



City of San Antonio

Legislation Details (With Text)

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Type: Resolution
In control: City Council A Session
On agenda: 1/17/2019
Title: Resolution adopting guiding principles that enhance public participation in the City of San Antonio.
[Carlos Contreras, Assistant City Manager; Jeff Coyle, Director, Government & Public Affairs]
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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
1/17/2019	1	City Council A Session		

DEPARTMENT: Government & Public Affairs

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Jeff Coyle

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: All

SUBJECT: A resolution adopting Public Participation Guiding Principles for the City of San Antonio.

SUMMARY:

Approval of a resolution adopting a set of guiding principles to enhance public participation in the City of San Antonio.

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 CCR and the recommended guiding principles went before the Governance Committee in June 2018 and the Community Health & Equity Committee received an update on November 26, 2018.

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

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:

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

RESPONSIVE - Communicate outcomes to all who participated and provided input

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

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.

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.

ISSUE:

GPA will support these guiding principles by implementing a set of recommendations for each City of San Antonio community input opportunity.

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. Departments should provide a variety of options for the public to provide input at their convenience. Public meetings should serve as a supplement to any input opportunity, rather than 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 initial presentation to the Governance Committee meeting in June, GPA implemented the above guiding principles and is working diligently with department directors and communications staff to encourage compliance.

GPA, the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) and the Office of the City Clerk have also enhanced the sign up form for Citizens to Be Heard (CTBH) 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.

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 aforementioned guiding principles were recommended for approval by the entire City Council during the Community Health & Equity Committee meeting on November 26, 2018.

ALTERNATIVES:

City Council could decide not to pass the proposed resolution supporting the adoption of public participation guiding principles.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This resolution poses no direct fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the resolution adopting Public Participation Guiding Principles for the City of San Antonio.