, the evaluation team will be reviewing documents, meeting with stakeholders, finalizing the evaluation plan and developing data collection instruments and documentation plan.

Board member Khalid Mustafa asked what would the data collected be evaluated against? Mr. Kuras noted that this is a pilot year and there is no comparison year available, however the Board will be instrumental in helping make sense of the data. Director Castelo added that the evaluation proposed focuses on four (4) evaluation questions that we would utilize as a baseline to build upon for future years.

Board member Betsy Neptune noted that every city has different contexts, however we should consider evaluating comparable cities. Mr. Kuras noted that the evaluation questions were structured to utilize the recommended questions other cities have utilized in their evaluation processes.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy opened up the meeting for public comments at 7:30PM. One member of the public agreed with several comments related to workshop logistics noted by the Board, such as required facilitator training, moderator guides and suggested thinking through the meeting format and pedagogy. He suggested that the team think differently about ways to allow residents to diversify their ideas that are not necessarily organized by category.

Co-Chair Jim Kennedy adjourned the meeting at 7:35PM

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