

Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Austin Progress Report 2017

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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. This report summarizes the results of the development and implementation of Austin's pilot subnational action plan from January 2017 to December 2017.

The IRM reports for OGP pioneers will be published online primarily. As a result, this template is outlined in terms of the final site layout of the report.

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Overview

Period under Review

Action plan under review	2017
Dates of actions under Review	01/2017 – 12/2017

Summary of IRM Findings

Austin developed an action plan with ambitious commitments that centered on improving access to information and civic engagement in key priority areas like homelessness and equitable budgeting. In future action plans, it is important to increase civil society engagement in the design of commitments and strengthen public accountability measures.

Participation in OGP

Action plan date	01/2017 – 12/2017
Lead Agency (Office, Department, etc.)	Innovation Office

At a Glance

Table 1: At a Glance	
Number of Commitments	5
Level of Completion	
Completed	2
Substantial	1
Limited	2
Not Started	0
Number of Commitments with...	
Clear Relevance to OGP Values	4
Transformative Potential Impact	2
Substantial or Complete Implementation	3
All Three (👉)	1

Did It Open Government?	<i>Major</i>	0
	<i>Outstanding</i>	0

Action Plan Priorities

1. Increase access to information for individuals and organizations working on social issues in Austin.
2. Develop new tools for city staff and the public to access information and facilitate equitable outcomes.
3. Improve public meetings processes to increase civic engagement.

Institutional Context

This section summarizes the Institutional and Subnational Context section. It emphasizes the description of the lead institutions responsible for the action plan, their powers of coordination and how the institutional set-up boosts or affects the OGP process.

OGP leadership in Austin

The Austin City Council passed a resolution in 2011 that directed the city manager’s office to “adopt an Open Government Framework with a comprehensive set of policies, initiatives, guidelines and standards.”¹ In 2016, the city council reaffirmed the directive as it committed the city to OGP’s subnational government pilot program, dedicating the City to the program and OGP’s principles.² The City’s OGP activities were overseen by a team of government leads. While each commitment was managed by a different multi-departmental team, the Innovation Office (OI) was the primary department responsible for implementing the City’s OGP activities. OI’s Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Innovation Officer were the primary government points of contact and provided high-level management of the city’s OGP initiatives. The commitments were designed through a co-creative, cross-department process and collaboratively implemented by the Innovation Office, Equity Office, Law Department, Management Services, Communications and Technology Management Department, and Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs Department. In addition to its resolutions of support and commitment to OGP, the city council participated directly in the implementation of Austin’s OGP commitment on public meetings. The departments overseeing each commitment did not change throughout the first year of Austin’s OGP participation. However, there were leadership changes at two of Austin’s civil society partner organizations during the implementation process.³

Table 2. Summary of OGP leadership in Austin

I. Structure	Yes	No
Is there a clearly designated government lead for OGP?	✓	
	Shared	Single
Is there a single lead agency or shared leadership on OGP efforts?	✓	
	Yes	No

Is the head of government leading the OGP initiative?		✓
2. Legal Mandate	Yes	No
Is the government's commitment to OGP established through an official, publicly released mandate?	✓	
Is the government's commitment to OGP established through a legally binding mandate?		✓
3. Continuity and Instability	Yes	No
Was there a change in the organization(s) leading or involved with the OGP initiatives during the action plan implementation cycle?	✓	
Was there a change in the executive leader during the duration of the OGP action plan cycle?		✓

Participation in OGP by Government Institutions

This sub-section describes which government institutions were involved at various stages in OGP.

Early participation in OGP was initiated by the Innovation Office. Staff sent invitations to other city departments to support the design and implementation of the city's OGP commitments. While Austin's OGP participation was overseen generally by the Innovation Office, each commitment was developed and implemented by a different small team. Three of Austin's commitments were managed by staff from the Innovation Office. The remaining commitments were managed by the Equity Office and Management Services. Some teams engaged with and were supported by city staff from additional departments. This collaboration varied widely and is further detailed later in this report. While the Innovation Office managed Austin's overall OGP activities, the city council and city manager's office were directly involved in the commitment implementation process. Table 1.2 illustrates the participation by various agencies and departments in Austin's OGP process.

During the implementation process, the Innovation Office and the Equity Office engaged with a variety of additional departments, boards, and commissions. These organizations were targeted directly by city staff overseeing each commitment. For example, the commitment dedicated to developing an online tracking tool benefited from input by staff from the Communications and Technology Management Department. Engagement with additional city departments increased during implementation. The Equity Office contacted departments to develop and pilot their equity assessment tool (commitment 2). The Innovation Office collaborated with other departments on a collection of commitments. Communications and Technology Management supported the development of the online project tracking tool (commitment 5). The Law Department supported the development and implementation of changes to public meetings (commitment 4). The Open Governance Operating Board (now renamed the Open and Smart Advisory Committee) offered insights during the implementation of commitment 3. Finally, the team working on Austin's homelessness commitment (commitment 1) collaborated to some extent with several city departments while developing its systems map of homelessness. These are detailed later in this report.

Table 3. Participation in OGP by Government Institutions

How did institutions participate?	Ministries, Departments or agencies	Legislative (parliaments or councils)	Justice institutions (including quasi-judicial agencies)	Other (special districts, authorities, parastatal bodies, etc.)
Consult: These institutions observed or were invited to observe the action plan, but may not be responsible for commitments in the action plan	5 ⁴	1 ⁵	0	2 ⁶
Propose: These institutions proposed commitments for inclusion in the action plan	2 ⁷	0	0	0
Implement: These institutions are responsible for implementing commitments in the action plan whether or not they proposed the commitments	4 ⁸	1 ⁹	0	2 ¹⁰

Commitment Overview

Austin’s five OGP commitments addressed homelessness, equitable budgeting, collaboration on open governance initiatives, civic engagement at public meetings, and access to information via online project tracking. Expected beneficiaries of Austin’s OGP activities include: individuals experiencing homelessness, city officials working to address homelessness in the city, homelessness service providers, researchers, city staff working on open governance in Austin, traditionally underserved communities (especially communities of color) across the city. Additionally, commitments dedicated to improving the public meetings process and online project tracking could potentially benefit all citizens of Austin, especially those that seek to engage with local governance but have traditionally been impeded by their inability to access meetings and information.

Austin’s OGP initiatives returned a list of accomplishments in 2017. City leaders and CSO partners successfully designed and implemented an equity assessment tool for departmental budgeting, launched a new online project tracking tool, and enacted changes to the public meetings process that allow for increased civic engagement. Two of Austin’s commitments were coded as potentially transformative, the homelessness systems map and the equity assessment tool. While the homelessness commitment was not fully implemented during the time frame for this report, city staff has already experienced significant improvements in cross-departmental collaboration on homelessness issues. The equity assessment tool was successfully implemented, and its use in the future will lead to further improvements in budget equity. OGP leaders in Austin can strengthen future OGP action plans and open government initiatives

by continuing work on incomplete commitments, actively engaging with more civil society partners during the commitment design process and strengthening public accountability measures in future commitments.

Table 4. Overview: Assessment of Progress by Commitment

Table 4 displays for each commitment the level of specificity, relevance to OGP values, potential impact level of completion.

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsens	No change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
1. Ending Homelessness				✓	✓	✓						✓		✓					✓		
2. Equity Assessment Tool			✓		✓	✓						✓				✓			✓		
3. Open Governance Operating Board			✓		✓					✓			✓						✓		
4. City Public Meetings				✓	✓	✓					✓			✓				✓			
5. Project Tracking			✓		✓		✓			✓					✓				✓		

General Recommendations

Strengthening the Co-creation Process

Austin’s future OGP action plans could benefit from a more structured, open, and collaborative co-creation process. The Innovation Office staff managed significant progress with limited resources during Austin’s OGP pilot year. Future action plans could benefit from a co-creation process that is more widely publicized to civil society. The 2017 civil society partners were originally selected through

targeted invitations, primarily based on previously existing relationships with the city government. While the government's action plan declared the OGP process open to all interested civil society organizations, the IRM researcher observed that civil society was only invited to the co-creation process through targeted invitation. The Innovation Office produced several useful tools during their first year managing the OGP process. By implementing these as part of a more open co-creation process, the government could facilitate the design of commitments that reflect the OGP value of civic participation.

Additionally, city staff and CSO partners should work to ensure continuity during leadership or staffing changes. Two of Austin's primary CSO partners experienced a change in leadership during the implementation process. In both cases, newly appointed CSO points of contacts expressed that onboarding in the middle of the implementation process was difficult. While leadership changes and attrition are inevitable occurrences, it could be beneficial to prepare for these instances when structuring future action plans. The IRM researcher observed that CSO points of contact were generally organizational leaders, such as executive directors and chairpersons. CSO partners could assign OGP coordination duties to individuals with fewer leadership responsibilities or even small OGP-specific teams. This could alleviate work slowdowns if CSOs experience similar changes during future OGP cycles.

Increased Public Accountability Measures in Commitment Design

Austin's OGP commitments aligned with the OGP values of access to information and civic engagement. However, none of the commitments met the criteria to be relevant to the value of public accountability as defined by OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). OGP clearly defines the characteristics of public accountability measures:

“To be counted as ‘clearly relevant [to public accountability],’ such commitments must include a public-facing element, meaning that they are not purely internal systems of accountability. While such commitments may be laudable and may meet an OGP grand challenge, they do not, as articulated, meet the test of “clear relevance” due to their lack of openness. Where such internal-facing mechanisms are a key part of government strategy, it is recommended that governments include a public facing element.”¹¹

Austin should strive to include public accountability measures in future commitment designs. Commitments that align with public accountability include “rules, regulations, and mechanisms that call upon government actors to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments.”¹² These mechanisms should be public-facing, rather than fully internal processes.

Stronger Incentives for Departmental Engagement and Support for OGP Projects

The Innovation Office invited city departments to engage in the OGP process. While several departments collaborated on the city's commitments, participation was voluntary. This is true for the development of the action plan and the implementation of Austin's OGP commitments. During interviews with the IRM researcher, city staff identified cross-departmental engagement as a key challenge to implementation. Additionally, city staff identified a need for clearer guidance and stronger support for OGP initiatives from city leadership. Future action plans could benefit from stronger incentives for departmental engagement with the OGP process and mandatory participation on certain open government initiatives, such as application of the new equity assessment tool and provision of

departmental data to populate the new project tracking tool developed as part of the OGP process in 2017.

With new leadership and a strong role in the city's administration, the city manager should join the city council in a renewed public pledge to the principles of openness, civic engagement, and public accountability. This support should include stronger mandates, increased funding and staffing allocations for future OGP commitments. The open government framework provides a unique opportunity for government and community leaders to develop new communities of practice and engage with the city's most pervasive issues, from affordable housing to police oversight. City officials should invest heavily in this opportunity as Austin moves forward into the next OGP cycle.

Opportunities for New City Manager

The city council recently selected a new city manager. This presents a unique opportunity for the city, the city manager, and Austin's OGP leaders. The city manager's office was an early leader in proactive open governance initiatives, embracing the principle of open government in a 2013 directive that called for all city departments to pursue openness, civic engagement and public accountability¹³. The new city manager spoke openly about transparency and open government in public statements during the selection process. However, a highly secretive hiring process raised doubts in the community and among city staff about the office's level of dedication to transparency. The city manager's office, under new leadership, should now reinforce its previous backing of open government principles with official support for the next OGP cycle. By working together early in their new relationship, the city manager and the city council can enshrine the values of transparency, civic participation and public accountability into new directives.

