

Public Engagement in Budgeting Program



Submitted by
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City of Milwaukee

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(Project Lead)

May 19, 2020

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On January 21, 2020, the Milwaukee Common Council unanimously approved Resolution 191462 to enhance public engagement in the City's annual budget process beyond the requirements established in Chapter 18 of the Milwaukee City Charter and Code of Ordinances. The resolution directs the Administration Director to "develop and present a plan to the Common Council for a City budget public education and participation initiative."

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN BUDGETING

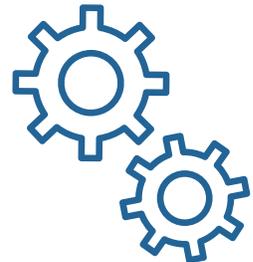
Provides an opportunity for City government to:

- ✓ Inform
- ✓ Acquire feedback
- ✓ Build common ground on the 2021 budget and future city budgets

The Administration Director strongly supports Resolution 191462 and affirms the need to join other cities that are taking steps to improve their budget processes through enhanced civic engagement. Resolution 191462 offers the City of Milwaukee the opportunity to:

- Increase transparency in the city's budget process
- Help residents to better understand the budget process and elected officials to better understand their values and needs
- Promote greater trust and confidence in City budget decisions
- Build knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of City government agencies and other local units of government
- Generate new ideas and solutions to budget challenges

The Administration Director will work to enhance public education and participation during the 2021 budget process and beyond in partnership with the City's Budget and Management Division (BMD). The BMD is required by ordinance to assist the Mayor and Common Council with preparing, adopting and implementing annual budgets and the BMD Director reports directly to the Administration Director.



According to the BMD, the City's projected 2021 budget gap is \$62 million. This means the amount of expenditures requested by departments to continue current service levels into 2021 exceed projected revenues by this amount. The City's budget challenges will be even further complicated by the mounting revenue losses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is, therefore, critically important to hear directly from residents and other community stakeholders as the City makes tough decisions that will involve tradeoffs and compromises in order to achieve a balanced budget.

Despite these challenges, the Administration Director is confident that the results of the directive included in Resolution 191462 will help improve the City's budget process and lead to the adoption of a 2021 budget responsive to the values and needs of local residents.

IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION

The Department of Administration (DOA) is committed to fostering an environment in which every city resident feels welcome to engage in and participate in the City’s annual budget process. As DOA works to fulfill the requirements of Resolution 191462, it is important to facilitate a process that recognizes the diversity of city residents and our Milwaukee community.



DOA will employ various strategies to reach residents instead of taking a one size fits all approach. This effort will require the assigned project leads to focus on specific groups of people strategically and with thoughtfulness. Furthermore, it will require staff to communicate in inclusive ways. Specific considerations that must be addressed include:

- Literacy barriers
- Language barriers
- Information technology barriers
- Government distrust – people of color are often harder to reach for the reason

In order to overcome these barriers to participation, our public education and participation plan must involve leveraging credible and trusted partners such as –

- Community-based organizations
- Faith-based groups
- Racial, ethnic and cultural groups
- Web-based and virtual groups
- Local residents

Outreach tools must be offered in various platforms. Likewise, materials will be produced in multiple language and accessible forms.

MISSION

The mission of city government is to enhance the safety, prosperity, and quality of life of all of our residents by working directly and through partnerships with our community stakeholders.

BUDGET GOALS

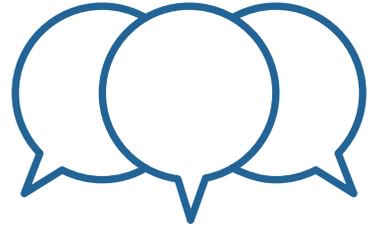
- ✓ Build safe and healthy neighborhoods
- ✓ Increase investment and economic vitality throughout Milwaukee
- ✓ Improve workforce development and connect more residents to family supporting jobs
- ✓ Help children succeed, prepare for post-secondary education and meet their full potential
- ✓ Promote racial, social and economic equity for all residents
- ✓ Sustain, enhance and promote Milwaukee’s natural environmental assets



EARLY WORK AND RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Early Work

Following the passage of Resolution 191462, Director of Administration Sharon Robinson designated DOA Capital & Debt Specialist Bill Christianson as the project lead on the Public Engagement in Budgeting Program. The team began researching best practices and looking at examples of activities used by other cities. See Appendix A for findings of preliminary research. The lead sponsor of the authorizing resolution, Ald. Milele Cogg, was consulted to refine the strategy and approach. The methodology of how the Public Engagement in Budgeting Work Group would identify ways of engaging and educating residents in the budget process is outlined below.



