



Date: October 18, 2021
To: Open Government Partnership
From: City of Austin, Office of Innovation
Daniel Culotta, Acting Chief Innovation Officer
Re: Action Plan 2 Completion Memo

The City of Austin is pleased to present for your consideration a summary of our community's completed Open Government Partnership [Action Plan 2](#).

Our city and civil society leadership wish to express their gratitude and appreciation for the continued opportunity to participate in this unique community of practice, as we all strive to deliver good governance.

Background: OGP in Austin

Austin joined OGP's first cohort of 15 local government members (OGP Local Pioneers) in 2016. We co-created and conducted our first one-year OGP Action Plan (AP1) in 2017, with five city projects designed to further OGP values. OGP provided an Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) assessment for AP1, including the honor of deeming the city's budgeting Equity Assessment Tool an exceptional "Star" commitment.¹ Austin then co-created and conducted a two-year Action Plan (AP2) from September 2019 to August 2021, this time with four city projects.

Action Plan 1: Recommendations

The IRM AP1 assessment provided valuable guidance and feedback that shaped our AP2. IRM recommendations included to consider continuing work on some AP1 commitments, such as homelessness; provide more structure to the co-creation process; and strive for leadership continuity.² Our own lessons learned included the value of framing OGP as a resource, not just a requirement, and the importance of framing open governance as an approach to our work, not just a reason for our work.

¹ IRM: Austin Progress Report 2017, at 30. See https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2001/01/OGP_Star-Reforms_2018.pdf

² IRM: Austin Progress Report 2017, at 6-7.

Action Plan 2: Commitments Context & Scope

We co-created AP2 with community during fall 2018. The city's OGP Lead Agency, the City of Austin Innovation Office, under the guidance of Chief Innovation Officer Kerry O'Connor, led listening sessions with city departments, committees, and city-convened meetings. Simultaneously, community partners led listening sessions with their memberships and collaborators. From these discussions emerged four clear projects with both strong civic need and committed city resources: climate resilience, displacement, homelessness court services contracting, and public safety data.

Our AP2 plan launched with strengthened leadership continuity, staffing, and outreach – each commitment identified specific people at the city and in the community to act as continuous structured conveners for commitment collaboration. We welcomed OGP staff to Austin as part of underscoring OGP's valuable advisory expertise, and supported departments and civil society partners in their new role as commitment leads. Despite our planning, however, 2020 brought unanticipated challenges.

Significant Events: Covid & Climate

The Covid-19 pandemic began in January 2020. By March, the virus reached Austin, and city operations shifted into emergency response. Hospital admissions spiked in July and December, with lock downs for each surge that prohibited in-person gatherings. The first vaccines distributed in January 2021 brought a return to limited in-person collaborations, but the Covid-Delta variant is emerging as the next threat.

A second shock occurred in February 2021. Winter Storm Uri brought unprecedented freezing weather and snow to North America. In Austin, the storm took natural gas, electricity, and water offline. Thousands went days without utilities or access to resources during extreme cold weather, which killed over 100 people.

The pandemic and storm had major impacts on the health, employment, and housing stability for Austin's city employees and community members. City staff shifted roles to provide emergency response support. Organizations closed their doors or revised their purpose. People left Austin to shelter with family.

These stressors and AP2 influences are not yet resolved -- evictions from storm damaged housing and the third Covid spike are just beginning.

Admirably, our OGP champions pivoted and persevered, demonstrating their tireless commitment and dedication to accountability, transparency, and civil society. Their efforts demonstrated resilience and fostered new collaborations, and simultaneous Black Lives Matter marches created a new shared awareness of the societal inequities.

We wish to express our gratitude to the champions that contributed to each of our four commitments, despite these significant life changing events.

Commitments Overview

Commitment 1: Community Climate Resilience Pilot

Commitment 1 strove to co-create a "unified community vision for city owned land and assets that guides public and private investment and stewardship of the regional green space network in Southeast Austin".³ Goals included fostering transparency and civic engagement; furthering city goals for health, environment, safety, and good government; and supporting a sustainable city and community.⁴

Overview:

The City's Office of Sustainability and community group Go! Austin/Vamos! Austin (GAVA) shared concerns about the southeast Austin neighborhoods traversed by Onion and Williamson Creeks. The area is part of the Eastern Crescent -- a portion of Austin's geography home to our most vibrant African American and Latinx communities, but also an area that endured catastrophic flooding in 2013 and 2015 within the two creek watersheds. This mutual city and community focus formed the foundation for the City of Austin's AP2 Commitment 1.

