

# Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) Preliminary Review 2017: Austin

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The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary international initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In 2016, OGP opened to subnational participants in their own right as part of a pilot program. The OGP Subnational Pilot Program consists of 15 subnational governments who submitted action plans and signed onto the Subnational Declaration at the Paris Global OGP Summit, and will be implementing them from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) carries out an annual review of the activities of each government that participates in OGP. As part of the pilot status of the reports, the IRM is releasing this early version of the review of process and commitment form (Specificity, Relevance, and Potential Impact). The final report will be released in the first trimester of 2018.

The early release will be reviewed by the IRM staff and the International Experts Panel (IEP). Thereafter, it will undergo two commenting periods. In the first period (14 calendar days), each OGP-participating government is invited to review the release in draft form before it is put out for broader comment. For the second phase of comments (14 calendar days), there will be a space on the OGP website for broader public comment, which may include formal responses by governments.

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# *Process of development of the action plan*

Governments participating in the OGP follow a process for consultation during development of their OGP action plan and during implementation. This section summarizes the performance of Austin during the development of their first action plan.

## OGP basic requirements

Subnational Governments received the following guidance on participation during action plan development and execution:

May – November 2016: Development of commitments: Participants set up ways to work with civil society organizations and other groups outside government and use these mechanisms to identify priority areas for commitments. Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones. Draft commitments should be shared with the OGP Support Unit as they are being developed and for comment and advice in October-November. Commitments should be finalized and agreed by the end of November, so they can be published and announced at the OGP Summit in December.

The City of Austin completed the basic requirements outlined in the OGP subnational pilot program guidelines. Prior to Austin's selection as an OGP subnational pioneer, city officials took a series of steps to foster open governance at City Hall. In 2013, the city manager issued a directive to "institutionalize the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration in the culture" of city government.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, the Austin City Council created the Task Force on Community Engagement to support civic engagement in decision-making<sup>2</sup>. To this end, city staff engaged with civil society organizations (CSOs) to identify "pain points" that could be alleviated by open governance initiatives<sup>3</sup>.

City staff built upon these efforts and partnerships to formulate their OGP action plan, framing their commitments in specific thematic priority areas: understandability, collaboration, decision-making, and tracking progress towards critical goals<sup>4</sup>. Three CSOs were initially approached by officials to help develop Austin's OGP commitments: Leadership Austin, Open Austin, and Vision Zero ATX. Representatives from these organizations collaborated with city staff from the Office of Innovation, the Office of Equity, the Office of the City Manager, the Law Department and the Office of Communications and Technology Management to develop Austin's OGP commitments and milestones, a process championed by city officials as "co-creation". Five teams have been organized and are tasked with developing and implementing each commitment around the city's guiding themes. Each team comprises at least one CSO representative and one government official, though commitment team size varies.

According to interviews with Office of Innovation staff and a former CSO partner contact, CSO partners and city staff collaborated fluently on the development of each of Austin's five OGP commitments<sup>5</sup>. While there is great variance in the manner and location of team meetings, CSO partners were engaged and consulted throughout the development of the action plan<sup>6</sup>. For instance, Austin's commitment around developing tools for ending homelessness grew out of discussions about using shared reasoning to address key issues in downtown Austin. Because of a wealth of political will to address homelessness and consensus among city staff and CSO partners that shared reasoning could adequately address the issue, Austin's first commitment was dedicated to ending homelessness. A community-wide survey, organized during a CSO-driven public hackathon, was the

driving force behind the development of Austin’s second commitment. Developing an equity assessment tool, the commitment’s target outcome, was first proposed by community leaders after conducting a large survey of stakeholders in traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods. This CSO-generated commitment was then adopted by the city’s OGP team. The remaining commitments were developed in a similar fashion, with fluent collaboration between government and CSO contacts and collaborative development of the city’s OGP commitments.

Teams utilized survey data and conducted interviews, gathering input from citizens, city staffers, council members, and other community leaders to inform each commitment<sup>7</sup>. While the use of surveys and interviews varied widely across commitments, the IRM researcher believes that care was taken to ensure a range of voices was included in the identification of key issues. For instance, the team tasked with developing an equity assessment tool analyzed approximately 2,000 comments collected during interviews in geographic regions historically affected by social inequity in Austin<sup>8</sup>. The city submitted its draft commitments to the OGP Support team for review in October and November 2016.

