

Communications Subcommittee Reflections on TFOGS Public Engagement Efforts

This appendix contains an analysis of the implementation of the TFOGS plan for public engagement and a series of promising practices based on our experience. It also includes lessons learned and recommendations for other initiatives across the city interested in implementing similar outreach approaches. The analysis focuses on the community survey and collaboration with community liaisons, TFOGS informational video, open houses, and social media strategy.

TFOGS began gathering information and inviting key informants immediately after its founding meeting. We focused on collecting background information on city structures, processes and evidence from other comparable cities across the US. This process took close to a full year. Once most of the information was gathered similar themes began emerging. After most of the information was compiled, we created an interim report containing a series of considerations that allowed us to communicate the complexity and interconnectedness of the different issues the Task Force was tackling. At that time, the Communication Subcommittee created a communication and public engagement plan.

Community survey, informational video and work with liaisons

One of the critical pieces to soliciting public feedback, and reaching the neighborhoods across Madison that are often underrepresented in city processes, was our work with community liaisons. With the help of community liaisons, we crafted a 3-minute informational video based on the findings of the interim report. The purpose of the video was to introduce to Madison residents both the current city structures and processes, and the work of TFOGS. The liaisons, compensated for their time and talent, also crafted and helped flesh out the community survey questions. They were, then, able to take the video and survey out to the communities which they represented. As with any innovative process, there were multiple glitches and challenges. Below are some of our reflections and recommendations about this work.

- It was challenging to mediate tension between content development and time constraints. We could have spent more time with the community liaisons to flesh out the questions. Setting up the MOU process, creating the video and the survey questions, took about two months. Starting the planning process a few weeks earlier would have allowed more ample time to troubleshoot and flesh out the questions.
- The survey was created primarily by the community liaisons and was designed by them to ask questions they considered meaningful to the community. Neither the drafting nor the sample selection followed a rigorous methodology which would allow scientific inferences. The trade-off could have been minimized if the Communications Subcommittee and TFOGS members had more time to flesh out the questions with the community liaisons. This presented a challenge later in the process, especially in terms of using the feedback and input for decision-making. The survey did, however, generate a rich body of qualitative information through the questions which contained comment boxes.
- The MOU and the contracting process were unique for the City of Madison. We would recommend that, if this process and payment scheme were to be implemented again, special attention be paid to the clarity of the conditions in the MOU and the expectations of all parties. It is critical to ensure that

all parties understand well what they are signing up for and have very clear and well-detailed expectations. Liaisons helped put the MOU together and negotiate the conditions. As with all new processes and products, we missed a few important details. The manner and timing of payments was also unusual. It became obvious that our governmental system has challenges when working with individuals who are not entities or do not represent entities. To set them up as vendors was complicated.

- It is important to set up processes that are fair and inclusive, both in the recruitment of the liaisons and in the execution of the public engagement process. Building an accountability mechanism in the MOU and the whole process helps protect all sides, including community liaisons themselves. In our case, all liaisons met the survey number goal and put a lot of effort into completing the tasks.

Open houses

The Task Force held two open houses in August and September on the south and north sides of the city - the Atrium on S Park St and Warner Park Community Center. The conversations at the open houses were very rigorous and informative and allowed for a lot of in-depth discussion. They did not, however, surpass expectations in terms of attendance. One of the main reasons for that was the poor timing in the summer, early fall. Unfortunately, TFOGS had time constraints that did not allow much flexibility in terms of timing. Below are some observations and recommendations that could improve attendance to such events in the future.

- Community dinners with City decision-makers should be regular events across the city. This would help improve engagement and build trust. Child care should always be provided. Repetition and continuous improvement will lead to familiarity and higher attendance rates when community input into city processes is needed.
- Having good visuals and a presentation available on demand, including the video created for the purpose of the survey or a more detailed video, could have further improved the discussion at the open houses.
- Despite the fact that the issues that the Task Force grappled with seemed too complex and removed from people's everyday lives, there was a lot of passion and insight in the conversations at the open houses. People wandered in from other activities, but were then really interested in the city structures discussion, happy to share opinions, ideas and thoughts. There was a lot of interest once people understood how the issues of structure fit with one other, or with more pertinent issues in their lives. If the open house events are scaled down but done more frequently, communities will become more familiar with this type of one-on-one engagement.
- The input from the open houses could have been augmented by input obtained at other events. TFOGS was not able to implement in a meaningful way the plan to meet people where they are, to attend events across the city where people naturally gather. We were unable to execute the ambitious strategy of attending festivals and other gatherings to collect input. Pop-up, smaller scale conversations could provide rich qualitative data and input.

Social Media approach

TFOGS piloted for the City of Madison a process and a contract with Facebook to do targeted advertising. With only \$100 spent on a targeted Facebook ad, we were able to reach thousands of people who scrolled through

it and helped inform Madison residents about the work of the Task Force. Setting up the contract and process was quite burdensome and took a lot of time but should be much easier to replicate in the future.

Other best practices:

- Alternate times of the day and locations for meetings. This will allow for more diverse audience and attendance at meetings. There is not a universal time/location that works for everyone so alternating times and location is the best way to give community members options.
- Suspend Robert's Rules as often as possible. Our committees, as well as the full Task Force, suspended Roberts's Rules and allowed for flexibility in procedure every time this was appropriate. Following strict procedure is often a barrier to community participation.
- All of our processes have been documented and information will be included in TFOGS' report to the Common Council. All of our survey results and open house input are also available to the public via Legistar.