Funding and Staffing

Resources and staffing support for Austin's OGP participation varied widely by commitment. The OGP process in Austin did not have an official budget. One commitment team was staffed and supported by grant funding. Others relied on existing funding within their respective departments. During interviews with the IRM researcher, multiple city staff members expressed frustration at the lack of sufficient resources and staffing for commitment implementation. Commitments that received grant funding, dedicated staff, and other resources produced robust research projects and new relationships between government and civil society. Future action plans and implementation phases will benefit from dedicated funding and staffing for the OGP process.

Further, the City of Austin should increase financial and material support for the Innovation Office, partner departments and other staff working on future OGP commitments. During the 2017 OGP cycle, several members of the city's Design, Technology, and Innovation Fellows Program played crucial roles designing and implementing commitments. Several of Austin's OGP commitments relied heavily on the work of these fellows and their colleagues at the Innovation Office, including the complex research design for Austin's commitment on homelessness and the design of Austin's online project tracking tool. While the fellows program has since ended, city leaders should invest in open government research, design, and development. Specifically, leaders should increase financial and material support for Austin's second round of OGP activities. This increased support for the Innovation Office and its OGP partners will continue to be crucial to the growth and successful implementation of Austin's open government initiatives.

¹ Austin City Council Resolution [20111208-074](#).

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- ² Austin City Council Resolution [20160225-XXX](#).
- ³ Open Austin and Vision Zero ATX both experienced leadership changes during the OGP implementation process.
- ⁴ Innovation Office, Equity Office, Communications and Technology Management, Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs, Law Department
- ⁵ City Council
- ⁶ Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission, Open Governance Operating Board/Open and Smart Advisory Committee
- ⁷ Innovation Office, Equity Office
- ⁸ Innovation Office, Equity Office, Law Department, Communications and Technology Management
- ⁹ City Council
- ¹⁰ Community Tech and Telecom Commission, Open Governance Operating Board/Open and Smart Advisory Committee
- ¹¹ OGP IRM Procedures Manual, version 2.0, page 52-53.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ City of Austin [Open Government Directive](#). 2013.

Institutional and Subnational Context and Scope of Action Plan

This section places the action plan commitments in the broader context. The emphasis of the IRM report is on the development and implementation of the OGP action plan. However, to ensure the credibility of the report and of OGP more broadly and to inform future versions of the action plan, researchers are asked to briefly consider the institutional context within which the OGP action plan is framed. Consider significant actions not covered by the action plan that are `be on the specific subnational context, although researchers may make some reference to the broader national context as it affects implementation at the subnational level (in county, referring to ward level or in the Municipality, referring to State and Federal context).

Background

Structure of Government

Austin is the capital city of the state of Texas in the United States. It is the fourth largest city in Texas and the eleventh most populous city in the United States, according to the US Census Bureau.¹⁴ Austin is operated under a city council – city manager system. Ten city council members and a mayor represent the city’s residents and oversee the City Manager, City Auditor, City Clerk, and the courts. In 2012, Austin’s electorate voted to change the way that city council members were elected, moving from the previous at-large election system to a system of geographic representation. City council members are now elected from ten geographically representative districts. The mayor is elected at-large. The city manager is appointed by the city council.

The Office of the City Manager oversees 41 administrative offices and departments, organized under seven headings, each assigned to an Assistant City Manager: Support Services, Development Services, Infrastructure Services, Community Services, Public Safety, Administrative Services and Financial Services.¹⁵ The Innovation Office, which was the primary point of contact for Austin’s OGP initiatives, is housed under Support Services.

Government Institutions Involved in OGP

Austin’s OGP initiatives were initiated by the Innovation Office and City Clerk, which submitted the city’s letter of interest for the subnational pilot program. The Innovation Office generally oversaw the design and implementation of Austin’s OGP commitments. The departments and other government entities involved in Austin’s commitment development and implementation processes varied by commitment. Each commitment was overseen by staff from one or more departments. Additional departments were engaged at varied levels, from simple consultations to regular meetings and involvement in the design process. These collaborations are detailed further in each commitment’s section later in this report.

Commitment	Responsible office
1. Ending Homelessness	Innovation Office
2. Equity Assessment Tool	Equity Office

3. Collaboration & City Departments	Innovation Office Office of Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs
4. City Public Meetings	Management Services Innovation Office Law Department
5. Online Project Tracking	Innovation Office, Communications and Technology Management

Significant Events

The IRM researcher identified two political events in Austin that may have impacted the implementation of Austin’s OGP commitment.

In August of 2017, Texas was severely impacted by Hurricane Harvey, a storm that swamped the state with costly flooding and related damage. While Austin was not subjected to severe storm conditions, the city was heavily involved in relief efforts for Texas residents that were impacted. The city provided shelter and organized supply drives. It is difficult to measure the precise impact on the implementation of the OGP action plan. However, city staff did identify the hurricane as a major disruption of city activities during interviews with the IRM researcher.

Additionally, the previous city manager vacated the position in October of 2016. The role was filled by an interim city manager for more than a year. During the search for a replacement, concerns were raised due to the city council’s decision to conduct the search confidentially.¹⁶ The city manager’s office oversees city departments working on open government initiatives, including the Innovation Office. The government’s decision to conduct the city manager hiring process behind closed doors led to allegations that the city had violated the State of Texas Open Meetings Act and state law.^{17, 18} The city’s mayor expressed some remorse at the decision to keep the process secret and physically barring the public and reporters from attending meetings.¹⁹ During interviews with the IRM researcher, city staff expressed frustration that the hiring process was not in the spirit of the city’s OGP commitments or the general principles of open government.

Stakeholder Priorities

Stakeholder priorities in Austin’s OGP action plan included ending homelessness through information sharing, creating equitable budgeting tools, increasing collaboration among city departments and civil society organizations, increasing accessibility and civic engagement at public meetings, and developing a publicly-accessible project tracking tool. While each commitment was celebrated by city officials as equally important, some commitments received more tangible support and/or were more successfully implemented than others. These included the commitments on homelessness, equity assessment, and project tracking. While Austin’s OGP activities received no official budget, some commitments benefited from related funding or department-specific resources. The commitment on homelessness benefited from grant funding that allowed the city government to provide dedicated staff to the commitment. Likewise, the commitment on equity was championed by the Equity Office and benefited from the commitment of significant departmental resources. In contrast, Austin’s other OGP commitments and activities had no official budget or dedicated staff. Rather, staff from the Innovation Office and a cadre of individuals from commitment-relevant departments collaborated on these commitments as their schedules allowed. Dedicated funding and staffing for the homelessness and equity commitments was

circumstantial. The financial resources dedicated to the homelessness commitment were the result of grant funding for the city's expanded homelessness research. While this funding was not directly tied to the OGP commitment, it provided added support for the Innovation Office as its staff conducted research on homelessness. Similarly, the city's second OGP commitment (creation of an equity assessment tool) was overseen by the Equity Office, which provided its own staff to support the development and implementation of the equity tool commitment.

Future action plans could focus on carrying forward incomplete commitments deemed valuable and relevant to Austin's open government objectives; expanding commitments that were successfully implemented; and expanding the co-creation process to include new community partners. The commitment on homelessness effectively increased collaboration between city departments and civil society. However, a final iteration of the proposed homelessness systems and services map was not completed until June 2018. This tool has the potential to transform service provision and collaboration between government and civil society. Future action plans should also include expanded efforts to increase social equity, which was a key priority in the first action plan. Austin's CSO partner Open Austin has also identified priorities for future action plans, which include increasing access to city council meeting agendas, city council vote data, raw data from city surveys, climate-related city data and data on lobbying activities at city hall.²⁰

Scope of Action Plan in Relation to Subnational Context

While it is not the job of the IRM to tell governments and civil society organizations what can or cannot be in action plans, the IRM Guiding Principles do require the IRM to identify, "The extent to which the action plan and its commitments reflect, in a certain subnational context, the OGP values of transparency, accountability, and civic participation, as articulated in the OGP Declaration of Principles and the Articles of Governance.

Open government in Austin is not an emerging concept. The city government prides itself as a leader in open government among other US cities. The City Council pledged in 2011 to embrace an open government framework.²¹ The City Manager's office reinforced this commitment with a 2013 directive instructing departments to "institutionalize the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration."²² The city operates an open data portal with hundreds of departmental datasets and a city finance portal that hosts city financial and purchasing data.²³ In 2017, Austin ranked highest on the Sunlight Foundation's Open Data Census and launched its inaugural Open Government Showcase, which featured more than a dozen open government initiatives currently underway at City Hall.^{24, 25}

These initiatives notwithstanding, city leaders have been criticized for ad hoc departures from the principles of open government. During a recent search for a new city manager, the City was accused of "abandoning transparency" as it kept its hiring process secret.²⁶ The Austin Police Department (APD), which receives the largest share of the annual city budget, has been similarly criticized for a lack of transparency.²⁷ The department has been accused of withholding information from the public.²⁸ Additionally, a community-led Citizen Review Panel, formed in 2001 to improve police transparency and accountability, was recently suspended by the city manager's office after being largely ignored by APD leadership for years.²⁹ A city-led audit found that the citizen-led panel had been ineffective at achieving "substantive change... largely due to the effects of City procedures and police department practices."³⁰ These examples of government opacity illustrate the opportunity to build trust between government and civil society representatives through expanded open government initiatives in Austin.

The city government, in consultation with its CSO partners, took significant steps toward openness and increased civic engagement during its pilot year with OGP. Austin's OGP leaders built a new tool to make it easier for citizens to track projects in their neighborhoods, piloted a budgeting tool that could begin to reverse decades of systematic inequity, and developed a revolutionary method for understanding homelessness in Austin. While some commitments were not fully implemented, the city and its partners drafted an ambitious action plan and made some progress toward equally ambitious challenges.

The co-creation process to develop Austin's first OGP action plan was not widely promoted beyond contacts known to the government points of contacts. A more open co-creation process will likely address issue areas that were not addressed by Austin's first action plan. Additionally, a more intentionally open co-creation process could ensure that constituent priorities from each geographic district are represented in future action plans.

The city government should also strive to connect with CSOs that work on key issues that were not reflected in the initial action plan. Immigrants rights groups, indigenous rights groups, LGBTQI advocacy organizations and other representatives of traditionally marginalized populations should be actively engaged in the next co-creation process.

¹⁴ American Fact Finder, US Census Bureau. Accessed 8 March 2018.

¹⁵ [City of Austin Organizational Chart](#). Accessed 8 March 2018.