Table 3.1: Basic requirements

1. <b>Participatory Mechanism:</b> Was there a way of working with CSOs and other groups? Guideline: Participants set up ways to work with civil society organizations and other groups outside government and use these mechanisms to identify priority areas for commitments.	Yes
2. <b>Priority identification:</b> Was civil society able to help identify priority areas for commitments? Guideline: Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones.	Yes
3. <b>Commitment development:</b> Did civil society participate in the [development/drafting] of commitments and milestones? Guideline: Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones.	Yes
4. <b>Review:</b> Were commitments submitted for review to the Open Government Partnership Support Unit prior to finalization? Guideline: Draft commitments should be shared with the OGP Support Unit as they are being developed and for comment and advice in October-November.	Yes
5. <b>Submission:</b> Were commitments submitted on time? Guideline: Commitments should be finalized and agreed by the end of November, so they can be published and announced at the OGP Summit in December.	Yes

## Openness of consultation

### Who was invited?

The City of Austin invited a group of three civil society organizations (CSOs) to participate in the development of the city’s OGP commitments. These organizations were notified via online invitations and were known to government officials through previous collaborative initiatives. According to interviews with city staff, while the targeted organizations were selected because of their perceived collective expertise on open government initiatives, the IRM researcher understood the selection of CSO partners to be mostly exclusive<sup>9</sup>. CSOs were selected because of city staff’s previous knowledge of their work or previous collaboration on government projects. The IRM

researcher did not find evidence of any open calls for collaboration or evidence that would suggest that organizations outside of the targeted groups were presented with an opportunity to collaborate on the development of Austin's OGP commitments. Considering that communication was fluent between the government and its CSO partners prior to acceptance into OGP, the IRM researcher did not identify a specific call. Most of the CSOs involved, such as Leadership Austin and Open Austin, are umbrella organizations. Their members are involved with other community organizations and are experts on a variety of issues. Other CSO partners, such as Vision Zero ATX, are issue-specific organizations.

### **How was awareness-raising carried out?**

The City of Austin engaged its civil society organization (CSO) partners in a highly collaborative commitment "co-creation" process. City officials pursued open governance as a means of addressing local issues that drive conflict between communities and the government, referred to by officials as *pain points*. According to the city's Chief Innovation Officer, city staff briefed the targeted CSOs on OGP commitment guidelines during the initial online invitation and in subsequent conversations with CSOs that expressed interest in collaboration<sup>10</sup>. Government officials and partner CSOs then initiated a series of meetings between government OGP contacts, CSO partners, and city staff working on each issue area (i.e. homelessness, city management, equity) to identify pain points that could be addressed through the development of Austin's OGP commitments. The IRM researcher interviewed Mateo Clarke, who was the point of contact at Open Austin during the development of Austin's OGP action plan, to confirm that OGP guidelines were well communicated during initial discussions and subsequent meetings<sup>11</sup>.

### **Which parts of civil society participated?**

The City of Austin ultimately enlisted seven civil society organizations (CSOs) and hundreds of ordinary citizens in the development of its OGP action plan. CSOs included Leadership Austin, Open Austin, Vision Zero ATX, the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, the Downtown Austin Alliance, the Community Tech and Telecom Commission, and GO! Austin/VAMOS! Austin. Though the original group of partner CSOs included three organizations, leaders of four additional organizations approached city staff and became involved in the action plan's development after hearing about Austin's OGP participation from city staff leaders of the original CSO partners<sup>12</sup>. Government entities involved in commitment development include the Office of Innovation, the Office of Equity, the Office of Communications and Technology Management, the Office of the City Manager, the Law Department, and the City Council.

## **Level of public input**

The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) "Spectrum of Participation" to apply to OGP.<sup>13</sup> This spectrum shows the potential level of public influence on the contents of the action plan. In the spirit of OGP, most countries should aspire for "collaborative."

Austin's CSO partners enjoyed a high level of direct influence and control during the development of the city's OGP action plan. Officials increased public input even further by collaborating with CSO partners to conduct targeted citizen interviews at public events and across economically and geographically diverse communities. City officials collected responses from 1,904 citizens of East Austin, a region of the city that has traditionally received an inequitable share of city resources<sup>14</sup>. These responses informed its commitment on increasing equitable decision-making<sup>15</sup>. The city also sourced input on its OGP commitments by sending city staff to community gatherings hosted by Open Austin, one of the city's CSO partners<sup>16</sup>. This inclusive approach garnered responses from

nearly 2,000 citizens and fostered a highly collaborative approach to the development of the government’s OGP commitments<sup>17</sup>. The city government made its OGP action plan and other OGP materials, including meeting notes, available to the public through the city’s Bloomfire site<sup>18</sup>. The public contributed input at a series of community events, including the Open Austin gatherings and the Spirit of East Austin rally. Representatives of these and other CSOs also meet monthly with city staff at City Hall, engaging in a collaborative dialogue as Austin’s OGP commitments were developed. In addition to monthly meetings, each team hosts commitment-specific reporting meetings at least once per month<sup>19,20</sup>.