Actions:

The commitment's implementation began in 2019 with an accountability cadence of biweekly meetings for community and city department representatives, led by the Office of Sustainability's Marc Coudert. Known as the "Community Strength and Health Equity for a Resilient Southeast Austin" effort, meeting attendance

³ City of Austin Action Plan 2, at 5.

⁴ See City of Austin's Strategic Plan 2023 goals of Health & Environment, Safety, and Government that Works for All; United Nations Sustainable Cities and Communities goal; and OGP transparency and civic engagement values.

grew to include the Watershed Protection Department, Public Health Department, Communications & Technology Management Department, Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, and the city's Flood Mitigation Action Team. GAVA's community activations folded in guidance from the University of Texas, the Social Determinants of Health Consortium of clinical partners, Dell Medical School, and grassroots faith-based neighborhood groups. GAVA secured climate resilience-focused funding to make this commitment part of a new sharpened focus for the organization. A community Hackathon in 2020 also focused on how to address transportation, pollution, weather, and health in southeast Austin. City Council supported the work in 2019 with Resolution 20190509-019⁵, calling for the creation of a Chief Resilience Officer position and heat and air quality studies, and in 2021 Resolution 20210127-056⁶, focusing on watershed flood risk for Onion and Williamson Creek.

Results:

As a result of city and community focus on these life-threatening environmental issues, the City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department has revised its mission and purpose to focus explicitly on climate resilience and equity, making it the city's lead dedicated agency for ensuring community accountability for safety, livability, and resilience for all our waterway-adjacent neighborhoods, including on Williamson and Onion Creek. This is reflected in the Watershed department's commitment to infuse equity into their upcoming strategic plan update.

Commitment 2: Inclusion in Court Contracting

Commitment 2 built on AP1's Homelessness Advisory Committee of Austin to co-create "strategies to maximize the community court [homeless] end-user's experience in services purchased on their behalf".⁷ Goals included fostering accountability and civic engagement; furthering city goals for economic opportunity & affordability; and reducing inequalities.⁸

Overview:

The City's Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) is not part of the city's court system, but rather a diversion program that gives residents experiencing

⁵ <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=319519>.

⁶ <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=354296>.

⁷ Action Plan 2, at 8.

⁸ See City of Austin's Strategic Plan 2023 goals of Economic Opportunity & Affordability; United Nation's Reduce Inequalities goal; and OGP accountability and civic engagement values.

homelessness the opportunity to resolve misdemeanor charges like public intoxication by agreeing to participate in health and social service programs.

DACC's Assistant Director, Robert Kingham, saw a need to include people experiencing homelessness in shaping the programs they receive. He presented his concept at the 2018 Feedback Labs Summit in Washington, DC, where civil society representatives from the Sunlight Foundation and the Open Contracting Partnership expressed interest in providing public accountability and their expertise to the project. This mutual city and community focus formed the foundation for Commitment 2.

Actions:

DACC looked first to the community accountability model created in the City's AP1: the Homelessness Advisory Committee of Austin (HACA). DACC became HACA's sponsoring department and took on the planning and support for the committee's biweekly meetings. The group rebranded as the Austin Homelessness Advisory Committee (AHAC).⁹ Local civil society organization Open Austin joined the co-creation process. DACC revised the city contracting process to include AHAC and require their scoring on contracts related to personal storage, supportive/transitional housing, and housing support services.¹⁰

"As a member of AHAC, I have a voice. I have that connection to city services, city leadership, to actually change things for the people of Austin."

-- Steve Potter, resident & member Austin Homeless Advisory Committee

Results:

This commitment empowered people experiencing homelessness to influence city contracting and have a tangible influence on city purchasing.

⁹ AHAC website, at <https://austininnovation.wixsite.com/solveforhomelessness/ahac>. The name change intended to remove confusion with another local government entity that already used the HACA acronym.