Methodology

- Review best practices, identify successful examples from other cities
- Compile comprehensive list of engagement methods, evaluate each method of engagement for feasibility in City of Milwaukee, likelihood of success, etc.
- Engage Council members, elected officials; solicit input and feedback
- Engage community stakeholders, solicit input and feedback
- Determine resources necessary to carry out each type of engagement (staff time, facility needs, surveys, consultants, educational materials, etc.)
- Establish set of preliminary recommendations, review with key stakeholders, make adjustments based on stakeholder input
- Develop implementation plan (specific actions, events with dates, locations)
- Prepare recommendations and implementation plan in a final report
- Present recommendations and implementation plan to Finance Committee

Several City staff and community partners were invited to become part a work group tasked with developing a set of recommendations for how the City of Milwaukee can enhance public engagement in the budget process. The kickoff meeting was scheduled for March 16, 2020. On March 12, 2020, Governor Evers issued Executive Order #72 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, declaring a public health emergency in the State of Wisconsin. The kickoff meeting of the Public Engagement in Budgeting Work Group, scheduled for March 16, 2020, was indefinitely postponed due to public health concerns. In light of the uncertainty and the additional workload that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the Department of Administration, the Public Engagement in Budgeting Program was put on hiatus.

Change of Circumstances

The COVID-19 pandemic will change how the City of Milwaukee seeks input and feedback from residents on the 2021 Budget. Departments submitted their 2021 budget requests last week on May 12, marking the beginning of the Administration's process for developing the 2021 proposed budget. At this point, it seems unlikely that large in-person meetings like the Mayor's Public Budget Hearing in August or the Joint Budget Hearing in September will take place this year in the same manner as in previous years. Public health recommendations for large gatherings would significantly limit the capacity of in-person events such a public budget hearing.

Engaging residents and soliciting input on the 2021 Budget will require the City to find alternatives to large in-person meetings in order to reach out to residents. Options for remotely engaging the public in the budget process through online platforms include things like videoconferencing, online town halls or workshops, surveys, social media engagement, interactive budgeting software, and many others.

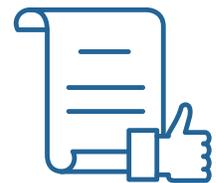
For example, Milwaukee County has used budgeting software called Balancing Act to seek public input on its budget. This software allows a

user to make adjustments to funding levels for expenditures and revenues to develop a balanced budget for the County, using real expenditure and revenue data. There are a number of ways that technology can be deployed to solicit meaningful input on budget decisions. Web-based platforms will likely play a major role in the City's strategy for engaging and involving residents in development of the 2021 Budget.

A technological divide exists in the City, and an inclusive engagement strategy has to find ways to reach out to those who cannot be reached through online platforms only. There are some residents without the means to obtain the phones, computers or tablets necessary to use these platforms. There are some who don't have the technological skills needed to meaningfully engage with the City on budget issues that are important to them. Alternative means of reaching those residents must be a part of a comprehensive engagement strategy. Some options include mailings, phone calls or phone surveys.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

1. Convene the work group as soon as possible, begin research and data collection
2. Solicit input from key stakeholders- Council members, community groups, residents, and City agencies on specific methods of engagement in the budget process
3. Identify and evaluate those methods of engagement that are in line with key stakeholder preferences and expectations, and would be feasible to implement in a short enough timeframe to be useful for developing the 2021 Budget
4. Develop a report containing a set of recommended public engagement activities that can be implemented by the City of Milwaukee for the 2021 Budget
5. Work with City staff to develop a plan for implementing the recommendations included in the report.
6. Present recommendations and implementation plan to the Finance Committee.



Budget Simulation Software

In addition to creating basic educational materials about the City's budget process, it is important to create interactive experiences for residents to learn about city budgeting through simulation.

This will allow residents to:

- ✓ Experience firsthand various scenarios for balancing a city budget
- ✓ Learn about revenue sources including tax receipts
- ✓ Learn about proposed budgets - where the money goes
- ✓ Give feedback on priorities and making tradeoffs
- ✓ Create buy-in for budget decisions

The Public Engagement Initiative Work Group could present its report on a strategy for the 2021 Budget at the July 1st Finance & Personnel Committee.

EVALUATING PROGRAM SUCCESS

It is important that the engagement process is evaluated. Information derived on an ongoing basis and post-completion will help explain how civic engagement has made a difference and inform future budget engagement processes.



Some questions to ask when evaluating the success of a public engagement activity include:

- What were the goals of the activity? Were those goals achieved?
- Who was the intended audience? Is the engagement activity and educational material properly designed for the target audience's level of understanding of City budgets?
- How were participants made aware of the activity? Were efforts made to encourage a diversity of views and population was represented?
- How were ideas or recommendations generated by this activity be communicated to elected officials and City management?
- What key takeaways did participants learn from this activity?
- What key takeaways were learned from those who participated in the activity?
- Are participants in the activity more or less likely to become more involved and engaged?
- Is this event likely to be continued in the future? Is this a one-time event or is this a catalyst for a sustained effort to solicit ideas and recommendations?