Table 3.2 Level of public input

Level of public input		During development of action plan
Empower	The government handed decision-making power to members of the public.	
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue AND the public helped set the agenda.	✓
Involve	The government gave feedback on how public inputs were considered.	
Consult	The public could give inputs.	
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.	
No Consultation	No consultation	

<sup>1</sup> The City of Austin’s Open Government Directive was issued on August 26, 2013. A PDF version can be accessed at <https://www.open-austin.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Memo-to-Mayor-and-Council-with-attached-Open-Government-Directive.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The Task Force on Community Engagement was established by City Council Resolution 20150129-023. A PDF version can be accessed at <http://austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=225247>.

<sup>3</sup> *Pain points* is a term used by city staff to describe issue areas that drive conflict between civil society and the government.

<sup>4</sup> Austin’s OGP Subnational Action Plan identifies four themes that framed their commitments: understandability, collaboration, decision-making, and tracking progress towards critical goals. These themes were selected by city staff and CSO partners based on responses from surveys and interviews conducted by the government and CSO partners during prior initiatives.

<sup>5</sup> Sabine Romero and Angela Hanson (City of Austin Office of Innovation), interview by IRM researcher, 20 June 2017; Sabine Romero, Angela Hanson, and Kerry O’Connor (City of Austin Office of Innovation), interview by IRM researcher, 28 June 2017; Mateo Clarke (formerly with Open Austin), interview by IRM researcher, 8 August 2017.

<sup>6</sup> The City of Austin Office of Innovation maintains a repository of all meeting notes, reports, and materials related to the development of OGP commitments. The repository can be accessed at <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/?feed=recent>.

<sup>7</sup> Surveys and interviews were conducted prior to and after Austin’s selection as an OGP pioneer. One key source of citizen feedback was Austin’s Hack for Change community hackathon, an annual gathering of citizen volunteers that produces technological solutions for civic problems.

<sup>8</sup> The [Spirit of East Austin](#) is a partnership between the city government and community organizations in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods in the eastern region of the city. At a launch event on September 12, 2015, city and CSO leaders conducted exit surveys of residents to identify key issues in their communities. These interviews yielded 204 responses. The entire dataset is available for public download at <https://data.austintexas.gov/Neighborhood/Spirit-of-East-Austin-Exit-Survey-Data/wg4m-dfpc>

<sup>9</sup> Sabine Romero, Angela Hanson, and Kerry O’Connor (City of Austin Office of Innovation), interview by IRM researcher, 28 June 2017; Sabine Romero (City of Austin Office of Innovation), interview by IRM researcher, 21 September 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Kerry O’Connor (City of Austin Office of Innovation), interview by IRM researcher, 28 June 2017.

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<sup>11</sup> Mateo Clarke (formerly with Open Austin), interview by IRM researcher, 8 August 2017.

<sup>12</sup> The four CSOs that joined Austin's OGP process during the action plan development were the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, the Downtown Austin Alliance, the Community Tech and Telecom Commission, and GO! Austin/VAMOS! Austin.

<sup>13</sup> "IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum", International Association for Public Participation Federation, (2014) [http://c.yimcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations\\_course/IAP2\\_P2\\_Spectrum\\_FINAL.pdf](http://c.yimcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> City officials and members of Open Austin received 1,904 comments from members of the public during a survey conducted in conjunction with the Spirit of East Austin event referenced in end note 6. Comments are available for public download at <https://data.austintexas.gov/City-Government/Spirit-of-East-Austin-Comments/wj2d-jcey>.

<sup>15</sup> The Spirit of East Austin was a community event held in 2015 that provided an opportunity for city staff to assess the needs of the traditionally disadvantaged region by engaging with community leaders and citizens. City staff surveyed 1,904 attendees and used their responses to later inform the development of the equity assessment tool described in Austin's second OGP commitment.

<sup>16</sup> Open Austin is an organization of citizen volunteers that develops new technologies at community meetups to solve a variety of civic issues.

