



City of San Antonio

Legislation Details (With Text)

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In control: Community Health and Equity Committee

On agenda: 11/26/2018

Title: A briefing on the City's enhanced public participation efforts. [Carlos J. Contreras, Assistant City Manager; Jeff Coyle, Director, Government & Public Affairs]

Sponsors:

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments:

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
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DEPARTMENT: Government & Public Affairs

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Jeff Coyle

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: All

SUBJECT: Public Participation Recommendations

SUMMARY:

An update on the status of enhanced public participation efforts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In February 2018, City Councilwoman Ana Sandoval filed a Council Consideration Request to develop principles and standards for each City campaign to follow in order to create consistency, clear expectations and ample opportunity for the public to provide input prior to Council action.

The City's Government & Public Affairs Department (GPA), which oversees communications and City-wide campaigns on behalf of the organization, led the effort to respond to the CCR through the following scope of work:

1. Assessing current public participation techniques utilized by departments
2. Convening a cross-departmental working group to establish guiding principles
3. Researching best practices
4. Reviewing and making recommendations to improve the Citizens to be Heard process

5. Developing a tool for updating the community on specific issues

What is public participation?

For the purpose of the principles and standards addressed in this directive, the City defines public participation as “any process that obtains and considers public input in a decision prior to taking action.” Public participation is a two-way communication with the goal of engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. Public participation campaigns differ from public awareness and education campaigns, which do not include the opportunity for the public to influence the decision or outcome of a policy, program or action. However, both campaign types utilize various marketing and public relations tactics to promote and support the effort, such as print advertising, social media and news releases.

Engaged residents are fundamental to the health of City government. The successful development of policy and implementation of City programs depends on meaningful civic engagement, which engenders trust and accountability between the community and the government that serves it. The City of San Antonio offers many opportunities for residents to provide input on City policies, programs and initiatives. The Government & Public Affairs Department has worked across the City organization to implement public participation principles, minimum standards and data collection and reporting.

Meaningful public participation follows these guiding principles:

TRANSPARENT- *Be open and clear by communicating the decision-making process to the public, including the role of public in the process, what type of input is sought and how the input will be used; provide a public record of the input received and the range of views and ideas expressed.*

INCLUSIVE- *Engage a broad range of stakeholders, with particular emphasis on those who do not normally take part in City public participation processes; make every effort to ensure that stakeholder groups do not feel left out of the process.*

TIMELY- *Seek public input well ahead of key decisions; engage the public proactively.*

ACCESSIBLE- *Ensure that anyone who wants to participate in the process can provide input; overcome barriers to participation, whether they are geographical, physical, socioeconomic or language barriers.*

CONVENIENT- *Make it as easy as possible to engage with the City; provide multiple opportunities for the public to provide input; when possible, meet people where they are instead of only requiring them to show up to a public meeting; utilize the power of digital communications while being mindful of technology gaps.*

INFORMATIVE- *Educate through public participation; use the opportunity to help people understand how the City organization works and to enhance both the public's and the City's understanding of issues, policies and challenges; strive to ensure that opinions are informed with facts.*

RESPECTFUL- *Consider all input received, including differing viewpoints, while balancing the interests of all stakeholders*

CONTINUOUS- *Treat every input provided by the public as another step toward a more engaged*

community by developing the infrastructure to foster sustained participation; residents who make the effort to participate should be continually engaged in future efforts; residents who want to share an opinion with their City organization should be able to do so at any given time.

MEANINGFUL- *Ensure that public input is appropriately considered in the decision-making process; use public participation to improve City programs, policies and ordinances.*

RESPONSIVE- *Communicate outcomes to all who participated and provided input*

ISSUE:

In June 2018, GPA presented a summary of public participation recommendations to the Governance Committee. The recommendations are as follows:

1. All City department public participation campaigns should be branded SASpeakUp going forward, barring any special circumstances. (e.g. SASpeakUp: Let's talk about scooters; SASpeakUp: Let's talk about the airport.). GPA rebranded SASpeakUp and collaborated with ITSD to launch a one-stop SASpeakUp website, www.saspeakup.com <<http://www.saspeakup.com>>, for all public meetings and input opportunities.
2. Public meetings, which often achieve low attendance that is not necessarily representative of the entire community, should serve as a supplement to any input opportunity, not as the foundation for public participation.
3. A clear timeline should be established for each opportunity, including a two-week minimum input period. Results of the campaign should be reported in the standardized format and provided prior to any City Council briefing or action at the committee or meeting level.
4. Each campaign should utilize each of the City's existing communications resources, barring any special circumstances.
5. All surveys and associated materials must be printed and available online, made available in English and Spanish and ask (optional) demographic questions to ensure representativeness.
6. All contact information gathered throughout the campaign should be added to the City's central database and used to communicate campaign outcomes and new input opportunities.

Since the June presentation to Governance, GPA has implemented the above minimum standards and is working diligently with department directors and communications staff to encourage compliance.

GPA, ITSD and the Office of the City Clerk have also enhanced the sign up form for Citizens to Be Heard by adding optional fields for phone numbers and email addresses, translating all forms and fields to Spanish and including a checkbox to indicate whether a Spanish interpreter is needed. City Council and City departments continue to receive a record of all CTBH comments, and departments follow up with individual speakers, as needed.

Next Steps

GPA has convened a working group that includes ITSD and the City Attorney's Office to develop and implement recommendations for the City's digital engagement strategy. To date, the group has met six times to

establish short-, mid- and long-term goals and benchmarks for the roll out of the public participation, social media and digital engagement plans.

The City is driven by a desire for continuous improvement. We are in the process of developing a public participation Administrative Directive, analyzing the cost-effectiveness of broadcasting and/or livestreaming Council Committee meetings and Board and Commission meetings, producing a Citizens to be Heard FAQ document and How-To video for the public, as well as exploring other potential technological enhancements.

ALTERNATIVES:

This briefing is for informational purposes only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There are no fiscal impacts, as this is a briefing only.

RECOMMENDATION:

This briefing is for informational purposes only.