



**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**FROM:** Ed Van Eenoo, Deputy Chief Financial Officer *EW*

**DATE:** April 25, 2016

**SUBJECT:** FY 2016-17 Public Engagement Plan

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The Budget Office is strongly committed to making the City's budget as transparent and accessible as possible for our residents and stakeholders. As part of this commitment, we actively seek resident feedback about their budget priorities and preferences as part of the City's annual budget development process. Many of our past public engagement efforts have been recognized for excellence, including the Budget-in-a-Box tool and the Budget Basics Video. Several of this year's data-driven public information and transparency efforts are already available for review online at [www.austintexas.gov/finance](http://www.austintexas.gov/finance). These include the results of the Annual Citizen Survey and an updated Budget Basics Video.

For FY 2016-17, residents will have opportunities to provide input through a new interactive online budget simulator, by participating in a Telephone Town Hall meeting on April 27<sup>th</sup>, by attending one or more Board and Commission meetings, or by signing up to speak at one of the several public hearings on the City's budget, tax rate, and utility rates. In addition to these efforts, outlined in more detail below, staff from the Budget Office and Public Information Office are available to assist with individual council member's town hall meetings on the topic of the City's budget.

#### **Austin Budget Simulator – Available Now until July 15**

The focal point of this year's budget public engagement process is an online, interactive budget simulator available here: [www.austintexas.gov/dollarsandsense](http://www.austintexas.gov/dollarsandsense). This tool allows participants to choose how to fund a variety of city services and shows in real time how those choices impact their combined annual tax and utility bill. Staff designed this tool to be accessible and inclusive, offering a version in English and Spanish, as well as, ensuring the tool is compatible with screen-reading technology. The tool is also designed to be fully compatible with all types of computers, tablet devices, and smart phones. To address concerns of internet accessibility and usage, staff will be in attendance at numerous community events with iPads, providing an opportunity to complete the Austin Budget Simulator onsite. The list of the community events to be attended by staff and a link to the Austin Budget Simulator can be found at

[www.austintexas.gov/DollarsAndSense](http://www.austintexas.gov/DollarsAndSense). Finally, the budget simulator tool will be available to residents at all Austin Public Library, encouraging free access on public computers.

### **Telephone Town Hall Meeting – April 27<sup>th</sup>**

The Budget Office is partnering with the Corporate Public Information team to host a telephone town hall meeting on April 27<sup>th</sup> starting at 7:00PM. Several thousand Austin households, including those with only cell phones, will be randomly selected and called to encourage participation. In addition, the program is televised on ATXN and residents can join in the conversation by calling, texting, or tweeting questions and comments throughout the broadcast.

### **Boards and Commissions Meetings and Public Hearings – May through September**

Department staff will have the opportunity to present their financial forecast information at the City's various boards and commissions meetings throughout May, June, and July. The stakeholder discussions will be included in the Annual Community Engagement Report. In addition, in the month of August and September, seven public hearings are held for public discussion on the tax rate, utility rates, and the City budget.

### **Council District Outreach Support – May through August**

If you are planning to host a budget-specific meeting or include a budget discussion at a district town hall meeting, staff is available to assist in facilitating a discussion or answering general questions. Please contact Lara Foss to request staff attendance at an outreach meeting in your district.

A Public Engagement Report detailing the results of these engagement efforts and the public feedback received will be provided to Council in early August. An array of resources is already available to assist each Council Office throughout your decision-making process. The Council Budget Question (CBQ) site is a public tool to request any budget and finance-related information. Brad Sinclair will continue to be your liaison in the Council Budget Question request process. You can contact him directly at [Brad.Sinclair@austintexas.gov](mailto:Brad.Sinclair@austintexas.gov) or 512-974-2735. Another avenue, Austin Finance Online, contains a wealth of historical budget information and data. This includes annual budgets from FY 2001-2016, monthly and quarterly finance reports, downloadable budget data by line item (through the FY 2016 second quarter), annual performance reports, citizen survey data, public engagement reports, and Capital Improvement Plans (CIP).

cc: City Manager  
Assistant City Managers  
Chief of Staff  
Chief Financial Officer