<sup>17</sup> City officials and members of Open Austin received 1,904 comments from members of the public during a survey conducted in conjunction with the Spirit of East Austin event referenced in end note 6. Comments are available for public download at <https://data.austintexas.gov/City-Government/Spirit-of-East-Austin-Comments/wj2d-jcey>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com>

<sup>19</sup> Sabine Romero (City of Austin Office of Innovation), interviewed by IRM researcher, 21 September 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Notes from all commitment meetings are catalogued on the City of Austin's OGP Bloomfire page at <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/?feed=recent>.

# Early assessment of commitments

## I. Shared Reasoning on a Complex Issue - Ending Homelessness

### **Commitment text:**

*To further the city's goal of ending homelessness, we commit to fostering civic participation and transparency by co-creating a systems map with a multi-sector team that works towards greater understanding and shared reasoning around this complex issue, and which strengthens collaboration and decision-making.*

### **Desired Outcomes**

- 1. The City of Austin has better ways to manage community concerns around homelessness without criminalizing the condition of homelessness.*
- 2. Funders of efforts to end homelessness can better coordinate to a) connect those experiencing homeless to housing, and b) prevent people from sliding into homelessness in the first place.*
- 3. People who care and want to engage can figure out how to participate in helping to end homelessness.*
- 4. City of Austin policies and programs related to ending homelessness are developed with, not just for, the intended beneficiaries and those responsible for implementing the tasks.*

### **Milestones**

- 1. Clarify Phase. Expected deliverables: Hypothetical Systems Map; Synthesis of Community Feedback - experiences, questions to answer, others to engage; Research Plan.*
- 2. Framing Phase. Expected deliverables: Insights from Research, First draft of Systems Map.*
- 3. Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase. Expected deliverables: Feedback sessions on Systems Map; Second iteration of Systems Map; Highlight of gaps and areas of opportunity.*
- 4. Plan/Build Phase. Expected deliverables: Stable draft of Systems Map (never final, always iterative); Policy briefings for Government and Community Leaders; Budget/funding recommendations for City Management and City Council.*

### **Commitment overview**

Start date:	December 2016
Intended completion date:	August 2017
Responsible Office:	Office of Innovation
Lead CSO partners:	Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, Downtown Austin Alliance, Leadership Austin

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall				✓	✓	✓						✓

### Commitment aim

#### Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin’s first OGP commitment addresses the prevalence of homelessness in Austin. Although numerous city departments and a host of civil society groups focus on the issue, the city’s homelessness rate increased by 20 percent, from 1,832 individuals experiencing homelessness in 2015, to 2,197 in 2016<sup>21</sup>. As part of their first OGP commitment, city officials and civil society organizations will develop a homelessness systems map that identifies resources and gaps in relief services. Officials intend to increase coordination between service providers, city agencies, and other stakeholders to further the goal of ending homelessness in Austin. The map will also identify opportunities for individuals and organizations that want to participate in homelessness relief efforts. City officials believe that the systems map, propelled by a swell of interest among community partners, will help disrupt the cycle of homelessness by increasing inter-agency collaboration and informing more effective policy at City Hall.

Austin’s first commitment addresses the OGP values of *access to information* and *civic participation*. The creation of the homelessness systems map will involve new research by city officials, which will increase publicly available information on homelessness and service provision in Austin. The commitment also seeks to increase the availability and usability of information. The commitment addresses civic engagement by involving homelessness outreach organizations and increasing meaningful input by key civil society actors in the development of the systems map. While the systems map may potentially involve, or lead to the development of, new technologies, the commitment language and milestones do not specifically promote new technology as key to the commitment’s implementation. Therefore, the IRM researcher does not believe that the commitment, as written, is relevant to the OGP value of *technology and innovation*.

#### Specificity and Potential Impact

Austin’s first commitment has been coded as highly specific. Most of the milestones contained in the commitment are objectively verifiable and clearly measurable. While the milestones dealing with research are general, major milestones such as the systems map and a series of policy recommendations are measurable, verifiable, and timely.

The IRM researcher believes this commitment’s potential impact to be transformative. According to the Ending Community Homelessness Alliance (ECHO), annual public investments in homelessness relief programs cost \$19.1 million in 2015<sup>22</sup>. Currently, the city government does not employ a tool



for identifying service gaps or areas of greatest need. The creation of a homelessness systems map will benefit both service providers and beneficiaries. This unprecedented tool has the potential to increase efficiency and cooperation among city staff and civil society organizations serving homeless individuals, reducing costs to government and CSO actors and more effectively distributing resources across the community.