¹⁶ Findell, Elizabeth, "Austin will keep city manager search a secret," Austin American-Statesman, 23 March 2017, <https://www.mystatesman.com/news/local-govt--politics/austin-will-keep-city-manager-search-secret/vKaK82Ix3IOFaSFxhyzS2K/>

¹⁷ Findell, Elizabeth and Philip Jankowski, "Statesman sues for city manager candidate names as interviews begin," Austin American-Statesman, 31 October 2017. <https://www.mystatesman.com/news/local-govt--politics/statesman-sues-for-city-manager-candidate-names-interviews-begin/cI ZyKEF4Df9nTVjvyAkb3H/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jankowski, Philip and Elizabeth Findell. "Council may have broken open meetings law with 'secret' city manager search," Austin American-Statesman, 2 November 2017, <https://www.mystatesman.com/news/local-govt--politics/council-may-have-broken-open-meetings-law-with-secret-city-manager-search/sC8gX3qBhBhfutIQeSlxNL/>

²⁰ [Open Austin City Council Advocacy Agenda 2017-18](#). Accessed 8 March 2018.

²¹ Austin City Council Resolution [20111208-074](#).

²² [City of Austin Open Government Directive](#). Issued 26 August 2013. Accessed 10 June 2018.

²³ [City Council Open Government](#). City of Austin. Accessed 10 June 2018.

²⁴ [US Data Open Census 2018](#). Sunlight Foundation. Accessed 10 June 2018.

²⁵ Romero, Sabine, "[Austin's Open Government Showcase 2017: 5 Civic Participation Exercises in 1 Event](#)," Civiqueso (Innovation Office Medium page), 27 December 2017.

²⁶ Austin American-Statesman Editorial Staff, "[Viewpoints: Austin abandons transparency in search for a city manager](#)," Austin American-Statesman, 31 March 2017.

²⁷ Hernandez, Nina. "[How transparent is APD?](#)" Austin Chronicle.

²⁸ Smith, Jordan, "[You can't have that](#)," Austin Chronicle. 16 July 2004.

²⁹ Lisher, Mark. "[Another citizen review board for Austin police in the works](#)." The Texas Monitor. 27 July 2018.

³⁰ City of Austin Office of the City Auditor. "[Effectiveness of Citizen Police Oversight](#)," June 2018.

Development Process and Monitoring of the Action Plan

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.³¹ In 2015, the Austin City Council created the Task Force on Community Engagement to support civic engagement in decision-making.³² To this end, city staff engaged with civil society organizations (CSOs) to identify "pain points" that could be alleviated by open governance initiatives³³.

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.³⁴ 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 Innovation Office, the Equity Office, 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 Innovation Office 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ While the use of surveys and interviews varied widely across commitments, the IRM researcher believes that care was taken to ensure that a range of voices was included in the identification of key issues areas. For instance, the team tasked with developing an equity assessment tool analyzed approximately two thousand comments collected during interviews in geographic regions historically affected by social inequity in Austin.³⁸ The city submitted its draft commitments to the OGP Support team for review in October and November 2016.

Table 5. Basic Requirements

<p>1. Participatory Mechanism: 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.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>2. Priority Identification: 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.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>3. Commitment Development: 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.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>4. Review: 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.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>5. Submission: 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.</p>	<p>Yes</p>

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 to organizations that government contacts knew through previous interaction.³⁹ 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. Simultaneously, the IRM researcher understood that the short time frame allowed by the one-year OGP local pilot program created a challenge to widespread CSO recruiting during the development of Austin's action plan. City staff expressed an overall desire for wider collaboration with civil society and identified the time constraints imposed by the one-year pilot program as a key factor limiting collaboration. 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.⁴⁰ 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 confirmed that OGP guidelines were well communicated to CSOs by government officials and that CSO partners received regular updates from government officials during initial discussions and subsequent meetings.⁴¹

Which parts of civil society participated?

The City of Austin ultimately enlisted seven civil society organizations (CSOs) and hundreds of citizens in the development of its OGP action plan. These organizations were approached directly by city officials overseeing the OGP process and were known to officials through previous initiatives. 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.⁴² Government entities involved in commitment development include the Innovation Office, the Equity Office, 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.⁴³ This spectrum shows the potential level of public influence on the contents of the action plan.

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.⁴⁴ These responses informed its commitment on increasing equitable decision-making.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ This inclusive approach garnered responses from nearly two thousands citizens and fostered a highly collaborative approach to the development of the government’s OGP commitments.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.^{49,50} Table 6 below illustrates the high level of public input considered during the development of the OGP action plan.

Table 6. 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	

³¹ 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>.

³² 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>.

³³ *Pain points* is a term used by city staff to describe issue areas that drive conflict between civil society and the government.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Sabine Romero and Angela Hanson (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 20 June 2017; Sabine Romero, Angela Hanson, and Kerry O'Connor (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 28 June 2017; Mateo Clarke (formerly with Open Austin), interview by IRM researcher, 8 August 2017.

³⁶ The City of Austin Innovation Office 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>.

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ 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>

³⁹ Sabine Romero, Angela Hanson, and Kerry O'Connor (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 28 June 2017; Sabine Romero (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 21 September 2017.

⁴⁰ Kerry O'Connor (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 28 June 2017

⁴¹ Mateo Clarke (formerly with Open Austin), interview by IRM researcher, 8 August 2017.

⁴² 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.

⁴³http://c.ycdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf

⁴⁴ 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>.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ Open Austin is an organization of citizen volunteers that develops new technologies at community meetups to solve a variety of civic issues.

⁴⁷ 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>.

⁴⁸ <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com>

⁴⁹ Sabine Romero (City of Austin Innovation Office), interviewed by IRM researcher, 21 September 2017.

⁵⁰ Notes from all commitment meetings are catalogued on the City of Austin's OGP Bloomfire page at <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/?feed=recent>.

Process of Monitoring Implementation of the Action Plan

OGP Basic Requirements

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

December 2016 – December 2017: Implementation of Commitments

The guidance below provides more information about the best way to manage implementation of commitments, internal reporting and consultation with civil society throughout.

- Commitments should be developed in partnership with civil society and should seek to engage the widest possible input from citizens. [This note](#) provides guidance about how to conduct successful engagement with civil society and provides advice about ongoing consultation with civil society.
- Governments should conduct regular internal assessment, to make sure that commitments are on track and that there is an ongoing role for civil society. This assessment should be carried out along the lines of the OGP template for self-assessment, to make it easier for the IRM researcher to gather information.
- At regular intervals governments should publish a brief update on progress against commitments and use that as an opportunity to invite any comments. To complement any tracking system, governments are strongly encouraged to maintain a public, online repository of all documents giving evidence of consultation and implementation of commitments.

During the implementation of its OGP commitments, the government of the City of Austin completed the OGP Basic Requirements. While there was regular variance in the level of civil society engagement across commitments, the basic requirements were achieved and, at times, exceeded. The Innovation Office oversaw regularly monthly meetings of all commitment teams, during which each team provided updates on the status of implementation.

Civil society counterparts were invited to attend these “all-hands” meetings via email invitation, though attendance varied. In addition to monthly all-hands meetings, each commitment team conducted its own meetings for the purposes of collaboration and information sharing. Civil society engagement at commitment-specific meetings varied widely from commitment to commitment. While some commitment teams consulted only one or two CSOs, others engaged several dozen organizations in consultations and collaborative work sessions.

The government published meeting notes, progress updates, resources and related documents via a public Bloomfire page.⁵¹ Meetings were occasionally broadcast via webinar to allow for increased CSO and stakeholder participation. However, this practice was infrequent, and accessibility of meetings varied. CSO partners were consulted and involved during the implementation process, though involvement varied by commitment. For instance, CSO partner Open Austin was consulted regularly during the development of the project tracking tool, offering input that helped city designers during the tool’s design process. Multiple civil society partners were involved in each step of the equity tool’s design and implementation. However, there was little, if any, evidence that civil society partners impacted the implementation of other commitments, such as the commitment on restructuring the

Open Government Operating Board. The involvement of CSO partners is detailed further in each commitment’s subsection below.

Table 7. Basic Requirements

<p>1. Internal Assessment & Participatory Mechanism:</p> <p>a. Did the government conduct regular internal assessments?</p> <p>b. Did the government ensure an ongoing role for civil society in monitoring of the action plan?</p> <p>Guideline: Governments should conduct regular internal assessment, to make sure that commitments are on track and that there is an ongoing role for civil society.</p>	1.a Yes
<p>2. Regular Updates & Opportunity to Comment:</p> <p>a. Did the government publish updates on progress at regular intervals? [at least once every four months]</p> <p>b. Were civil society organizations provided the opportunity to comment on progress of commitment implementation?</p> <p>Guideline: At regular intervals governments should publish a brief update on progress against commitments and use that as an opportunity to invite any comments.</p>	2.a Yes
<p>3. Online Repository:</p> <p>a. Did the government create a public online repository of documents?</p> <p>Guideline: To complement any tracking system, governments are strongly encouraged to maintain a public, online repository of all documents giving evidence of consultation and implementation of commitments.</p>	3.a Yes

Openness during Implementation

Who Was Invited?

The government of the City of Austin invited many organizations and individuals to contribute to the OGP implementation process. Consultations varied widely across commitments.

The team working on Austin’s first OGP commitment, led by the Innovation Office (IO), consulted and collaborated with a wide variety of stakeholders. In addition to the original CSO partners named in the city’s OGP action plan, staff expanded their consultations to additional city departments and homelessness services providers⁵²:

- City Departments: Innovation Office, Police Department, Fire Department, Code Enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, Watershed Protection, and the Homelessness Outreach Street Team (HOST)⁵³
- CSOs/providers: Dell Medical School, FrontSteps, Integral Care, Caritas of Austin.

City staff sent invitations to stakeholders through email and phone calls. CSOs and city service providers were included in discussions of research design and are currently invited to join synthesis sessions, during which the commitment team explores the results of their recent research.

The newly-established Equity Office at the City of Austin oversaw the development of the equity assessment tool outlined in Austin's second commitment. During the implementation process, the commitment team collaborated with seventy stakeholder organizations, including CSOs, city commissions, businesses, and other organizations⁵⁴. These partners were invited via email and telephone communications. These stakeholders make up what is known as the Communities of Color United (CCU) coalition. This coalition shaped the formation of the city's Equity Office, so city staff included them in the work of the Equity Action Team, as a natural extension of their previous collaboration.

Austin's third and fourth commitments were overseen by the Innovation Office and were internally-focused. Consultation included city departments, commissions, and CSOs originally named in Austin's OGP action plan. The team overseeing the fifth commitment, which aimed to create a project tracking tool, was cross-departmental, led by staff from the Innovation Office and the Office of Communications and Technology Management. The commitment team consulted with its CSO partner, Open Austin, to test the design of the tool prior to launch.

How Was Awareness Raising Carried Out?

Awareness-raising was carried out in different manners across commitments. Participants were contacted primarily via email from city staff. A cross-departmental team organized and facilitated monthly "all-hands" meetings, inviting CSO partners and other stakeholders to come together and discuss Austin's OGP commitments and the implementation process.

Within each commitment, awareness-raising took place in the form of targeted contact. Generally, city staff contacted stakeholders directly and invited them to attend meetings and discussions. Reports and minutes from these meetings were shared via the city's Bloomfire site. Commitment teams made periodic updates to the Bloomfire site, but this, along with updates through other outlets, varied widely by commitment. Some commitment teams, such as the project tracking team, published occasional updates to departmental Github and Medium pages, as well as a separate city website run by the Innovation Office.⁵⁵ Innovation Office staff also published occasional updates about OGP activities through a departmental Twitter feed.⁵⁶

Which Parts of Civil Society Participated?