¹⁰ "A role in city contracting for people experiencing homelessness", City of Austin OGP Website, <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/posts/3691463-a-role-in-city-contracting-for-people-experiencing-homelessness>.

Since 2019, AHAC has participated in 3 solicitation processes, awarding over \$9M of funding for local homeless service providers to assist individuals in achieving and maintaining long-term, stable housing. DACC codified this process for all future solicitations, ensuring AHAC continues to participate in solicitations' planning and evaluation phase. AHAC also participates in regular performance reviews of DACC-funded homeless service contracts.

AHAC has become a critical focus group for a range of other city service providers across departments, and now affects equity and service decisions across the city. DACC's dedication to this commitment also stood the test of Covid; DACC did not cancel a single AHAC meeting during the pandemic lock-down, providing continuity of support for participants in the city's most difficult time. In spring 2021, OGP featured AHAC member Steve Potter in a video celebrating this commitment and community voice in decision making.¹¹

Commitment 3: Public Participation in City Anti-Displacement Efforts

Commitment 3 is part of the city's greater anti-displacement strategy, seeking to help residents stay in their homes by "improving online and in person access to housing services".¹² Goals included fostering transparency and civic engagement; furthering city goals for economic opportunity & affordability; and reducing inequalities.¹³

"The i-Team's support in prioritizing anti-displacement recommendations has resulted in a new division focused on preventing displacement and the modification of the Housing and Planning Department's mission to include displacement prevention."

Overview:

In 2019, the Department of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development (now the Housing and Planning Department, hereafter referred to as Housing) received over 300 recommendations for how to help residents remain in their homes and maintain and grow affordable housing options in the face of rapidly increasing gentrification and development. However, staff lacked a strategy for identifying which

¹¹ OGP Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zdRilWU_Tk (2021).

¹² AP2, at 10.

¹³ See City of Austin's Strategic Plan 2023 goals of Economic Opportunity & Affordability; United Nation's Reduce Inequalities goal; and OGP accountability and civic engagement values.

**-- Erica Leak, Officer, City of Austin
Housing and Planning Department**

approaches would work best in which neighborhoods.

At the same time, the Austin Community Design & Development Center (ACDDC, now known as Community Powered Workshop) and Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation issued their "Right to Remain"¹⁴ study of the Montopolis neighborhood, in an effort to identify the unique needs and available resources for housing insecure households in this Eastern Crescent neighborhood. This mutual city and community focus on the Montopolis community formed the foundation for the City of Austin's AP2 Commitment 3.

Actions:

The Innovation Office provided a Bloomberg Foundation-funded innovation team ("i-Team") to staff Housing's work on this commitment. Almost immediately, the effort faced a pivot. Mayor and Council took a city-wide view to growing affordability issues. Housing responded with a focused assessment of internal capacity for delivering on the Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint's affordable housing goals and harnessing Housing Trust Fund construction dollars across Austin.

As a result of this change, OGP community partner involvement shifted; the revised direction prompted a new city-wide call for civil society engagement as part of the Displacement Mitigation Action Accelerator program. A lesson learned from this type of mandated shift is to socialize the shift with initial partners more actively; for example, the City could have maintained better lines of communication with our OGP partner, ACCDC, across the changing directives that created a different commitment environment.

The internal focus shift did result in a needed asset -- in the fall of 2019 the i-Team released a Neighborhood Stabilization Strategy Tool. The tool focused on providing decision-making data support for city decisions to benefit homeowners¹⁵ and renters¹⁶ at risk of displacement. In 2020, City Council

¹⁴ "Right to Remain" ACDDC & GNDC, https://issuu.com/acddc/docs/gndc_montopolis_final_report_web.

¹⁵ Neighborhood Stabilization Strategy Tool: Owners, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/city.of.austin.office.of.innovation/viz/NeighborhoodStabilizationStrategyTool-Owner/normalizeddashhousing>.

¹⁶ Neighborhood Stabilization Strategy Tool: Renters, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/city.of.austin.office.of.innovation/viz/NeighborhoodStabilizationStrategyTool-Renter/normalizeddashrent>.

directed the City Manager in Resolutions 20200423-038¹⁷ and 20200807-003¹⁸ to bring together key city departments to utilize these data sets as the basis for an anti-displacement Equity Tool, with its first application as part of the City's 2021 local investment in a first of its kind city-wide rail system.