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<sup>21</sup> "Austin sees 20 percent increase in homeless population," *KVUE.com*, <http://www.kvue.com/news/local/austin-sees-20-percent-increase-in-homeless-population/65879102>.

<sup>22</sup> "Homelessness in Austin: Current Needs and Gaps Report," Ending Community Homelessness Alliance. Revised March 30, 2016. <http://austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Austin-Homelessness-Needs-and-Gaps3.pdf>

## 2. Equity Assessment Tool

### Commitment text:

To advance the goal of achieving equitable outcomes for all members of the Austin community, we further our commitment to civic participation, transparency, and accountability by establishing an equity assessment tool to better support decision-making and track progress towards critical goals.

### Desired Outcomes

1. Understand and evaluate the impact existing city policies and practices have on equity.
2. Enable city departments and the public to access an equity assessment tool during the budget process and throughout the year to evaluate and address equity challenges in the city.
3. Address significant inequities across multiple social determinants that impact the quality of life for many low-income communities, which are disproportionately found among communities of color.

### Milestones

1. Clarify Phase. Expected deliverables: Equity Visioning Session event; Synthesis of community feedback.
2. Framing Phase. Expected deliverables: Frame/parameters for system equity focus; Report out on scan of the environment, and internal and external stakeholder alignment to frame.
3. Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase. Expected deliverables: Identify specific targets within departments to pilot tool for 2017-18 city budget cycle.
4. Plan/Build Phase. Expected deliverables: Equity-focused departmental budgets for selected departments for consideration to city manager and city council; First round of equity-focused budgets implemented in 2017.

### Commitment overview

Start date:	December 2016
Intended completion date:	August 2016
Responsible Office:	Office of Equity
Lead CSO partners:	Vision Zero ATX, GO! Austin/VAMOS! Austin

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓		✓	✓						✓

## Commitment aim

### Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin's second OGP commitment addresses historic inequities in the City of Austin's budgeting and decision-making processes. While Austin is consistently ranked as one of the best places to live in the United States, it has also been crowned the most economically segregated major metropolitan area in the nation<sup>23</sup>. This disparate economic climate has existed in the city for decades and primarily disadvantaged communities of color. For many years, economic segregation along racial lines was strategically imposed by city officials and developers, such as the intentional isolation of minority residents to neighborhoods east of the downtown area, known as the "Koch and Fowler city plan"<sup>24</sup>.

This commitment proposes the development of an equity assessment tool to be used during budgeting and other city government proceedings. The equity tool will be available to both city officials and members of the public. The tool will compound data gathered by city departments and civil society organizations that address inequity in Austin. As stated in the action plan, during the development process, government officials and their CSO partners will conduct interviews with leaders and residents from historically disadvantaged communities. This research will be synthesized to create equity standards for city decision makers. Using these standards, city staff and their CSO partners will target specific departments to pilot the assessment tool. Upon approval from the city manager, the targeted equity-focused budgets will be implemented by the end of 2017.

Austin's second commitment addresses the OGP values of *access to information* and *civic participation*. The city is increasing access to information by collecting and proactively releasing survey data and synthesized research results during the development phase of the equity assessment tool. The commitment intends to increase public participation in government decisions by directly involving civil society groups in the development of the equity assessment tool. Communities that have been traditionally shut out of budgeting and other processes will also enjoy an increased role in city governance. By directly consulting and collaborating with these communities through surveys and equity tool development sessions, the city may encourage increased civic participation.

### Specificity and Potential Impact

Austin's second commitment is coded as medium specificity. The impact of the inequity that this commitment seeks to alleviate is broad. The milestones set out by government officials and civil society partners are objectively verifiable. Most of the milestones, such as hosting an equity visioning event, identifying departmental budgets for piloting the tool, and completing equity-focused budgets, are measurable and verifiable.

This commitment has the potential to transform the way that budgeting and decision-making are undertaken at City Hall. For decades, minority communities across Austin have been systematically denied equitable consideration by city leaders. Segregation, though illegal, has hardly been dismantled. Austin is the most economically segregated, and the fifth-most educationally segregated, large metropolitan area in the United States<sup>25</sup>. The proposed equity assessment tool, if implemented citywide, could signal a transformative step in a new direction with positive effects for disadvantaged communities. This commitment creates an opportunity for these historically marginalized communities to play a direct role for the first time in developing solutions to Austin's inequitable history. The groundbreaking factor is the combination of innovation and participation in policy-making on this key priority area in Austin.

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<sup>23</sup> Florida, Richard, and Charlotta Mellander, "Segregated City: The geography of economic segregation in America's metros," *Martin Prosperity Institute*, Harvard (2015): 25.