In addition to the CSOs listed in Austin's action plan, the community of organizations involved in the implementation process grew steadily during the implementation period (January to December 2017). The makeup of each commitment's consultations varied widely. Across all five commitments, city officials included their partner CSOs in monthly reporting meetings. Beyond regular meetings and reports, city staff engaged a wide range of stakeholders in the implementation of its OGP commitments.

Innovation Office staff implementing the city's commitment on ending homelessness took great care to gather input from a broad range of stakeholders, including individuals experiencing homelessness, CSOs that provide services to the homeless community, and city employees from a range of departments that regularly interact with homeless communities. Staff from the city's Equity Office, tasked with developing the city's equity assessment tool, engaged seventy different stakeholders – city commissions, community leaders, and CSOs focused on social justice. City staff consulted with a diverse cross-section of

government and civil society organizations - from the police departments to leaders of community organizations protesting police brutality, healthcare practitioners to academic research institutions.

Level of Public Input

The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Scale of participation for use in OGP. The table below shows the level of public influence on the implementation of the action plan. From left to right, features of participation are cumulative. In the spirit of OGP, most countries should aspire for “collaborate.”

Consultations varied across each of Austin’s five commitments. Overall, the level of public input hovered between Consult and Collaborate on the IAP2 Scale. While the city’s equity assessment tool was developed in a truly collaborative format between government staff and many community stakeholders, other commitments were implemented primarily by city staff, with minimal input from the public. Research for the city’s homelessness initiative involved dozens of interviews aimed at understanding the lived experience of homelessness. City staff conducted these interviews at multiple geographic locations where individuals experiencing homelessness live. Staff also surveyed service providers, city employees from a cross-departmental sample, and related organizations. As part of design research, the team overseeing Austin’s project tracking tool conducted a small number of interviews with representatives of key stakeholder organizations, such as Open Austin.

While these examples illustrate the highest levels of public engagement, the range of input varied widely. Some community partners attended monthly meetings and offered high-level input on their respective commitments. Others were directly involved in the development of the implementation process, such as the previously mentioned contributions of the public to the equity assessment tool and research on homelessness. Overall, Austin’s OGP commitments achieved a public input level of Involve on the IAP2 Scale. Most often, voices of the public were directly consulted for input along the way as each commitment was implemented. While a few instances of Collaborate-level engagement were observed, the most accurate level that described the overall implementation is Involve.

Table 8. Level of Public Input

Level of public input		During implementation of the 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 public could give feedback on how commitments were considered.	✓
Consult	The public could give inputs.	

Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.	
No Consultation	No consultation	

⁵¹ Meeting notes, updates, resources and related documents were posted regularly to the City of Austin Open Government Partnership Bloomfire page: <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/?feed=recent>

⁵² Leadership Austin, the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, and the Downtown Austin Alliance were originally selected as CSO partners in Austin's OGP Action Plan.

⁵³ HOST is a cross-departmental government/CSO initiative that conducts homelessness outreach across the City of Austin.

⁵⁴ The complete list of stakeholders consulted during implementation of Austin's second commitment includes: Aging and Disability Resource Center, ALLGO, Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas, Arab Anti Discrimination Committee, Asian American Quality of Life Commission, Asian American Resource Center, Asian Family Support Services, Austin Community College, Austin ISD, Austin Public Library, British Lung Foundation, Community Advancement Network, Cardea, Center for the Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities, Central Health, Central Texas Food Bank, City of Austin: Women's Commission, Charlotte Caples Consulting, City of Austin: African American Resource Commission, City of Austin: African American Resource Commission, City of Austin: African American Resource Commission, City of Austin: Archivist, City of Austin: Austin Energy, City of Austin: Austin Public Health, City of Austin: Austin Public Library, City of Austin: City Manager's Office, City of Austin: Commission on Disability, City of Austin: Commission on Seniors, City of Austin: Council Member Allison Alter's Office, City of Austin: Council Member Jimmy Flannigan's Office, City of Austin: Development Services, City of Austin: Economic Development Department, City of Austin: Equal Employment and Fair Housing Office, City of Austin: Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Commission, City of Austin: Human Resources, City of Austin: Innovation Office, City of Austin: Law Department, City of Austin: Neighborhood Housing and Community Development, City of Austin: Office of Sustainability, City of Austin: Parks and Recreation, City of Austin: Mayor's Office, Communities of Color United, Connect Consulting, Darren Bates, LLC, Del Valle Board of Trustees, Dell Medical Center, Population Health, Center for Place-Based Initiatives, E3 Alliance, Eco Development, Food for Black Thought, Forty Percent Against Rights, Get Rooted Consulting LLC/CCU, ICE Out of Austin, City of Austin: Central Public Information Office, Language Access, Mama Sana/Vibrant Woman, Mamas on Bedrest and Beyond, Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, National Association of Social Workers/Texas, Network of Asian American Organizations, PODER, Restore Rundberg, Seton, St. Edward's University, The Man in Me, Undoing Racism Austin, Undoing White Supremacy Austin, UT Austin: Public Health, UT: Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Youth Artist Project, YWCA

⁵⁵ The Innovation, Technology, and Design Fellows Medium page can be found at <https://medium.com/civiqueso>. The Github page can be found at <https://cityofaustin.github.io/innovation-fellows/posts/>. The city website dedicated to the program can be found at <http://projects.austintexas.io/>.

⁵⁶ The Innovation, Technology, and Design Fellows Twitter feed can be found at <https://twitter.com/civiqueso?lang=en>.

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.

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

Status of Completion	Limited
Start Date	01 January 2017
Intended Completion Date	31 December 2017
Responsible Office	Innovation Office
Did It Open Government?	Marginal

<p>Is it a STAR commitment?</p> <p>Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have “medium” or “high” specificity. - The commitment’s language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability. - The commitment would have a "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented. - Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of "substantial" or "complete" implementation. 	No
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Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Tech. and Innov. for Transparency and Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Complete	Worsens	No change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
Overall				✓	✓	✓					✓		✓						✓		
I.1 Clarify Phase			✓		✓	✓					✓					✓					
I.2 Framing Phase				✓	✓	✓					✓		✓								
I.3 Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase				✓	✓	✓					✓		✓								
I.4 Plan/Build Phase				✓	✓	✓					✓		✓								

Commitment Aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin's first OGP commitment addressed 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 twenty percent, from 1,832 individuals experiencing homelessness in 2015, to 2,197 in 2016.⁵⁷ As part of their first OGP commitment, city officials and civil society organizations sought to develop a homelessness systems map that identifies resources and gaps in relief services. Officials intended to increase coordination between service providers, city agencies, and other stakeholders to further the goal of ending homelessness in Austin. The map would 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, may help disrupt the cycle of homelessness that led to its rise in 2016 by increasing inter-agency collaboration and informing more effective policy at City Hall.

Austin's first commitment addressed 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 sought to increase the availability and usability of information. The commitment addressed 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 did not specifically promote new technology as key to the commitment's implementation. Therefore, the IRM researcher does not believe that the commitment, as written, was relevant to the OGP value of *technology and innovation*. Likewise, the commitment cannot be coded as relevant to public accountability, as public accountability measures must establish "a public facing mechanism that requires governments to justify their actions or respond to citizen inputs."⁵⁸ This commitment does not clearly identify such a mechanism.

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 potentially transformative. According to the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO), annual public investments in homelessness relief programs cost \$19.1 million in 2015.⁵⁹ 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 individuals experiencing homelessness, reducing costs to government and CSO actors and more effectively distributing resources across the community.

Completion Limited

This commitment, overseen by the Innovation Office, aimed to convert shared understanding between many stakeholders into a systems map of homelessness in Austin. The commitment team aimed to conduct new research on homelessness in Austin, to use that research to develop the homelessness

systems map and to inform a series of policy recommendations to city leaders. City staff conducted more than 120 interviews with stakeholders, including individuals experiencing homelessness and homelessness service providers.⁶⁰ From these qualitative interviews, researchers identified some 3,500 data points, which were synthesized into the group's first research report.⁶¹ These interviews were conducted over a period of four months, from September to December 2017.

While the implementation phase was delayed until June 2018, the city's homelessness research efforts received significant support in the form of a \$1.25 million grant from the Bloomberg Philanthropies Innovation Team program.⁶² However, the grant is not specific to the OGP commitment, and the city's homelessness efforts are not confined to the OGP commitment. While the financial support has allowed the Innovation Office to dedicate staff to the commitment, their work overlaps with other initiatives and departments. According to the Chief Innovation Officer, the city's research on homelessness, which was being conducted during IRM consultations, provided additional data that informed the systems map.⁶³

While a sketch of a hypothetical systems map was included in documents provided to the IRM researcher, the map proposed in the city's action plan was completed in June 2018, outside of the scope of the 2017 action plan.⁶⁴ Taylor Cook, an Innovation Office fellow who was assigned to the homelessness research initiative, explained that the systems map was delayed due to a restructuring of the project after the Bloomberg grant was awarded. "The focus has moved away from specific service mapping," she said during an interview with the IRM researcher.⁶⁵ The development of the systems map was delayed in favor of a strong focus on the research phase of this commitment. During interviews with the IRM researcher, city staff were unable to confirm that the systems map would be completed by December 2017, as initially proposed in the action plan. City staff in the Innovation Office explained that the systems map was still viewed as a valuable resource and expressed a general desire for the map to be completed. However, during the implementation process, as more stakeholders were consulted and the department received grant funding, priorities shifted toward the research phase of this commitment. City staff explained that a stronger focus on qualitative interviews with individuals experiencing homelessness would ultimately strengthen the city's efforts to end homelessness, including the proposed systems map.

In addition to the research undertaken by Innovation Office staff, two separate reports on homelessness were generated by ECHO during the implementation process: "Homelessness in Austin/Travis County: Current Needs and Gaps Report" and "Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness."^{66 67} While both reports presented new data and recommendations on homelessness in Austin, these are independent assessments conducted by ECHO and were unrelated to the city's OGP commitment. Requests by the IRM researcher for interviews with ECHO staff were not returned.

Early results: did it open government?

Access to Information: Marginal

Civic Participation: Marginal

Prior to the implementation of this commitment, city officials and stakeholders identified a need for increased coordination among civil society organizations and government agencies addressing homelessness in the city. Many different groups were engaging with individuals experiencing homelessness. The potential impact of a systems map of homelessness, which these groups could use to strengthen collaboration and identify gaps in service, was transformative. The commitment aimed to strengthen coordination among service providers and to include the voices of those experiencing

homelessness in the development of new government policies and programs. By the end of the implementation period (December 2017), the commitment had created marginal changes in government practice around access to information.⁶⁸ The commitment team's new qualitative research on individuals experiencing homelessness delivered a series of findings that were shared with the public and the government's CSO partners during a series of research presentations.

As part of the implementation process, the Innovation Office staff and CSO partner ECHO worked together to form the Homelessness Advisory Committee of Austin (HACA). HACA was designed in October to be a direct opportunity for individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness, or who have previously experienced homelessness, to "help with the development of research tools, consult on findings, and test possible solutions." In its first few months, the group adopted bylaws and procedures, contributed to research around the OGP commitment on homelessness and began planning to recruit new members. The development of HACA created an unprecedented channel for including the views of individuals experiencing homeless in public policy decision that directly affect those same individuals. This development marks a significant step forward in civic participation on this critical issue.

