

DATE: March 18, 2024

TO: Mayor Wheeler
Commissioner Gonzalez
Commissioner Mapps
Commissioner Rubio
Commissioner Ryan
Chief Administrative Officer Michael Jordan

FROM: Government Transition Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Recommended Improvements to Community Engagement

Introduction

The Government Transition Advisory Committee's workplan supports service delivery and policy improvements in the mayor-council form of government, as well as public engagement in both areas.

The Transition Team has also requested our feedback on the City's proposed approach to the four key disciplines, which include community engagement. Without efforts to reform community engagement through a systemic approach, supported at the executive level, we do not see a clear path to fulfilling the promise of an inclusive, transparent and accountable new government. We welcome the opportunity to advise council and the Team in these endeavors and look forward to your response.

Scope

Despite the charter's mandate and the City's aspirations to engage the community, a lack of comprehensive, tangible public involvement in our new government concerns our members. We observe that current efforts are consistently disjointed, ad hoc and often ineffective. Community engagement is key to fulfilling the stated potential of charter reform. Furthermore, the transition itself is a fleeting opportunity to redefine community involvement in Portland, as well as public opinion of the city itself.

Recommendations

We believe council must take the following steps to implement effective community engagement by January 1, 2025:

- Consider hiring an engagement officer as soon as possible, because currently no staff are charged with completing this work.
- Define community engagement essential to ongoing transition-related topics, such as Civic Life’s work, the role of neighborhood district coalitions and in-district offices. This work is currently unaccounted for.
- Assess the effectiveness of the community engagement function, by establishing clear measures of success; ensure implementation of lasting change, via legislative and policy actions.
- Allocate appropriate funding levels, considering the full extent of necessary engagement.
- Integrate the Community Engagement discipline with the disciplines of Communications, Equity, and Sustainability. Consistency, coordination, and integration among the four disciplines is essential.
- Ensure that community engagement is embedded in our new government’s culture, throughout the organization.

Conclusion

As “the main public engagement body for the transition,” the GTAC is a natural participant in all four disciplines: Community Engagement, Communications, Equity, and Sustainability.

- Community Engagement is at the heart of GTAC’s Purpose, Roles and Responsibilities.
- GTAC adds value with our individual and collective expertise, lived experience and engagement work on the transition.
- GTAC offers a credible way to increase the transparency of this work and to disseminate ideas for community response.
- We maintain the objectivity to identify issues that require clarification, such as the role of the future Engagement Officer.