<sup>24</sup> Zehr, Dan, "Inheriting Inequality," *Austin American-Statesman*, <http://projects.statesman.com/news/economic-mobility/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> Florida and Mellander, 34.

### 3. Collaboration & City Departments - Open Governance Operating Board

**Commitment text:**

*To improve collaboration within the City of Austin and between the city and residents, we commit to furthering civic participation and accountability by adapting the City Manager’s existing executive Open Government Operating Board to oversee broader open government efforts, including these OGP projects.*

**Desired Outcomes**

- 1. Collaboration is increased among city departments and with civil society partners.*
- 2. Multiple avenues are created for feedback loops within government and between community members and organizations, all of which will help open government projects succeed at developing better outcomes.*
- 3. City Management has a more collaborative and effective way of managing, prioritizing, and supporting the growing portfolio of technology and innovation initiatives.*

**Milestones**

- 1. Clarify Phase. Expected deliverables: Assessment current state of the Open Government Operating Board’s purview and structure; Assessment the open government portfolio; Review existing Open Government commitments and assess compliance.*
- 2. Framing Phase. Expected deliverables: Publish proposed method for managing, prioritizing, and supporting open government efforts.*
- 3. Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase. Expected deliverables: Report of tested governance process flow and feedback; Document Open Government Operating Board process, success, and challenges.*
- 4. Plan/Build Phase. Expected deliverables: Draft recommendations to City Council, City Management, and other appropriate stakeholders; Funding sources identified for Open Government, Open Data, Civic Tech, and Civic Innovation in City of Austin Budget.*

**Commitment overview**

Start date:	December 2016
Intended completion date:	August 2017
Responsible Office:	Office of Innovation
Lead CSO partners:	Community Tech and Telecom Commission, Vision Zero ATX

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓		Unclear relevance					✓		

### Commitment aim

#### Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin’s third OGP commitment addresses management of open governance initiatives within city government. City officials and their civil society partners are working to improve the way that open governance initiatives are undertaken, managed, and monitored by the city manager’s office. This commitment outlines a process for assessing and restructuring the Open Government Operating Board’s method for managing open government projects.

The Open Government Operating Board (OGOB), overseen by the city manager’s office, was tasked in 2011 with overseeing open governance initiatives in Austin<sup>26</sup>. The number and variety of open data and open governance initiatives continues to grow, with three open data portals now operational on the city website and more than 300 datasets now available for public download through the city’s Open Data Portal<sup>27</sup>. City officials recognized a need to reassess and restructure the board to increase collaboration across departments and between government and civil society organizations. The commitment aims to create new methods for community engagement on open government issues and to increase the OGOB’s efficiency when “managing, prioritizing, and supporting the growing portfolio of technology and innovation initiatives”<sup>28</sup>. Each milestone concludes with the production of a detailed assessment, report, or list of recommendations. The commitment is robust and will generate a new, complex understanding of how open governance initiatives are structured and executed in Austin.

Austin’s third commitment, as written in the city’s OGP action plan, does not clearly address OGP values. The stated desired outcomes mention a need to increase feedback loops between community members, other stakeholders and the government, hinting at *civic participation*, but the commitment’s language and milestones do not elaborate on this goal. The IRM researcher believes that restructuring of the OGOB may potentially create opportunities for increased civic engagement. However, the action plan, as written, does not identify specific mechanisms for encouraging this collaboration.

#### Specificity and Potential Impact

Austin’s third commitment is coded as medium specificity. The milestones listed in the action plan are objectively verifiable but lack specific, measurable details. For instance, the IRM researcher can verify whether the proposed assessments of the “current state of the Open Government Operating Board’s purview and structure” and the “open government portfolio” were completed<sup>29</sup>. However,

these milestones do not identify specific, measurable indicators or procedures that will guide the assessments. Likewise, the outcomes identified in the action plan, such as increased collaboration and more effective management of the open government portfolio, are objectively verifiable but lack measurable indicators. The IRM researcher understands that the commitment's language may be broad by design and due to the one-year time constraint of the OGP commitment process.

This commitment has the potential to create a minor impact within city government. As an increasing number of transparency and public engagement initiatives are taken up by city leaders, reforming the management process is a positive step towards creating a new method of collaboration between the city and civil society. According to IRM interviews with city officials in the Office of Innovation, this commitment could increase the efficiency of the OGOB by replacing the current open governance management structure with a model that is more suited to handle the rapidly expanding portfolio of new open government initiatives in Austin<sup>30</sup>. While this commitment does seek to improve the function of the open governance management structure at City Hall, the commitment language is limited in scope. The set of recommendations that would come out of the implementation of this commitment represent an incremental step towards improving the way that open governance initiatives are undertaken, managed, and monitored. However, as written, the commitment falls short of identifying a mechanism to ensure implementation, without which it does not constitute a potential major change to the status quo.