By the end of the implementation period, the commitment had created major changes in the collaborative approach to understanding homelessness. The work plan included in the first milestone of this commitment because very important, and with added financial support, the commitment team expanded its research efforts. As mentioned above, the design-focused qualitative interviews conducted by the commitment team collected some 3,500 data points. To undertake this level of unprecedented collaboration, the commitment team required more time than was provided by the pilot program's one-year window. The responses gathered as part of the expanded research phase of this commitment would ultimately inform the systems map produced in June.

Recommendations

While this commitment's implementation was delayed until June 2018, the initial research process yielded new data on homelessness in Austin. One area for improvement is accessibility of data between city departments and homelessness service providers. During interviews with the IRM researcher, city staff tasked with conducting research for this commitment expressed frustration that partner organizations were hesitant to share data. City government may be able to alleviate these delays by empowering city staff and incentivizing affiliated organizations to be fully transparent. Currently, the primary partner for this commitment, the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, provides their data in limited offerings that are not reusable or machine-readable. Data should be made available in reusable, machine-readable formats. City staff should continue implementation of this commitment's goals, either as part of future OGP action plans or as a standalone project.

Links to further evidence

- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Commitment I Project Information Page](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Homelessness Research Summary](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Homelessness Research Presentation Slides](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Homelessness Project Tracking Site](#)
- [ECHO – Homelessness in Austin/Travis County: Needs and Gaps Report](#)
- [ECHO – Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness](#)

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- ⁵⁷ "Austin sees 20 percent increase in homeless population," *KVUE.com*, accessed June 17, 2017, <http://www.kvue.com/news/local/austin-sees-20-percent-increase-in-homeless-population/65879102>.
- ⁵⁸ OGP IRM Procedures Manual, version 2.0, page 52-53
- ⁵⁹ "Homelessness in Austin: Current Needs and Gaps Report," Ending Community Homelessness Alliance. Revised March 30, 2016. Accessed August 26, 2017. <http://austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Austin-Homelessness-Needs-and-Gaps3.pdf>
- ⁶⁰ "Insights based on the iTeam's research with people with lived experience of homelessness in Austin." Research presentation. 19 April 2018. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vRHjdImSKcLy7RNhglRTS-tUXKgIbsascBenzQWP2bWoUrC6vMBr0NDJtiM5iDjDXaYgMgivaP2Uh/pub?start=false&loop=false&delayms=60000&slide=id.g3899981be9_0_5
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² City of Austin Press Release, "Austin to Receive Grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies Innovation Team Program," Communications and Public Information Office, 12 January 2017. <http://www.austintexas.gov/news/city-austin-receive-grant-bloomberg-philanthropies-innovation-team-program-0>
- ⁶³ Kerry O'Connor (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 28 June 2017
- ⁶⁴ The hypothetical systems map is included on slide 15 in a [research findings presentation](#) provided by the Innovation Office.
- ⁶⁵ Taylor Cook (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 8 December 2017
- ⁶⁶ Ending Community Homelessness Coalition. "Homelessness in Austin/Travis County: Current Needs and Gaps Report." 1 September 2017. <http://www.austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/170901-Austin-Homelessness-Needs-Gaps-Analysis-2017.pdf>
- ⁶⁷ Ending Community Homelessness Coalition. "Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness." 8 February 2018. <http://www.austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/180208-Action-Plan-to-end-Homelessness.pdf>
- ⁶⁸ The OGP IRM coding methodology identifies a "marginal" impact on open government as "some change, but minor in terms of its effect on level of openness."

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.

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

Status of Completion	Complete
Start Date	01 January 2017
Intended Completion Date	31 December 2017
Responsible Office	Equity Office
Did It Open Government?	Marginal

<p>Is it a STAR commitment?</p> <p>Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have “medium” or “high” specificity. - The commitment’s language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability. - The commitment would have a "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented. - Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of "substantial" or "complete" implementation. 	Yes
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Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Tech. and Innov. for Transparency and Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Complete	Worsens	No change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
Overall			✓		✓	✓					✓				✓			✓			
2.1 Clarify Phase				✓	✓	✓					✓				✓						
2.2 Framing Phase		✓			✓						✓				✓						
2.3 Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase			✓		✓						✓				✓						
2.4 Plan/Build Phase				✓	✓						✓				✓						

Commitment Aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin’s second OGP commitment addressed 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.⁶⁹ This disparate economic climate has existed in the city of Austin 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.”⁷⁰

This commitment proposed 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 compounds 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 conducted interviews with leaders and residents from historically disadvantaged communities. This research was synthesized to create equity standards

for city decision makers. Using these standards, city staff and their CSO partners targeted specific departments to pilot the assessment tool.

Austin's second commitment addressed the OGP values of *access to information* and *civic participation*. The city increased 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 intended 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 the 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 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 were 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, were measurable and verifiable.

This commitment had 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. The long-term effects of forced segregation are reflected in Austin's demographic and socioeconomic indicators. Austin is the most economically segregated, and the fifth-most educationally segregated, large metropolitan area in the United States.⁷¹ The equity assessment tool, if implemented citywide, could signal a transformative step in a new direction with positive effects for disadvantaged communities. This commitment has created 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.

Completion **Complete**

The second commitment was completed. This commitment aimed to develop and pilot an equity assessment tool based on feedback from a community of stakeholders. Equity Office staff and the Equity Action Team (EAT), a coalition of 43 community organizations/CSOs and 25 city departments, oversaw the development of this commitment⁷². The EAT met seven times between March 2017 and September 2017 to discuss, develop, and test the equity assessment tool.⁷³ In June, eight departments volunteered to pilot the first draft of the assessment tool during their budget processes. These departments included Human Resources, Parks and Recreation, Libraries, Water Utility, Transportation, Economic Development, Public Health, and Public Works.

The equity assessment tool was completed and piloted on time as written in the City's OGP action plan. Each of the eight departments employed the tool to analyze their proposed 2018 budgets. This analysis involves answering a series of questions related to outcomes of departmental budgets on traditionally disadvantaged communities. Answers are scored according to a rubric developed alongside the equity assessment tool. In June 2018, the Equity Office released a report detailing the analysis of the first eight pilot budgets.⁷⁴ This SWOT analysis was conducted by the Center for Placed-Based Initiatives (CPBI) at

the University of Texas, one of the Equity Action Team's members. During an update to the EAT at the July 2017 meeting, CPBI Director Lourdes Rodriguez explained that this analysis would provide a level of quality control for responses to the tool during its pilot phase.⁷⁵ CPBI's analysis of the first eight departmental budgets identified diversity in hiring practices as the primary means by which departments are supporting racial equity. The report also outlines significant opportunities for improvement in advancing equity across the departments, making special note of data collection and management practices:

"Weaknesses in data collection pointed to the lack of a process to collect, aggregate, or analyze client data, including demographic information and client surveys, for input in, or to measure the effectiveness of, its programs and services. Only a few departments had data regarding the race and ethnicity of their contractors and consultants... Having disaggregated data by race and ethnicity is one of the essential first steps in advancing equity. Without segmented data to inform decision-making, it is difficult for the City to assess the impact or lack of impact it is having on communities of color and other marginalized populations."⁷⁶

Seventeen additional departments have been recruited by Equity Office staff for a second round of budget analysis.

In addition to developing and piloting the equity assessment tool on time, the Equity Office developed a supplemental tool, an equity analysis worksheet, to be applied to smaller budgets and projects.⁷⁷ The greater equity tool was designed for departmental budgets, but the smaller equity worksheet allows city staff to apply similar aims to specific projects and other initiatives. The Equity Office and the EAT also intend to adapt the worksheet to assess projects beyond departmental budgets.

Early results: did it open government?

Access to Information: No change

Civic Participation: Marginal

When this commitment was designed, city departments lacked a tool for measuring equitable outcomes of city programs and departmental budgets. Government and community leaders have since taken unprecedented steps to address the city's economic segregation and institutional racism in local politics. The Equity Office's Equity Action Team set out to develop and pilot the equity assessment tool by December 2017. This commitment was coded as having a transformative potential impact. The proposed assessment tool would be developed in direct collaboration with the Equity Action Team, a large coalition of civil society organizations and city staff that works to directly address longstanding racial disparities in Austin. The commitment was designed to add a previously nonexistent layer of public scrutiny to city decision-making. By providing an equity score for departmental budgets and programs, the proposed tool would offer the public a new utility for measuring the expected benefits of city initiatives on traditionally disadvantaged communities across Austin.

The IRM researcher did not find evidence that this commitment significantly increased access to information during the 2017 reporting period. The implementation of the commitment focused on the development of the tool and the identification of departments for an initial pilot. At the end of the reporting period (December 2017), the initial eight budgets assessed by the tool were being analyzed by the Center for Place-Based Initiatives, one of the many civil society organizations contributing to this

commitment. The results of CPBI's analysis and any future budget analysis have been made public and provide new information. However, the budgetary analysis was still underway when the reporting period ended. During the reporting period, the IRM researcher did not identify any changes in information quality or disclosure related to this commitment. Since the end of the reporting period, the Equity Office has published a series of reports on its public-facing website, including the results of its first round of budget analysis and a report detailing the equity analysis of a proposed land code reform effort.

The implementation phase of this commitment initiated unprecedented opportunities for civic participation in Austin and has the potential to continue creating transformational changes in the public decision-making process. The city government engaged the public directly in the development of the equity action tool, providing new opportunities for civil society to inform departmental decisions. The Equity Action Team meetings also provided a direct forum for civil society leaders to influence the tool's criteria for measuring equitable outcomes. Additionally, the analysis performed by CPBI will provide direct feedback from civil society on the budgets of city departments. While the continued implementation of the tool may lead to more impactful opportunities for civic participation, the initial engagement of civil society during the first year of implementation created marginal changes in practice at City Hall. The implementation of equity-focused budgets remains voluntary, and many departments have not yet committed to analyzing their budgets through the lens of equity. City leaders can increase the impact of this commitment across the city's administration by applying the equity tool to all city budgets. This could ensure that the voices represented by the Equity Action Team are considered in all budgetary decisions.

This commitment was coded as having a transformative potential impact due to its strong inclusion of civil society in the budgeting process. Austin has a well-documented history of economic segregation. This commitment proposed to upend that history by creating a mechanism for identifying inequitable budget outcomes before they could be realized. While this possibility could ultimately create major changes in the way budgets and projects are organized at City Hall, the IRM researcher found that, at the time of this report, the commitment had achieved an important change in the status quo, although still limited in scale. The equity tool had been applied to a small number of departmental budgets. The Equity Office continues to engage departments in piloting the tool. The equity assessment tool is a very promising resource that could still yield transformative results on open government and civic participation, but its success relies on continued support from city officials. City leaders should continue to expand the use of the equity tool across all city departments and adapt it so that future city initiatives are systematically analyzed to ensure equitable outcomes. By doing so, the City of Austin would encourage even greater impacts on openness and civic engagement in the decision-making process.

