

Government That Works For All of Us

Strategic Outcome:

Believing that city government works effectively and collaboratively for all of us—that it is equitable, ethical, and innovative.

Council Indicators:

- Financial cost and sustainability of City government
- Condition/quality of City facilities and infrastructure and effective adoption of technology
- Satisfaction with City services
- Employee engagement
- Stakeholder engagement and participation
- Equity of City programs and resource allocation
- Transparency and ethical practices

Challenges (DRAFT):

1. How might we build a more trusting, collaborative decision-making process amongst Council, City Management, and our Community to increase productivity and transparency?
2. How might we achieve more equitable outcomes and deliver services that meet or exceed the expectations of the people we serve?
3. How might we continue to meet the needs of a rapidly growing city, in a dynamic legislative environment, while managing organizational capacity and ensuring fiscal responsibility?
4. How might we improve our approach to facilities and infrastructure management to ensure a high-quality, efficient, and sustainable portfolio that supports both staff and the customer?
5. How might we mature the City's data and technology capabilities to provide secure and scalable solutions that enable staff to deliver accessible, modern, and impactful services to all residents?
6. How might we attract and retain a talented workforce that sustains a workplace culture of engagement, customer focus, and high performance?
7. How might we improve engagement to include voices of our most vulnerable populations, demonstrate the impact of public input, and generate meaningful outcomes for the community?

GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS - CHALLENGE #1

How might we build a more trusting, collaborative decision-making process amongst Council, City Management, and our Community to increase productivity and transparency?

Nature of the Challenge

Governance is the collection of rules, norms, and actions that structure the way decision-making is carried out in an organization. This includes the political processes which exist within an organization and it is the way policies are structured and regulated. The City is currently a 10-ONE geographic district based structure which began in 2014. Because 10-ONE is still relatively new, there is a learning curve for staff and elected Council Members to work as efficiently and effectively as possible in terms of both representativeness and responsiveness.

An open transparent government is vital in building trust and communication between Council, staff, and the community. This is exemplified in the fact that a very large number of hours are spent at Council work sessions, Council meetings, and budget work sessions before decisions are made, and even then, some items are postponed to a different time in the future for additional vetting and discussion. Amongst Council, staff, and the community, there is a resonating desire to improve how we operate as an organization to provide services more equitably, efficiently, and adaptively. The base of this change is a need to further improve the collaboration and trust between Council, the community, and staff.

Evidence

- 2016 Council Meeting Statistics - 557 hours at Council Meetings and Work Sessions (2017 staff briefing to Council “Council Meeting Efficiency and Deliberation”)
- 2016 Council Meeting Statistics
 - 3,161 registered speakers
 - 9,483 total speaker minutes or 158 hours equals 45 percent of Council Meeting time. (2017 staff briefing to Council “Council Meeting Efficiency and Deliberation”)
- 2016 Council Committee Meeting Statistics - 95 Council committee meetings scheduled, of which 30 were cancelled. (2017 staff briefing to Council “Council Meeting Efficiency and Deliberation”)
- There are more than 80 Council appointed boards, commissions, and task forces ranging from very active to inactive. Each body requires varying levels of staff support.



GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS - CHALLENGE #2

How might we achieve more equitable outcomes and deliver services that meet or exceed expectations of the people we serve?

Nature of the Challenge

Austin is a growing community, in terms of both the City as an organization and the population we serve. While the City of Austin continues to be a high-performing organization when measured against peer cities nationwide, keeping up with the associated service demands in a balanced and efficient way has proven a challenge. The City lacks sufficient mechanisms to track and measure service outcomes in a way that helps us understand the needs of different communities. As a result, the service delivery experience can be inconsistent and inequitable.

While Austin is renowned for its quality of life and economic resiliency, major issues such as poverty, hunger, and homelessness continue to impact our City, all of which disproportionately affect communities of color. As documented by the 2017 Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities Report, racial and economic segregation is exacerbated by a lack of citywide availability of affordable housing, public transportation, healthy food options, healthcare, and other neighborhood services. Although well intended, our decision-making processes have not always yielded equitable results. The City has both internal and external customers. Our ability to excel in service delivery externally depends on our ability to meet our internal service delivery needs.

Evidence

- While Austin was recently recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* as, "The Best Place to Live in the U.S." in 2015, the Martin Prosperity Institute listed Austin as the most economically segregated in the country. (City of Austin Equity Assessment and Recommendations Report)
- Satisfaction with the overall quality of City services has decreased over the last five years from 65 percent in 2011 to 47 percent in 2016. (Austin Community Survey, 2016)
- In 2016, 36 percent of Community Survey respondents gave a dissatisfied or very dissatisfied ranking for overall value received for City taxes and fees. (Austin Community Survey, 2016)
- 48 percent of respondents to the City's annual survey report being satisfied or very satisfied with the City's efforts to serve people equally regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, age, or abilities; however, when this information is disaggregated demographically, 27 percent of African American respondents report being dissatisfied with the same measure. (Austin Community Survey, 2016)



Carver Branch Library employee assists library patron. Photo by Hennig Photography.

GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS - CHALLENGE #3

How might we continue to meet the needs of a rapidly growing city, in a dynamic legislative environment, while managing organizational capacity and ensuring fiscal responsibility?

Nature of the Challenge

While Austin's continued growth brings increased fiscal prosperity, it also creates some fiscal challenges to both the residents and the government. With the rapid growth, comes an increased need to provide more services in both type and amount. The need to ensure everyone has equal access and understanding is even more expansive in a city as diverse as Austin.

The rapid increase in population creates additional challenges in trying to balance policy goals with fiscal responsibility. Many policies have a fiscal impact such as the cost of increasing the living wage or adopting a local preference purchasing policy, and policymakers must decide which policy goals are worth the investment. These sometimes competing priorities make it important to ensure a budget process that is priority-driven and transparent.

Austin must be prepared for possible new state or federal legislation outside the control of the City, which can significantly impact expected tax revenues.

Evidence

- 36 percent of Austin residents are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the value they receive for their taxes and fees. (Austin Community Survey, 2016)
- Austin's population has grown by more than 29 percent from 718,912 in 2006 to 926,426 in 2016. (Estimates from City Demographer, Department of Planning, City of Austin.)
- The number of employees working for the City of Austin has increased 17 percent in the past 10 years from about 11,795 to 13,825 (City of Austin Budget Office)
- The tax rate in Austin has increased from 0.4126 with collections of \$249,137,327 in Fiscal Year 2007 to 0.4418 with estimated collections of \$547,352,549 in Fiscal Year 2017 (City of Austin Budget Office)



Photo Credit: City of Austin

GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS - CHALLENGE #4

How might we improve our approach to facilities and infrastructure management to ensure a high-quality, efficient, and sustainable portfolio that supports both staff and the customer?

Nature of the Challenge

Many of the facilities and infrastructure the City owns are in poor or failing condition or fail to appropriately support community and department needs. Properly maintaining these assets directly affects the safety and engagement of the employees who work in them and their ability to meet the needs of the public who visit them.

The City's facilities and infrastructure will continue to require additional investment to ensure they serve the residents and visitors of Austin efficiently, and protect the health and safety of all. Because of limited funding options and the magnitude of capital renewal needs, the City will fall behind unless we continue making substantial investments in capital renewal efforts as well as implement proactive approaches to address facilities maintenance. The City also must balance maintenance with investments in new infrastructure capacity to meet the service demands of our growing population. Doing this requires a long-term approach to portfolio management and exploration of additional funding sources that meet all of the City's important goals.

Evidence

- The City currently operates over 250 facilities, 20,000-plus acres of park land, water and wastewater treatment plants, power generation facilities, nearly 8,000 lane miles of streets, 2,400 miles of sidewalk, and nearly 250,000 trees in parks, trails, and rights of way.
- In 2014 a Comprehensive Infrastructure Assessment identified portions of the city's infrastructure that are classified in poor or failing condition:
 - 24 percent of water treatment facilities
 - 40 percent of wastewater treatment facilities
 - 12 percent of streets
 - 13 percent of traffic management devices
 - 11 percent of park infrastructure
 - 27 percent of public trees
 - 10 percent of creek crossings are at high risk for flooding
- Council approved a Capital Rehabilitation financial policy in Fiscal Year 2016 and initial one-time funding of \$1.2 million to address deferred facilities maintenance. Assuming the current maintenance backlog of \$70 million in facilities, the budget would require \$5.9 million in funds annually to eliminate the backlog by 2036. (RSPI assessment)



Oscar Amos, Wes Crow

GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS - CHALLENGE #5

How might we mature the City's data and technology capabilities to provide secure and scalable solutions that enable staff to deliver accessible, modern and impactful services to all residents?

Nature of the Challenge

The success of Austin as a leading digital city presents significant challenges to the City of Austin as a municipal government. Can the City deliver data and technology services to internal and external customers at the same high levels as industry? Can these services meet the expectations of a high-tech community but still be accessible and equitable to all?

While the City of Austin Information Technology (IT) capabilities are successful in meeting the basic needs of a large, growing organization—there are several areas where continued focus is needed to keep pace and improve. These challenges include:

- Enhancing the citywide IT governance structure to better prioritize and fund projects,
- Strengthening software management standards and processes to improve quality, and increased use of linked technologies to create a seamless user experience for residents,
- Balancing new and emerging technology implementation with maintaining existing operations including network infrastructure, legacy software systems, and personal computing and communication tools, and
- Attracting and retaining highly skilled technical employees in a highly competitive IT talent market.

