

Equity Analysis

As part of the development of this report the workgroup conducted a survey of communication options and preferences. This survey was primarily conducted electronically, and the responses were mostly from white females with ages ranging from 30 to 55. The workgroup discussed other means of gathering feedback such as in person at specific locations as well as door to door and paper surveys. The response to our survey identified that current communications are not effectively reaching all communities.

We recommend conducting an equity analysis on Council (Citywide) communications to identify the barriers and blind spots to current communication strategies. Significant efforts need to be taken to ensure we are reaching all residents equitably and not focusing on “equal” communications. Our bias to conduct outreach in the most expedient way, often electronically, creates a barrier to low income communities having equal access to information.

Expand and establish community connectors

In a recent Memo to the Mayor the Latino Community Engagement Team requested the creation of two such programs focused on Spanish speaking and Hmong communities. The purpose of these positions is to engage their respective communities in a more culturally effective manner, and to provide community members with a representative whom they trust and value. It should be noted that this is not the only application of community connectors that exists, but the common theme is the compensation of individuals for their contribution.

The concept of community connectors is becoming recognized as a prevalent best practice in community engagement and outreach. The City of Madison has engaged this model in a number of transactional engagements such as Imagine Madison, the Darbo-Worthington Neighborhood Plan, and the Triangle-Monona Bay Neighborhood plan. These independent uses of community members working on behalf of the City to solicit and gather feedback has proven valuable to their respective projects, but Planning staff identify the lack of continuity in community connectors as a barrier. Community Connector Programs intend to create touchpoints of trust within the community and provide residents greater access to government functions.

We believe the expansion and formal establishment of a Community Connectors Program could strengthen communications between alders and their respective communities by creating more two way dialogue that allows Alders the opportunity to gather and solicit feedback outside of the tradition BCC structure, which can prove cumbersome to residents for a number of reasons.

Multimedia outreach

Currently Alders communicate primarily through writing with blogs being the primary form of communication. This excludes many people with low literacy levels, which include non native English speakers including the deaf community. We recommend moving toward vlogs as an alternative for purposes of equity and access. This would also provide alders with video to share with broadcast partners, audio which could be shared with radio partners, and individual text

clips to be used for social media posts. Videos can be provided with an American Sign Language Interpreter, and end users can access subtitling through other technologies.

Potential

Reliance on staff

Holding an elected position creates an inherent power dynamic that can be challenging to overcome for residents who hold a mistrust government. Groups within the city structure exist to support communications, these include NRTs and the Latino Community Engagement Team. Departments often utilize a number of engagement strategies including public hearings and focus groups. Reliance on staff expertise on how to structure communication would be beneficial. Staff are not elected and have the ability to be objective in the information they provide about city projects. Council staff can efficiently interact with other city staff preserving the separation of legislative and executive responsibilities. This, in conjunction with the development of a Chief Information Officer, could enhance coordinated communications across city services.