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<sup>26</sup> The City of Austin's City Council initiated a series of open government reforms by passing [Council Resolution 2011208-074](#) on 8 December 2011.

<sup>27</sup> The City of Austin's Open Data Portal and other open government resources are published at <http://austintexas.gov/page/city-council-open-government>.

<sup>28</sup> City of Austin OGP Subnational Action Plan, page 12.

<sup>29</sup> City of Austin OGP Subnational Action Plan, page 13.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Honker and John Speirs (City of Austin), interviewed by IRM researcher, 23 August 2017

## 4. City Public Meetings

### **Commitment text:**

*To help Austin community members better navigate issues of concern, and to make city decision-making processes more understandable and accessible, we commit to furthering transparency and accountability by gathering, sharing, and analyzing data on the activities during public meetings to recommend opportunities for efficiencies and effectiveness.*

### **Desired Outcomes**

- 1. Public understanding of the activities at public meetings is increased through access, both in person and electronically.*
- 2. Council communication is improved with through new practices built on shared understanding of what works.*
- 3. The effectiveness of each meeting is increased, with a clear progression through debate.*
- 4. Establish meaningful options for informational and decision flows that will have the effect of making public meetings more accessible to the public.*
- 5. Create a better understanding for citizens on how initiatives are funded and how departments use resources from the General Fund and other budgetary sources.*

### **Milestones**

- 1. Clarify Phase. Expected deliverables: Research plan for interviews with stakeholders and members of the community and assessments of meeting recordings and transcripts; Draft of data format for publishing information about activities during public meetings; Storyboard of the city discussion life cycle.*
- 2. Framing Phase. Expected deliverables: Report on meeting process themes and patterns; Report on synthesis of interviews with stakeholders and community members.*
- 3. Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase. Expected deliverables: Backlog of possible solutions for achieving the desired outcomes; Identification of a council issue for testing possible solutions for achieving desired outcomes; Feedback from stakeholders and community members about how different solutions performed.*
- 4. Plan/Build Phase. Expected deliverables: Recommendations for formalizing solutions that have proved effective during testing; Refined storyboard of the city discussion life cycle; Data format for publishing information about activities during public meetings.*

### **Commitment overview**

Start date:	December 2016
Intended completion date:	September 2017
Responsible Office:	Office of Innovation
Lead CSO partners:	Leadership Austin



Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall				✓	✓	✓					✓	

### Commitment aim

#### Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin’s fourth OGP commitment addresses the efficiency of city government public meetings and public engagement in the decision-making process. Currently, city council meetings run very late, often ending in the early hours of the morning on the following day. Government officials and community leaders agree that this type of “late-night governance” decreases transparency and inhibits members of the public from fully engaging with and understanding the decision-making process. The commitment sets out a plan to collect, publish, and analyze data on public meetings. City officials and their civil society partners will use this information to make recommendations for improving the public meetings process.

Like many of Austin’s OGP commitments, the commitment to improve city meetings involves four key stages. City officials and their CSO partners will use qualitative interviews with staff and stakeholders to generate new insights into the city meetings process. They will then synthesize their research results and create reports for city staff, CSOs, and other stakeholders. These results will inform the selection of a specific city council issue for testing solutions for more efficient decision-making. After a testing period, city officials and their CSO contacts will collaborate on a set of recommendations to city leaders for solving the issue of inefficient city meetings, including “data format[s] for publishing information about activities during public meetings”<sup>31</sup>.

Austin’s fourth commitment addresses the OGP values of *access to information* and *civic participation*. The commitment aims specifically to increase understanding of and access to information on public meetings. The publication of city meeting data in a useable and understandable format will empower citizens to engage more easily with their local representatives. By increasing meeting efficiency and solving the issue of late-night governance, city officials can make it much easier for citizens to have their voice heard on key issues.

#### Specificity and Potential Impact

Austin’s fourth commitment is highly specific. Milestones are objectively verifiable, timely, and easily measurable. Each milestone marks the production of resources that are key to the commitment’s success, including research plans, reports, data publication, and recommendations for city government.