Recommendations

In 2017, Austin's OGP team designed and piloted an equity assessment tool to introduce equitable budgeting processes for city departments. While this tool was piloted by a small number of city departments, the possibility for expanded engagement across city department is well within reach for the city. As Austin's leaders move forward with open government initiatives and other projects, it is important to analyze the design and implementation of these future projects through the lens of equity. City departments should continue to work with the Equity Office to apply the current equity assessment tool, or a modified version thereof, to their project designs. This could simultaneously strengthen the tool through additional testing and ensure that Austin's future open government activities are designed with an intentional focus on creating equitable outcomes. This aligns with the OGP principle of civic engagement.

Simultaneously, the equity assessment tool should be used to analyze those departmental budgets that were not a part of the initial pilot. The application of the equity tool should be made mandatory. If this is not possible, departments should be incentivized to use the tool.

Links to further evidence

- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Commitment 2 Project Information Page](#)
- [City of Austin – Equity Office – Equity Assessment Tool](#)
- [City of Austin – Equity Office – Equity Analysis Worksheet](#)
- [City of Austin – Equity Office – Equity Action Team Work Session Notes and Meeting Minutes](#)

⁶⁹ Florida, Richard, and Charlotta Mellander, “Segregated City: The geography of economic segregation in America’s metros,” *Martin Prosperity Institute*, Harvard (2015): 25.

⁷⁰ Zehr, Dan, “Inheriting Inequality,” *Austin American-Statesman*, accessed July 21, 2017, <http://projects.statesman.com/news/economic-mobility/index.html>

⁷¹ Florida and Mellander, 34.

⁷² The Equity Action Team comprises representatives of 43 community organizations and 25 city departments and offices. The complete list is available here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fX-M-EtMUKIQP9OFpZdzBctDUUoCSnhe>

⁷³ The Equity Action Team met to discuss and develop the equity assessment tool once per month from March to September. Meeting notes can be found here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CPzYzi8Yj0Hu1262wBbjgD3Khyhb8sit/view?usp=sharing>

⁷⁴ City of Austin Equity Office Memorandum. [Equity Assessment Tool Pilot Completion](#). 12 June 2018.

⁷⁵ Equity Action Team meeting notes, 21 July 2018. https://drive.google.com/open?id=1M_5KD50DgeTIB7D9801rMRtaZ_D3-n9b

⁷⁶ City of Austin Equity Office Memorandum. [Equity Assessment Tool Pilot Completion](#). 12 June 2018.

⁷⁷ City of Austin Equity Office. [Equity Analysis Worksheet](#), https://drive.google.com/open?id=1116gCHup9htIK_AonzcnilwPuwblF15H

3. Collaboration and 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.

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

Status of Completion	Limited
Start Date	01 January 2017
Intended Completion Date	31 December 2017
Responsible Office	Innovation Office
Did It Open Government?	Marginal

<p>Is it a STAR commitment?</p> <p>Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have “medium” or “high” specificity. - The commitment’s language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability. - The commitment would have a "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented. - Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of "substantial" or "complete" implementation. 	No
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Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?														
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Tech. and Innov. for Transparency and Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Complete	Worsens	No change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding										
Overall			✓		✓					✓				✓					✓												
3.1 Clarify Phase			✓		✓					✓						✓															
3.2 Framing Phase			✓		✓					✓			✓																		
3.3 Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase			✓		✓					✓				✓																	
3.4 Plan/Build Phase				✓	✓					✓		✓																			

Commitment Aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

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

The Open Government Operating Board (OGOB) was tasked in 2011 with overseeing open governance initiatives in Austin.⁷⁸ The number and variety of open data and open governance initiatives continues to grow in Austin, 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.⁷⁹ 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 aimed 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.”⁸⁰ Each milestone concluded with the production of a detailed assessment, report, or list of recommendations. The commitment was robust and promised to 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, set out to catalog and publish a complete inventory of city open government initiatives. This constitutes new information, including project information that was previously unavailable to the public. Such a release aligns with the OGP value of *access to information*. The stated desired outcomes mentioned 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 did not elaborate on this goal. The IRM researcher believes that restructuring of the OGOB may have potentially created opportunities for increased civic engagement. However, the action plan, as written, did not identify specific mechanisms for encouraging this collaboration. Commitments that are relevant to the OGP value of civic participation must specify a mechanism for increasing participation. This commitment did not identify such a mechanism.

Specificity and Potential Impact

Austin’s third commitment was coded as medium specificity. The milestones listed in the action plan were objectively verifiable but lacked specific, measurable details. For instance, the IRM researcher could 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.⁸¹ However, these milestones did not identify specific, measurable indicators or procedures that would guide the assessments. Likewise, the outcomes identified in the action plan, such as increased collaboration and more effective management of the open government portfolio, were objectively verifiable but lacked measurable indicators. The IRM researcher understands that the commitment’s language may have been broad by design and due to the one-year time constraint of the OGP commitment process.

This commitment had 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 was a positive step to create a new method of collaboration between the city and civil society. According to IRM interviews with city officials in the Innovation Office, this commitment had the potential to 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.⁸² While this commitment sought 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 fell short of identifying a mechanism to ensure implementation, without which it did not constitute a potential major change to the status quo.

Completion **Limited**

Austin’s third commitment was designed to assess and adapt the City Manager’s Open Governance Operating Board, which oversees open government initiatives. The commitment team completed the assessment of open government initiatives defined in the first milestone.⁸³ The initial inventory included forty projects. The inventory eventually grew to more than eighty open government projects. To catalog

as many open government projects as possible, the commitment team opened the inventory to submissions from all city employees.⁸⁴ In April and September 2017, the commitment team published an analysis of the open government projects contained in the inventory.⁸⁵ This analysis included several key findings, such as a need for more cross-departmental coordination and a lack of “resources, funding, and staff capabilities to achieve goals.”⁸⁶

The commitment met with 23 city staffers and two community stakeholders working either directly or indirectly on open government projects to “identify what project teams need, how subject matter experts might advise projects, and how public stakeholders want to engage with City efforts.” Responses from these conversations were used by the commitment team to draft six “guideposts” for redesigning open governance at City Hall.⁸⁷ The guideposts were presented to the Open Government Operating Board on 9 March 2018.⁸⁸ The publication of these recommendations fulfilled the second milestone of this commitment. At the time of this report, the commitment team was in the process of drafting a new charter for the Open and Smart Advisory Committee (OSAC, the new name of the Open Governance Operating Board).⁸⁹ Simultaneously, the commitment team is drafting a proposal to fund and staff an “Open and Smart Program Team” that would support the work of the OSAC.⁹⁰

As part of the implementation process, the commitment team detailed a series of findings based on their rigorous investigation of Austin’s open government and smart cities projects. The team compiled a list of needs and recommendations to inform the OGOB/OSAC’s work moving forward. This list includes recommendations for increased cross-departmental collaboration, design-centered qualitative research and new public-private partnerships to advance project outcomes.⁹¹ The commitment team’s recommendations informed the redirection and renaming of the OGOB/OSAC. During IRM interviews, commitment staff members said that understaffing and the ambiguous nature of the commitment contributed to the delayed implementation. Project Manager Daniel Honker highlighted some key challenges during the implementation phase. “Our experience with most of the commitments has underscored the need to resource and staff these efforts adequately so that we can meet the goals we set.”⁹²

Early Results: did it open government?

Access to Information: Marginal

This commitment was designed to assess and restructure the city’s Open Government Operating Board to oversee the expanding portfolio of open government projects at City Hall. Prior to implementation, the city government had not compiled a comprehensive dataset of open government projects, though many such projects were concurrently underway across a variety of city departments. The commitment team identified a series of potential outcomes of this restructuring: increased collaboration between city departments and civil society, new feedback mechanisms for civil society, and more effective management of open government initiatives as potential outcomes of this commitment.

By December 2017, the commitment team had contributed new information about open government initiatives in the form of an inventory of open government projects “government projects (and opportunities) City departments are involved in, as well as what challenges these projects face in achieving their goals.”⁹³ The inventory is being continuously updated, and the initial collection of eighty projects provides new, publicly available information on open government projects at City Hall. This constitutes a minor improvement in the availability, quality, and access to information that was not available prior to the implementation period.

Recommendations

During interviews with the IRM researcher, city staff assigned to implement this commitment expressed frustration at its ambiguity. While the completion of this commitment may not be a part of future action plans, the commitment's ambiguous nature provides a learning opportunity for those developing future commitments. OGP commitments should be highly specific and clearly relevant to OGP values. Future commitments should also receive adequate staffing and budgetary support. This commitment was also primarily internal and lacked a major role for civil society partners. Likewise, milestones addressed primarily internal city government operations. Future commitments should include more opportunities for civic engagement, especially opportunities for direct public input during the design and implementation processes.

Links to further evidence

- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Commitment 3 Project Information Page](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Open Gov Board change effort – Design Brief](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Open and Smart Program Team – Design Brief](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Empowering “open” and “smart” initiatives with the Open Government Operating Board – Presentation Slides](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Assessment and Inventory of Open Government projects](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office - Analysis of the list of open/smart projects: What we know about project needs and challenges](#)

⁷⁸ The City of Austin's City Council initiated a series of open government reforms by passing [Council Resolution 2011208-074](#) on 8 December 2011.

⁷⁹ The City of Austin's Open Data Portal and other open government resources are published at <http://austintexas.gov/page/city-council-open-government>.

⁸⁰ City of Austin OGP Subnational Action Plan, page 12.

⁸¹ City of Austin OGP Subnational Action Plan, page 13.

⁸² Daniel Honker and John Speirs (City of Austin), interviewed by IRM researcher, 23 August 2017

⁸³ City of Austin Innovation Office. Inventory of Austin's open gov/"smart city" projects.

<https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/series/3202373/posts/2748674>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ City of Austin Innovation Office. Analysis of the list of open/smart projects: What we know about project needs and challenges.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ City of Austin Innovation Office. March 2017 Update – Redesigning Open Governance.

<https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/series/3202373-commitment-3-redesigning-open-governance/posts/2740571-march-2017-update-redesigning-open-governance>

⁸⁸ City of Austin Innovation Office. Empowering “open” and “smart” initiatives with the Open Government Operating Board. 9 March 2017.

⁸⁹ The original charter of the Open Government Operating Board can be found at

<https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/series/35086/posts/1356750>. The draft of the revised charter can be found at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fwKLo_9YXwOKRKYaOxNIWxc6i8cirTH24qIVpYsVW2E/edit?usp=sharing.

⁹⁰ City of Austin Innovation Office. Open and Smart Program Team. Design brief.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NPP19gldblC96Lr-TFvjszdaXwNYivnU87jj6NvQjk/edit#heading=h.yylIp9kptx6u>

⁹¹ City of Austin Innovation Office. “[Analysis of the list of open/smart projects: What we know about project needs and challenges.](#)” City of Austin OGP Bloomfire site. 12 October 2017.

⁹² Daniel Honker (City of Austin Innovation Office), interview by IRM researcher, 5 January 2018

⁹³ City of Austin Innovation Office. Inventory of open gov/"smart city" projects.

<https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/series/3202373/posts/2748674#about>

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.