These challenges limit the ability for City IT to keep pace with more modern technology frameworks and practices that can better serve staff and the community.

Evidence

- Each year the City is only able to approve approximately 10 percent of IT budget requests submitted by departments. (Information Technology Governance Data, 2015-2017)
- There is no citywide strategy to identify, prioritize, or implement online services to residents. (Online Services Audit, 2017)
- 42 percent of surveyed residents would need assistance to get online access to City Services (City of Austin Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan Survey, 2014)
- 35 percent of IT staff are eligible to retire in the next five years. (Human Resources Report, 2017)



Understanding the needs of staff and residents is key in delivering meaningful data technology services. City staff members assess the usefulness of an online service found on AustinTexas.gov.

GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS - CHALLENGE #6

How might we attract and retain a talented workforce that sustains a workplace culture of engagement, customer focus, and high performance?

Nature of the Challenge

Improving workplace culture and unlocking thoughtful and effective talent management is essential to our success as a City. The City of Austin ranks No. 9 on the Forbes list of best employers and while this is a distinct honor, a recent third-party assessment concluded areas of opportunity around strengthening the City's culture. Factors associated with strengthening the City's culture include retaining and attracting motivated employees, commitment to engaging and serving the community, and thoughtful employee engagement.

As a City we must be able to create a municipal culture that listens and facilitates high performance while generating trust and promoting transparency. Establishing a clear culture at every level that promotes interdepartmental and cross-functional lines of communication will ensure greater transparency, improved performance, and a sense of community within the City workforce.

Growing pains associated with the City's transition to a Municipal Civil Service system have created new challenges and questions regarding how the organization can continue to hire and retain the highest quality workforce to serve our community. Pending retirements and turnover in key positions present a need to prepare for knowledge transfer and new leadership. Striving to attract and retain highly sought after talent in a highly competitive workforce market and maintaining a workforce that is customer oriented, responsible, accountable, innovative and ethical will help us better meet the needs of our City over the next 3 to 5 years.

Evidence

- When compared to average scores for 180 other organizations, the City of Austin scored lower across the six major metrics: culture strength, discipline, openness, strategic growth, performance, and relationships. (Culture Analysis by Russell Reynolds and Associates, 2017)
- In 2012, City of Austin residents voted for the implementation of a Municipal Civil Service (MCS); the rules were implemented in 2014
- 11 percent of the City of Austin workforce is eligible for retirement.
- According to the 2016 Listening to the Workforce Survey:
 - 43 percent thinks the survey is used to make improvements to the workplace.
 - 49 percent thinks that personnel policies are interpreted and used fairly.
 - 38 percent feel department recognition programs makes them feel appreciated.
 - 43 percent are satisfied with their promotion and career opportunities.
 - 56 percent believe they can report unethical behavior without retaliation.



Photo Credit: City of Austin

GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS - CHALLENGE #7

How might we improve engagement to include voices of our most vulnerable populations, demonstrate the impact of public input, and generate meaningful outcomes for the community?

Nature of the Challenge

The City of Austin is committed to community engagement when soliciting feedback from the public about large-scale or long-range civic initiatives, such as CodeNEXT or the Spirit of East Austin. During Council meetings, General Citizen Communication is another example of a way in which the public can directly have their voice heard on issues of importance to them and impact their community. Additionally, City departments and offices often seek input from stakeholders before implementing programs and services.

However, as the City has increased the number of engagement opportunities available to the public, concern about accessibility, trust, and follow-through has been raised. There is a sense of overall skepticism for how the City uses data collected from its various input methods. Overlapping opinions surface in different engagement settings, which can create frustration and an inadvertent feeling of mistrust for government. Furthermore, it can be difficult for low-income families and individuals working multiple jobs to attend a public meeting. As Austin's demographic and language profile changes, how might we best engage all residents (particularly those who have been historically marginalized) in setting the direction of City government without producing "engagement fatigue"?

Evidence

- When the community was surveyed, 47 percent expressed low satisfaction with the outcomes of their engagement with the city. (Task Force on Community Engagement Report, 2016)
- In 2016, 34 percent of residents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall effectiveness of the City's communication. This is 4 percent below the national average for this benchmark. (Austin Community Survey, 2016)
- Resident satisfaction with the City's overall effectiveness of communication has declined from 50 percent to 34 percent over the last 5 years. (Austin Community Survey, 2016)



Photo Credit: City of Austin
Public input session for CodeNEXT (2013)