The Equity Tool's creation brought our commitment journey full circle, with a co-creation process in 2021 that empowered a group of 30 community representatives at risk of displacement (primarily people of color from the Eastern Crescent) to determine the tool's format, content, and variables for identifying displacement threats in vulnerable Austin neighborhoods. This group grounded the commitment in community and ensured the decisions made with the tool will serve both their needs and wants.

Results:

The commitment's mission to connect people to anti-displacement information evolved into a commitment wherein the people became the source of the information. With this equity tool, the city is taking a more data-informed approach to displacement mitigation, and is seeking opportunities to apply the tool to several additional projects and operations.

Commitment 4: Public Safety Data Analysis

Commitment 4 is a technology-based approach to taking online police data and "making it even more meaningful and useful, resulting in better public safety problem solving and policy decisions".¹⁹ Goals included fostering transparency and civic engagement; furthering city goals for government that works for all; and reducing racial disparities in policing.²⁰

Overview:

The City's Equity Office and Office of Police Oversight identified a need to make city annual crime data meaningful to residents. Feedback from community justice organizations such as Grassroots Leadership also highlighted a need to create maps and graphics with key data sets to improve residents' ability to understand, discuss, and track progress on key metrics. This mutual city and community focus formed the foundation for the City of Austin's AP2 Commitment 4.

¹⁷ <https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=339361>

¹⁸ <https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=346090>

¹⁹ AP2, at 13.

²⁰ See City of Austin's Strategic Plan 2023 goals of Government That Works For All; United Nation's Reduce Inequalities goal; and OGP transparency and civic engagement values.

Actions:

The Office of Police Oversight, Equity Office, and Innovation Office examined Austin Police Department (APD) motor vehicle stop data from 2015 to 2019, to understand how various racial/ethnic groups in Austin experience motor vehicle stops.

The data included information for each motor vehicle stop and "whether the subject's race was known to the officer before the stop." This data is reported by officers and is separated into "Race Known" versus "Race Not Known" categories.

The study found that between 2018 and 2019, the proportion of motorists pulled over when their race was known before the stop increased: a 2% increase in stops involving Hispanic/Latinos and a 1% increase in stops involving Black/African Americans. Conversely, there was a 1% decrease in stops involving White/Caucasians when their race was known before the stop.

The report offered recommendations to address areas where disproportionality exists and to improve data collection.

"Transparency and accountability are crucial to building trust with the community. And making this data publicly available shined a light on how policing disproportionately impacts people of color in Austin. This research has generated conversations about equity throughout the community and renewed the City of Austin's commitment to developing solutions to address disproportionality and the fair administration of justice..."

***-- Farah C. Muscadin
Director, Office of Police Oversight***

Results:

The City released the *Joint Report: Analysis of APD Racial Profiling Data* in January 2020.²¹

Based on these findings, Austin City Council formally adopted a Strategic Direction 2023 goal of zero racial disparity in policing²²: zero racial disparity in motor vehicle stops by 2023; zero racial disparity in citations and arrests resulting from motor vehicle stops by 2023; zero use-of-force incidents per year by 2023; and zero deaths per year by 2023.

In 2021, Bloomberg Philanthropies cited the report as a key element in the City of Austin's "What Works Cities" certification -- the national standard of excellence in data-driven city governance. Bloomberg highlighted the community-focused collaboration on racial profiling data. The city intends to utilize the joint report as a baseline for future annual analyses.

Conclusion:

Austin's Action Plan 2 played an important role in both further developing commitments launched as part of Action Plan 1, and focusing on new and emerging good governance needs. Departments and community groups developed and strengthened new and existing relationships, and we collectively look forward to future co-creation opportunities.

Finally, the City of Austin OGP team wishes to express our continued gratitude to the Open Government Partnership, our city leadership, and our community for supporting our participation in OGP. We value this opportunity to continue contributing to a vital international discussion of good governance, accountability, and transparency, now more than ever.

²¹ Joint Analysis, 2020

(https://joplin3-austin-gov-static.s3.amazonaws.com/production/media/documents/Final_-1.28.2020_Racial_Profiling_Report.pdf).

²² Resolution 20200611-050.