

AAQoL Budget Recommendation #1 – Mental Health Education & Awareness Campaign

Recommendation Description

This recommendation would create a mental health awareness and education campaign targeted to the Asian-Pacific Islander (API) community in the City of Austin. The campaign would focus on (1) reducing the stigma of mental health issues within our community, (2) how to identify mental health issues, and (3) connecting people to mental health support systems.

City Department

Austin Public Health (APH)

Amount

TBD based on additional guidance from APH

Justification

Data from the City's Asian American Quality of Life Initiative (Quantitative Study) showed higher levels of mental distress and serious mental illness across all of Austin's largest Asian American ethnic groups when compared to the general U.S. population. In addition, these groups also exhibited low utilization levels of psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health professionals (counselors, marriage therapists, social workers).

Information gathered from two AAQoL budget community engagement events spanning the past six months also showed a need and high priority level for increased education and awareness of mental health issues in the API community.

Alignment with Council Strategic Priorities

Health & Environment: Accessibility to quality health care services, both physical and mental

AAQoL Budget Recommendation #2 – Transportation to City Events Pilot

Recommendation Description

This recommendation would create a pilot program to provide transportation of city residents to Asian American Resource Center (AARC) events as well as other city events. The pilot program would pick up individuals and groups from areas of the city with high concentrations of Asian Americans. The pilot would utilize existing City resources, where feasible, including the two AARC shuttles and Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) drivers. The pilot program would provide transportation to six AARC/City events in FY 2020 and would test pick up locations consisting of homes and apartment complexes in different parts of the city.

City Department

Parks and Recreation Department (PARC)

Justification

The AAQoL Advisory Commission has received numerous comments from our two budget community engagement events regarding the difficulty of getting to and from AARC/City events from certain parts of town. Attending cultural events helps reduce the feeling of social isolation, especially with seniors.

Creating a transportation pilot program targeting seniors and others in areas of the City with high concentrations of Asian Americans would provide data on community needs, interest, and locations required to provide justification for a future, permanent transportation program.

Amount

TBD based on additional guidance from PARC staff

Alignment with Council Strategic Priorities

Mobility: Accessibility to and equity of multi-modal transportation choices

Culture & Lifelong Learning: Vibrancy and sustainability of creative industry ecosystem

AAQoL Budget Recommendation #3 - Install room divider for AARC Auditorium

Description

There is a high demand for meeting and activity spaces at the Asian American Resource Center on Cameron Road. They currently have a small conference room and small classrooms, as well as an auditorium. Although there is a Master Plan process underway to expand the Center capacity, that won't be implemented for 5 – 15 years. In order to accommodate more programs, one solution would be to use one-time funding to install a divider in the auditorium to increase the availability of medium sized meeting/program space. A divider that preserves the ability to also use the entire auditorium is ideal.

Justification

In 2017, AARC was able to use one-time funding to extend operating hours to accommodate more programs. As a result, the number of programs and participants increased. In 2018 there was a significant drop in revenue from programs and participants.

We know from 2017 data that there continues to be a high demand for additional programming at AARC, but extending hours of operation is no longer feasible. The divider would provide more flexibility in meeting the needs of the community. It would provide different space options for different activities. Additional staff was hired in 2019, including a full-time permanent Marketing Rep, putting AARC in a better position to identify new groups and offer more options for event collaboration and other programs.

City Department

Austin Parks & Recreation Department (PARC)

Amount

\$200,000

Alignment with Council Strategic Priorities

Strategic Outcome 1: CULTURE & LIFELONG LEARNING

- Quality of cultural venues, events, programs, and resources
- Quality of lifelong learning opportunities

Strategic Outcome 2: GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS FOR ALL

- Condition of City facilities and technology
- Public Engagement and Participation
- Equity of City Programs and Resource Allocation

Strategic Outcome 3: HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

- Accessibility to quality health care services
- Accessibility to quality parks, trails, and recreational opportunities

AAQoL Budget Recommendation #4 - Create an Immigrant Affairs Office with at least one full time staff person

Description

We recommend that the City of Austin create an Immigrant Affairs office, with at least one full-time staff member. This office would act as a central location for information about city services and programs that are available to immigrants. It would also be tasked with outreach to the various immigrant communities to build trust, and collect feedback about the City and how its programs and departments are serving the immigrant community. This would increase efficiency by creating a “one-stop-shop” for community members and for departments who have questions/concerns about how their services and programs are being accessed by immigrants in Austin, and help avoid any duplication of services. It also would make City services and programs more effective by ensuring that immigrant community members are aware of those services and programs and creating a direct line for feedback regarding their experiences with said services. The office would increase equity by ensuring that the voice of a vulnerable population is elevated, and it would also catch the city up with the other major cities in Texas who are already serving their immigrant communities through an established Immigrant Affairs office.