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

Status of Completion	Limited
Start Date	01 January 2017
Intended Completion Date	31 December 2017
Responsible Office	Management Services, Innovation Office
Did It Open Government?	No change

<p>Is it a STAR commitment?</p> <p>Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have “medium” or “high” specificity. - The commitment’s language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability. - The commitment would have a "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented. - Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of "substantial" or "complete" implementation. 	No
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Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?														
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Tech. and Innov. for Transparency and Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Complete	Worsens	No change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding										
Overall				✓	✓	✓				✓				✓				✓													
4.1 Clarify Phase				✓	✓					✓				✓																	
4.2 Framing Phase				✓	✓					✓				✓																	
4.3 Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase				✓	✓	✓				✓			✓																		
4.4 Plan/Build Phase				✓	✓					✓			✓																		

Commitment Aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin’s fourth OGP commitment addressed 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 agreed 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 set out a plan to collect, publish, and analyze data on public meetings. City officials and their civil society partners would then use this information to make recommendations for improving the public meetings process.

Like many of Austin’s OGP commitment’s, the commitment to improve city meetings involved four key stages. City officials and their CSO partners planned to use qualitative interviews with staff and stakeholders to generate new insights into the city meetings process. They would then synthesize their research results and create reports for city staff, CSOs, and other stakeholders. These results would 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 would 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.”⁹⁴

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

Specificity and Potential Impact

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

This commitment had 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 could make government more accessible to the public and have the potential to inform more transformative commitments in the future. While this commitment sought to solve the notorious issue of late night council meetings at city hall, the action plan was not written with the intent to prescribe measures for change. Rather, the commitment was designed to allow approaches to council reforms emerge, identify strategies for improving efficiency and make recommendations to the city council. Improving these processes could have a strong positive impact on the status quo.

Completion Substantial

Austin’s fourth commitment aimed to streamline city public meetings and make recommendations to the city council to make meetings more efficient and effective. This commitment was managed by the City of Austin’s Management Services Department with support from the Innovation Office, Law Department and CSO partner Leadership Austin. The IRM researcher considers that it was substantially completed.

The commitment team met monthly to study past city council meetings and council work sessions and identify opportunities for increased efficiency.⁹⁵ City staff conducted extensive background research on city council meetings, compiling statistics on lengths of meetings, number of items consider, number of public comments on each item, and other information that could inform public meetings changes. Staff presented these findings and an initial series of recommendations to the city council in March and April 2017.⁹⁶ Key recommendations included: publishing meeting agendas two weeks in advance, establishing standard schedules for meetings, utilizing an online message board to discuss items ahead of meetings, and reducing the amount of time available to any one speaker during public comment periods of council meetings.

Council members and city staff agreed that these changes could help prevent late night meetings and avoid decisions on key issues during less accessible hours. Civil society leader Carmen Llanes Pulido, Executive Director of the community organization GO! Austin / VAMOS! Austin, agreed that late night decision making is problematic, but she also highlighted the difficulty that many Austin residents face when trying to attend council meetings. “One of those late nights that we had residents testifying [at a council meeting], one of the residents was one of those people who works odd hours and works two or

three jobs at a time... and actually was able to stay late and give testimony,” Llanes Pulido told the Austin Monitor in April 2017.⁹⁷

During the implementation period, the city council enacted some changes to public meetings.⁹⁸ For instance, in February 2017, the city council reduced the number of council committees from ten to five.⁹⁹ At the same meeting, the city council formally directed the city manager to make recommendations “to improve Council meeting efficiencies and deliberation.”¹⁰⁰

In May 2017, the City Council modified the meetings process to institute the recommended changes.¹⁰¹ The changes took effect in August 2017. The commitment team observed the following five regular meetings, documenting start and end times of meetings under the new procedures. The commitment team also met with council staff to assess the impact of the adopted changes. The commitment team found that the changes had created only a limited impact and that most factors contributing to late night meetings had not changed.

Based on research conducted as part of this commitment, city and CSO officials were discussing a series of opportunities and suggestions for improving access to and efficiency of public meetings. These include establishing remote district offices to increase citizen access to council meetings, developing a city wiki that informs the public of the history and background of council issues, developing an electronic council agenda status board at City Hall, and continuing collaborative efforts between civil society and government to address holistic issues with public meetings processes.¹⁰² These recommendations align with the first deliverable in the fourth milestone. At the time of this report, the additional recommendations had not been formally introduced to the city council and were still being discussed by city staff.

Early results: did it open government?

Access to Information: No change

Civic Participation: No change

When this commitment was designed, city staff and civil society partners lamented the inefficiency of city public meetings, which often ran late into the evening. Civil society partners identified “late night decision making” as an obstacle to transparency, civic engagement and accountability, explaining that the current meetings system presented “a situation which is neither transparent nor effective in considering impacts of decisions, and which makes it difficult for the public to understand how and why decisions are made.”¹⁰³ Government officials and their CSO partners designed this commitment to increase efficiency, access, and understanding of public meetings. The commitment, if fully implemented, was expected to have a moderate impact on open governance in Austin.

By the end of the implementation period, the commitment had created some minor changes in government practice. However, the IRM researcher did not discover any evidence that the initial implementation of the commitment had created any of the outcomes expected by the commitment team. The city council enacted several changes to meetings procedures based on the commitment team’s recommendation, such as limiting the amount of time allowed for speaking on agenda items and posting agendas ahead of meetings. rules could be changed quite easily without citizen approval. Meetings continued to run late into the evening, with one recent city council meeting ending at 2:56 a.m. The final note in the meetings transcript captures one council member confessing “I’ve been up almost 24 hours now. This is too long.” When another commented that the council had broken a new record for long meetings, the mayor responded, “I think we did, unfortunately.”¹⁰⁴

Similarly, the initial changes enacted by city leaders did not create new opportunities for civic participation. Members of the public who wish to engage at city council meetings are still subject to limitations identified during the commitment design process. City staff identified a series of opportunities for improving access to public meetings that have not yet been taken up by elected officials. The IRM researcher concludes that there has been no observable change to city public meetings with regard to access to information or civic participation.

Recommendations

Improving city meetings to increase civic engagement is an important, ambitious goal for the City of Austin. City staff should complete the implementation of this commitment by drafting formal recommendations, publishing them in a publicly accessible format, and publicize those recommendations through direct citizen communications and local media. While the city council enacted changes to the meetings process, these were largely autonomous. Recommendations from Innovation Office staff may supplement the council's changes and inform further improvements to public meetings. City staff should also work with civil society organizations to design and implement an evaluation of the meetings changes made by the city council. Further research could identify the impacts of these changes and inform future action plans.

Links to further evidence

- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Commitment 4 Project Information Page](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Staff Recommendations – Council Meeting Efficiency and Deliberation](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Public Meetings 2017 Follow-Up – Memo to Council Staff](#)

⁹⁴ City of Austin OGP Subnational Action Plan, page 15.

⁹⁵ Sabine Romero (City of Austin Innovation Office), interviewed by IRM researcher, 21 September 2017.

⁹⁶ City of Austin Innovation Office. Council Meeting Efficiency and Deliberation. Staff Recommendations. <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=273632>

⁹⁷ McGlinchy, Audrey. Sleep researchers cheer on Council members as they consider ways to avoid late nights. The Austin Monitor. 20 April 2017. <https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2017/04/sleep-researchers-cheer-council-members-consider-ways-avoid-late-nights/>

⁹⁸ City of Austin Innovation Office. Public Meetings Discussion: Council Meeting and Committee Resolutions, 2/9/17. <https://opengovpartnership.bloomfire.com/series/3202374-commitment-4-city-public-meetings/posts/2821991-public-meetings-discussion-council-meeting-and-committee-resolutions-2-9-17>

⁹⁹ City of Austin City Council Resolution 20170209-034. <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=272092>

¹⁰⁰ City of Austin City Council Resolution 20170209-035. <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=272093>

¹⁰¹ City of Austin City Council Resolution 20170518-015. <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=277608>

¹⁰² City of Austin staff, interviewed by IRM researcher. 2017.

¹⁰³ City of Austin OGP Subnational Action Plan, page 14.

¹⁰⁴ City Council Regular Meeting [Session Transcript](#) – 26 April 2018. Page 229.

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.

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

Status of Completion	Complete
Start Date	01 January 2017
Intended Completion Date	31 December 2017
Responsible Office	Innovation Office
Did It Open Government?	Marginal

<p>Is it a STAR commitment?</p> <p>Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have “medium” or “high” specificity. - The commitment’s language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability. - The commitment would have a "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented. - Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of "substantial" or "complete" implementation. 	No
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Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Tech. and Innov. for Transparency and Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Complete	Worsens	No Evidence Yet	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
Overall			✓		✓			✓		✓					✓			✓			
5.1 Clarify Phase			✓		✓					✓					✓						
5.2 Framing Phase			✓		✓					✓				✓							
5.3 Conceive/Prototype/Test Phase			✓		✓			✓		✓				✓							
5.4 Plan/Build Phase				✓	✓			✓		✓				✓							

Commitment Aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

The City of Austin’s fifth OGP commitment addressed the need for a public-facing project tracking tool. By creating this resource, city officials and their civil society partners would 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 initiatives¹⁰⁵ in recent years, including an open data portal and an online city finance tool. A project tracking tool, according to city officials, was a natural next step in Austin’s continuing embrace of open governance.

Austin’s fifth commitment addressed 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 would foster increased transparency at City Hall. The project tracking tool was described as a new technology (“Project Tracking Interface”) that would allow citizens to access key information on demand about city projects. While online tracking tools have the potential to strengthen public accountability, the action plan, as it is written, did not specify a mechanism for public redress. Such a feature could easily be built into future iterations of the tool, qualifying it as a public accountability measure. Public accountability commitments provide new mechanisms that allow the

public to “call upon government actors to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments.”¹⁰⁶

Specificity and Potential Impact

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

This commitment, as written, was considered as a positive, yet incremental step towards improving access to information. The IRM researcher considers that it had 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.¹⁰⁷ 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 was 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 was unlikely to create major changes to city governance structures in Austin.

Completion

Complete

Austin’s fifth commitment was completed. Grackle, the project tracking tool promised in Austin’s OGP action plan, was officially launched at the city’s Open Government Showcase in December 2017. The tool was designed by staff from the City of Austin Innovation Office and Communications and Technology Management Department (CTM). The project team developed Grackle “to make it easier for people in Austin to have a 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.”¹⁰⁸

During the research phase of the project, the commitment team cataloged similar platforms that had been launched by other governments.¹⁰⁹ The team also interviewed eight community advocates and twenty city staff members to learn more about what civil society and government employees need from a public project tracking interface.¹¹⁰ The commitment team identified recurring themes in interview responses, organized key insights into “user stories” and published those insights as a public-facing dataset.¹¹¹ The commitment team shared their research findings, project updates, and next steps during public research presentations in August and September 2017.^{112,113} City staff published a summary of insights from their interviews with civil society and government representatives.¹¹⁴ The team also published a list of project tracking tools previously and currently used by city departments.¹¹⁵

Research insights and next steps were shared with civil society partner Open Austin at the organization’s general meeting in September 2017. During the design phase of the project, the commitment team used insights from their interviews to decide which data fields would be included in the first iteration of the project tracking tool.¹¹⁶ The commitment team engaged a designer from the City of Austin’s Design, Technology, and Innovation Fellows program to design mock-ups of the initial project tracking tool.¹¹⁷ The commitment team consulted with CSO partner Open Austin several times

during the implementation process, including a formal presentation and feedback session in September 2017 and several informal meetings between Open Austin representatives and Innovation Office/CTM staff developing the project tracking tool. During IRM interviews, Victoria O'Dell, Open Austin Brigade Chair, confirmed that the organization was consulted regularly during the implementation of this commitment and that O'Dell attended commitment team meetings, providing input on the development of the tool. O'Dell said that the Grackle project tracking tool created better visibility of city projects and allows CSOs and citizens to track progress of projects that affect them. O'Dell expressed hope that the tool would put the city's project information in one place. This would make it much easier for community members and organizations to find information and give input on city projects. "If we can get our ideas plugged in, that is open government," O'Dell said.¹¹⁸

The live version of the project tracking tool, Grackle, launched in December 2017.¹¹⁹ An initial catalog of eighteen city projects were organized under six city priority themes: government that works; economy and affordability; safety; health and environment; mobility; and culture and lifelong learning. Summary information about each tracked city project is detailed on a dedicated project page. Project pages identify each total budget, links to project offices, status of completion, and direct contact information for an individual representing the project. At the time of this report, the commitment team was identifying the next round of projects to add to the tracking tool and developing a roadmap for intaking new and existing project data.