The State of Minnesota's Department of Human Rights in 2018 published "[A Guide to Evaluate Civic Engagement](#)", which identifies a thorough, academic methodology for measuring effectiveness and success of public engagement initiatives. It also shares useful lessons that the State learned through developing their process and applying it to a set of pilot projects.

CONCLUSION

The response from several community stakeholders regarding Resolution 191462 has been strong. The resolution is being viewed as a very positive step towards making City budget decisions more transparent while giving local residents and other community stakeholders a stronger say in the annual budget process. Despite the challenges and uncertainties of COVID-19, the Department of Administration remains committed to working in partnership with the Common Council to jump start a Public Engagement in Budgeting Program and forming the alliances necessary to reach people who are not traditionally involved in local government or the city's budget process. After all, an informed and involved community that includes everyone is the cornerstone of democracy. We look forward to launching this program and expanding it in future years for the betterment of residents and our community.

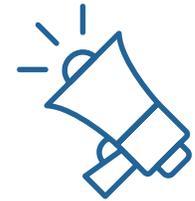


Appendix A - Preliminary Research Findings and Links

Examples of Tools for Engaging & Educating the Public in the Budget Process

- **Budget Advisory Committees**
 - o Committees could be focused on a particular issue or service
 - o Community-driven, make reports or recommendations to elected body

- **Budget Workshops**
 - o Town-hall style
 - o Presentation with small group discussions



Budgeting Software

- o Platform for residents to create their own budget
- o Could be coupled with educational materials for additional context

- **Surveys**
 - o Statistically valid or informal
 - o US Mail or electronic



- **Educational Materials**
 - o Distribute/make available in advance of public budget hearings
 - o Prepare materials geared towards audiences with different levels of understanding of budgets and in multiple formats

- **Participatory Budgeting**
 - o A portion of discretionary funds are set up for community improvement projects
 - o Projects are identified and selected by residents, approved by elected officials, implemented by municipal staff

- **Social Media**
 - o Use social media accounts to promote budget workshops, distribute surveys, link to educational materials



Links to Selected External Resources

[Government Finance Officers Association \(GFOA\) - Best Practices for Public Engagement in the Budget Process](#)

[Municipal World Article - "Four ways to engage citizens in local government"](#)

[City of Atlanta – Community Engagement Playbook](#)

[Living Cities/City Accelerator – "Accelerating Public Engagement- A Roadmap for Local Government"](#)

Appendix B - Agenda for Cancelled March 16 Public Engagement in Budgeting Work Group (Kickoff Meeting) and Authorizing Resolution



City Hall Room 603
200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee,
Wisconsin 53202

City of Milwaukee Meeting Agenda

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE WORK GROUP

*Bill Christianson
Jim Owczarski
Arlisia McHenry
Dana Zelazny*

*Steve Adams
Luz Sosa
Markasa Tucker
Kate Pawasarat*

Monday, March 16, 2020

1:30 PM

City Hall, Room 603

Regular Session

The Public Engagement Initiative Work Group will meet on the following items:

Agenda

1. Introductions and opening remarks
2. Outline the purpose of work group, project deliverables
3. Review strategies currently used by the City of Milwaukee to involve residents in the budget process
4. Review and discuss best practices in engaging and educating the public in the budget process and review examples of public engagement activities from other cities
5. Assign follow up tasks
6. Arrange next meeting date and time
7. Adjournment

Upon reasonable notice, efforts will be made to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities through sign language interpreters or auxiliary aids. For assistance contact the Legislative Services ADA Coordinator at 286-2998, (FAX)286-3456, (TDD)286-2025 or by writing to Room 205, City Hall, 200 E. Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202.

Public Engagement in Budgeting Program Resolution

Number

191462

Version

ORIGINAL

Reference

Sponsor

ALD. COGGS, HAMILTON, LEWIS, STAMPER, PEREZ AND RAINEY

Title

Resolution directing the Administration Director to develop and present a plan to the Common Council for a City budget public education and participation initiative.

Analysis

This resolution directs the Administration Director to develop and present a plan to the Common Council for a City budget public education and participation initiative. The Administration Director shall present this plan to the Common Council within 4 months of adoption of this resolution.

Body

Whereas, The 2020 Budget was adopted by Common Council File Number 190001 on November 26, 2019; and

Whereas, Amendment 42L placed a footnote in the Budget stating, "The Administration Director shall develop and present to the Common Council a City budget public education and participation initiative"; and

Whereas, City budgets establish the priorities of municipal government by determining where to allocate funds; and

Whereas, Residents of Milwaukee should be educated on the budgeting process and have the opportunity to influence the allocation of funds; and

Whereas, Participatory budgeting allows citizens to identify, discuss and prioritize public spending; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, By the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, that the Administration Director shall develop and present a plan to the Common Council for a City budget public education and participation initiative; and, be it

Further Resolved, That the Administration Director shall present this plan to the Common Council within 4 months of adoption of this resolution.

Requestor

Drafter

LRB175712-1

Luke Knapp

12/16/2019