Justification

We have heard from the community, including in our community budget forum, that immigrant and refugee communities are underrepresented in policy and budget discussions. Additionally, immigrant

service providers at our budget forum described having no knowledge of the various City services, grants, and programs available to the immigrant community in Austin. The decentralized nature of these programs within the City government is creating a barrier to access for immigrant community members.

We need an office with a city staff person who can identify how the immigrant communities are affected by city policies, how well they are served by city services, and identify gaps in service. We also need a person who can direct outreach efforts to the immigrant communities. A person in such a position can provide some oversight of city services and outreach to immigrants, help ensure there isn't duplication, and coordinate what is now a disjointed effort to reach immigrants. Such a person can also ensure that as federal immigration policies change, such as the upcoming change on public charge rules, and as state policies change, such as with the implementation of SB4, City departments are aware of such changes and can tailor their policies accordingly.

Every major city in Texas has an Immigrant Affairs executive and/or department. As a volunteer commission, we have tried to take on that role, but it's not an adequate approach. As we meet only once a month, we cannot timely respond to emergencies, such as how to coordinate with other Texas cities on an immigration influx. We cannot participate nationally in policy discussions, as with urgent calls to action by Cities United for Action, of which Austin is a member. As such, Austin is not a sufficient part of the national discussion.

While Austin may need more than one person to staff an Office of Immigrant Affairs, as many cities around the country have full offices, at this time we are recommending at least one full-time staff person who can then inform the Commission on Immigrant Affairs and the City Council on the needs of the department.

There are over 70 languages spoken in Austin. The City has identified 7 priority languages. Immigrants account for approximately 19% of the city's population.

The City Council in 2018 directed the City Manager to review Immigrant Affairs Offices in other cities in Texas, and to determine how Austin can most effectively do the same.

Alignment with Council Priorities

Strategic Outcome 1: Government that Works for All

- Condition of City Facilities and Technology
- Satisfaction with City Services
- Public Engagement and Participation
- Equity of City Programs and Resource Allocation

Strategic Outcome 2: Safety

- Fair Administration of Justice

Strategic Outcome 3: Health

- Accessibility to quality health care services
- Accessibility to quality parks, trails, and rec opportunities
- Food security and nutrition

Strategic Outcome 4: Culture and Lifelong Learning

- Quality of cultural venues, events, programs, and resources
- Appreciation, respect and welcoming of all people and cultures
- Honoring and preservation of historical and ethnic heritage

Strategic Outcome 5: Mobility

- Accessibility to transportation choices

Strategic Outcome 6: Economic Opportunity & Affordability

- Housing availability and affordability
- Ability to improve your home

AAQoL Budget Recommendation #5 - Budget for Translation and Interpretation Services

Description

We recommend that all City Departments budget some dollars in the new Translation and Interpretation object codes. This would force Departments to make an assessment of their need for translation and interpretation services. That assessment will be evaluated as those object codes are used to record expenses during the year, improving accuracy in future years. If no budget is included in these object codes, Department staff may be unaware that they exist and tracking of those expenses would be compromised.

Justification

In recent years the City has focused on increased awareness of the importance of language access to meet community needs. The Language Access Coordinator was created. The City website is language accessible. Vendors have been identified to translate documents and the City is working on identifying certified language interpreters for Department use. There are new budget codes for Translation and Interpretation services. The recommendation is for Departments to use these new codes to plan for translation and interpretation services.

There are over 70 languages spoken in Austin. The City has identified 7 priority languages. Immigrants account for approximately 19% of the city's population. According to the 2017 Travis County American

Community Survey (ACS), 36% of the Hispanic population and 36% of the Asian population speak English “less than very well”.

The City Equity Office developed an Equity Assessment Tool that has been piloted in a few Departments. This tool can provide more specific data that can be measured over time.

City Department

Multiple

Amount

None – Within existing funds

Alignment with Council Priorities

Strategic Outcome 1: SAFETY

- Fair administration of justice
- Timeliness and quality of Emergency Response
- Public compliance with laws and regulations

Strategic Outcome 2: GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS FOR ALL

- Satisfaction with City Services
- Public Engagement and Participation
- Equity of City Programs and Resource Allocation

Strategic Outcome 3: MOBILITY

- Accessibility to transportation choices

Strategic Outcome 4: HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

- Accessibility to quality health care services
- Accessibility to quality parks, trails, and rec opportunities
- Climate change and community resilience