Early results: did it open government?

Access to Information: Marginal

Civic Participation: Marginal

When this commitment was designed, the city government lacked a central, public-facing project tracking tool. The commitment team identified a need "to make it easier for people in Austin to have a 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." The city's open data portal provided raw data, but departmental engagement was limited, and many city projects were not represented in the portal. Many departments tracked progress of departmental projects through different tracking tools, but there was no central collection of project information or uniform method for presenting key project. The commitment team identified a series of potential outcomes from the development of a new project tracking tool, including increased availability of project information, new opportunities for public engagement and collaboration on city projects, and increased collaboration on projects across city departments.

By the end of the implementation period, the commitment team had gathered input from government and civil society contacts and published their research findings online, one of several first steps toward the commitment's expected outcomes. The team launched the project tracking tool with information on eighteen city projects. One remarkable feature of the tool was the adoption of open source technologies by its design team. "This website/webapp is freely available and reproducible because the code is released to the public domain. One aspect of 'opening government' is liberation from restrictive software license and vendor lock-in," said Mateo Clarke, a lead developer on the Grackle tool. Clarke identified this approach as a key principle of the digital services strategy for the Innovation Office and the Office of Design and Delivery.

These initial steps constitute a positive, yet incremental step towards increased access to information.

City project information on these eighteen projects is now available in a central location. However, departmental engagement with the project tracking tool is voluntary. City departments continue to maintain their own project tracking and the departments that provided information to the commitment team constitute a minority of city departments. Until more departments engage with the project tracking tool and provide uniform project information to the public, this promising development can only represent a marginal change in government practice.

Although the commitment, as written in the action plan, was not considered relevant to the OGP value of civic participation, the project team undertook steps during implementation that achieved a marginal change related to this value. The commitment team engaged civil society directly during the development of the project tracking tool. City staff interviewed civil society leaders, seeking input on what types of information members of the public desired from a project tracking tool. During the implementation period, civil society representatives were asked to evaluate a beta version of the tool. This engagement provided a direct opportunity for civil society to influence the development of the tracking tool. During IRM interviews, Victoria O'Dell, Open Austin Brigade Chair, confirmed that these direct consultations with the public reflected an increase in civic engagement and expressed hope that such engagement was an important first step toward increasing direct collaboration between civil society and government in Austin. Although the commitment ultimately produced a new project tracking tool, the publication of project data at the time of this report was still underway. By continuing to populate the tool with city project data, city officials can achieve new changes in government practice related to the OGP value of technology and innovation for openness and accountability.

Recommendations

While this commitment was fully implemented, the new project tracking should be developed further by city staff and CSO partners. The tool should ultimately reflect all available project data from every city department. The city manager's office can support this effort by requiring all city departments to organize departmental project data in a uniform, useable format. Whether as part of future action plans or outside of the OGP process, city staff should work with CSO partners to continue testing and improving the tool until it contains all city data in a useable format. If improvements become a part of future action plans, city staff should take steps to include CSO partners more heavily in the design process.

Links to further evidence

- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Commitment 5 Project Information Page](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Project Tracking Overview](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Project Tracking Research Method/Plan](#)
- [City of Austin Innovation Office – Projects: Project Tracking Research Findings](#)
- [Grackle – City of Austin Project Tracking Tool](#)
- [Grackle – Link to Source Code](#)

¹⁰⁵ “City Council Open Government,” *City of Austin*, Accessed July 21, 2017, <http://austintexas.gov/page/city-council-open-government>.

¹⁰⁶ OGP IRM Procedures Manual, version 2.0, page 52-53.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Honker (City of Austin), interviewed by IRM researcher, 13 September 2017

¹⁰⁸ City of Austin Innovation Office. Project Tracking - Overview: What We're Doing – Background.

<http://projects.austintexas.io/projects/project-tracking/about/overview/>

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ City of Austin Innovation Office. Project Tracking – Research – What We’re Learning.

<http://projects.austintexas.io/projects/project-tracking/research/research-findings/>

¹¹¹ City of Austin Innovation Office. User Stories. Project Tracking Research Findings.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1rAnVbjACz96UKvEEs2A2H2hTqIM99Mj9SKfxEgtVLU/edit#gid=0>

¹¹² City of Austin Innovation Office. Project Tracking Research Share-out. August 2017.

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WVsssiWdkbcEr7g1DDyVW7_lvK8TBan3XIJ899fhOY7A/edit#slide=id.p

¹¹³ City of Austin Innovation Office. Project Tracking Share-out. September 2017.

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1F2Vsn0A5kmpaIV0Sm5aO_RS4qYa5tlkjtKZvwGGwkjw/edit#slide=id.p

¹¹⁴ City of Austin Innovation Office. Project Tracking – Interview Insights.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1k2tcNtSqFI0kYA-h3BnNR_utRnwDjdu36nTLB4z8IF4/edit

¹¹⁵ City of Austin Innovation Office. Project Tracking Research and Design. Dataset.

<https://airtable.com/shrv3psTrtf6mXAOH/tblwDPGvhyE07dxQ/viww60rsecNRcKINP>

¹¹⁶ City of Austin Innovation Office. Projects – Project Tracking. Research findings.

<http://projects.austintexas.io/projects/project-tracking/research/research-findings/>

¹¹⁷ City of Austin Innovation Office. Project – Project Tracking. What We’re Making.

<http://projects.austintexas.io/projects/project-tracking/design/what-were-making/>

¹¹⁸ Victoria O’Dell (Open Austin). Interview with IRM researcher. 15 November 2017.

¹¹⁹ Grackle, the City of Austin’s project tracking tool, can be accessed at grackle.austintexas.io.

Method and Sources

The IRM report is written by well-respected governance researchers. All IRM reports undergo a process of quality control to ensure the highest standards of research and due diligence have been applied.

Analysis of progress on OGP action plans is a combination of interviews, desk research, and feedback from nongovernmental stakeholder meetings. The IRM report builds on assessments of progress put out by civil society, the government, the private sector, or international organizations.

The first and primary objective of the IRM is to verify completion of action plan commitments and the level of participation. Beyond this, the IRM seeks to assess potential impact and early changes in behavior around open government. There are two intended outcomes: accountability and learning. The method follows these aims. A second, important function of the IRM is to act as a “listening post” for the concerns of civil society.

Each report undergoes a 4-step review and quality control process:

- Staff review: IRM staff reviews the report for grammar, readability, content, and adherence to IRM methodology
- International Experts Panel (IEP) review: IEP reviews the content of the report for rigorous evidence to support findings, evaluates the extent to which the action plan applies OGP values, and provides technical recommendations for improving the implementation of commitments and realization of OGP values through the action plan as a whole
- Pre-publication review: Government and select civil society organizations (at the discretion of the researcher) are invited to provide comments on content of the draft IRM report
- Public comment period: The public is invited to provide comments on the content of the draft IRM report.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Each IRM researcher is required to hold at least one public information-gathering event. Care should be taken in inviting stakeholders outside of the “usual suspects” list of invitees already participating in existing processes. Supplementary means may be needed to gather the inputs of stakeholders in a more meaningful way (e.g. online surveys, written responses, follow-up interviews). Additionally, researchers perform specific interviews with responsible agencies when the commitments require more information than provided in the self-assessment or accessible online. If IRM researchers wish to substitute a stakeholder meeting with another format, they should communicate this to IRM staff.

The following information-gathering events and interviews contributed evidence for this report:

Date: 26 July 2017

Attendees: Ginger Yachinich, Equity Office; Kerry O’Connor, Innovation Office; Sabine Romero, Innovation Office; Sara Smith, Communications and Technology Management; John Spiers, Telecommunications; Brion Oaks, Equity Office; Mateo Clarke, Equity Office; Marni Wilhite, Innovation Office.

Format: Roundtable discussion

Synopsis: OGP commitment teams reported out on design and implementation of OGP commitments.

Date: 11 August 2017

Attendees: Daniel Honker, Innovation Office; John Spiers, Telecommunications

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed design and implementation of commitment 3.

Date: 7 September 2017

Attendees: Cindy Crosby, Erika Lopez

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed design and implementation of commitment 4.

Date: 13 September 2017

Attendees: Daniel Honker, Innovation Office; Mateo Clarke, Innovation Office; Sara Smith, Communications and Technology Management

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed design and implementation of commitment 5

Date: 13 September 2017

Attendees: Victoria O'Dell, Open Austin; Sara Smith, Communications and Technology Management; Ginger Yachinich, Equity Office; Sabine Romero, Innovation Office; Daniel Honker, Innovation Office; Mateo Clarke, Innovation Office; John Spiers, Telecommunications; Kerry O'Connor, Innovation Office; Cindy Crosby, Law Department; Erika Lopez, Law Department

Format: Roundtable discussion

Synopsis: OGP teams reported on status of implementation of OGP commitments

Date: 22 September 2017

Attendees: Daniel Honker, Innovation Office; John Spiers, Telecommunications

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed implementation of commitment 3

Date: 18 October 2017

Attendees: Kerry O'Connor, Sabine Romero, Angela Hanson

Format: Group interview

Synopsis: Discussed development of action plan and implementation of OGP commitments

Date: 11 November 2017

Attendees: Sabine Romero, Innovation Office; Kerry O'Connor, Innovation Office; Daniel Honker, Innovation Office; Mateo Clarke, Innovation Office; Erika Lopez, Law Department; Taylor Cook, Innovation Office; Ginger Yacinic, Equity Office; Victoria O'Dell, Open Austin

Format: Roundtable discussion

Synopsis: Discussed implementation of OGP commitments, lessons learned, and opportunities for future action plans.

Date: 15 November 2017

Attendees: Victoria O'Dell, Open Austin

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed Open Austin's role in OGP, implementation of commitment 5

Date: 8 December 2017

Attendees: Taylor Cook, Innovation Office

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed design and implementation of commitment 1

Date: 12 December 2017

Attendees: Maura Newell, Innovation Office; Sarah Rodriguez, Innovation Office

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed design and implementation of commitment 1

Date: 18 December 2017

Attendees: Sabine Romero, Innovation Office

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed overall OGP implementation; Discussed commitment 4

Date: 5 January 2018

Attendees: Daniel Honker, Innovation Office

Format: Interview

Synopsis: Discussed implementation of commitment 3