This commitment has the potential to create a moderate change within city government. Austin’s

city council meetings are notoriously long and convoluted. Streamlined processes for conducting and documenting city meetings will make government more accessible to the public and have the potential to inform more transformative commitments in the future. While this commitment seeks to solve the notorious issue of late-night council meetings at City Hall, the action plan does not clearly outline any transformative measures for improving the city meetings process. The commitment's language rather implies that many current processes, though not reformed, will be improved and carried out more efficiently. The IRM researcher believes that improving current methods will have a strong positive impact on the current status quo but that the language of the commitment does not identify a transformative impact.

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<sup>31</sup> City of Austin OGP Subnational Action Plan, page 15.

## 5. Project Tracking

### **Commitment text:**

*To better track our progress towards ambitious goals, we commit to transparency and accountability by creating an online project-tracking interface, using our OGP commitments as a first project.*

### **Desired Outcomes**

- 1. The public will have a better sense of what projects the City is working on, the state of progress of those projects, how the projects relate to critical goals, and how they are funded.*
- 2. Members of the public have meaningful ways to engage and collaborate on these projects.*
- 3. Public engagement and commitment to civic goals increases.*
- 4. City Departments have a better means of cross-pollinating projects with each other and collaborating with the community.*
- 5. The public has a better understanding on how projects are funded.*

### **Milestones**

- 1. Clarify Phase. Expected deliverables: Report out on existing platforms; Report out on public and inter-departmental interests in projects; Report out on inventory of possible projects beyond these commitments.*
- 2. Framing Phase. Expected deliverables: Decision about what data about projects will be collected; Status update to Community Tech & Telecom Commission, Open Austin Meetup, other public squares.*
- 3. Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase. Expected deliverables: Alpha release of Project Tracking interface; Online resource for viewing work in progress and tracking issues, questions, and feature requests from the community.*
- 4. Plan/Build Phase. Expected deliverables: Beta release of Project Tracking Interface in alignment with ATX Hack for Change 2017; Live release of Project Tracking Interface; Prioritized backlog of potential improvements.*

### **Commitment overview**

Start date:	December 2016
Intended completion date:	August 2017
Responsible Office:	Office of Innovation
Lead CSO partners:	Open Austin

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓		✓			✓		✓		

### Commitment aim

#### Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin’s fifth OGP commitment addresses the need for a public-facing project tracking tool. By creating this resource, city officials and their civil society partners will provide the citizens of Austin with a better understanding of projects in their community, how those projects are funded, and each project’s status. The city has introduced several open government initiatives<sup>32</sup> in recent years, including an open data portal and an online city finance tool. A project tracking tool, according to city officials, is a natural next step in Austin’s continuing embrace of open governance.

Austin’s fifth commitment addresses the OGP values of *access to information* and *technology for innovation and transparency*. By proactively increasing the amount of information available through a user-friendly web-based tool, city officials will foster increased transparency at City Hall. The project tracking tool is described as a new technology (“Project Tracking Interface”) that will allow citizens to access key information on demand about city projects. While online tracking tools have the potential to increase public accountability, the action plan, as it is written, does not specify a mechanism for public redress. The IRM researcher believes that the commitment could ultimately inform future commitments that directly address the need for public accountability mechanisms.

#### Specificity and Potential Impact

Austin’s fifth commitment is coded as medium specificity. The milestones are objectively verifiable but lack measurable indicators. City officials intend to produce an online resource for tracking city projects, beginning with Austin’s OGP commitment projects. However, the action plan, as written, specifies very few characteristics of the tracking tool. The IRM researcher understands that these characteristics may be decided and developed as part of the research included in the early milestones.

This commitment is a positive, yet incremental step towards improving access to information. The IRM researcher considers that it has the potential to create a minor impact on the way that city projects are monitored and evaluated, including open governance initiatives. City departments currently track projects using a broad spectrum of tools. According to interviews with city staff, the amount, type, and availability of data made available varies drastically by department<sup>33</sup>. By providing the public with a transparent, uniform method for tracking projects in their neighborhoods, the city could potentially increase access to information about individual projects and encourage increased understanding of local governance. The IRM researcher believes that this commitment is a key step

toward increased transparency in Austin. However, without a mechanism for increasing civic participation and securing buy-in from a wider spectrum of city departments and initiatives, this commitment is unlikely to create major changes to city governance structures in Austin.

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<sup>32</sup> “City Council Open Government,” *City of Austin*, Accessed 21 July 2017, <http://austintexas.gov/page/city-council-open-government>.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Honker (City of Austin), interviewed by IRM researcher, 13 September 2017