



February 23, 2016

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Attention: Kitty von Bertele

Re: Pilot Program Expression of Interest, City of Austin, Texas, USA

Dear Ms. von Bertele:

Please accept this letter of endorsement for the City of Austin's application in the "Pioneer" local government program. Leadership Austin has a long and respected history with the City staff and elected officials as we pursue our community mission of providing leadership training and issue education for Greater Austin.

An example of where Leadership Austin and the City of Austin fostered community capacity building occurred during our transition from an at large city council to one elected in 10 geographical single-member districts. This new structure is one of the most significant leadership changes in our community in decades. We convened a number of organizations (KLRU-PBS Austin, The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at UT Austin, The LBJ School of Public Affairs and the League of Women Voters) who held a seven part series for potential candidates, their staffs, and the public to receive information about current community issues. The objective was to provide a free series to enrich public dialogue during this historic election. The City of Austin provided faculty experts for every session with over 1,000 citizens attending and all 78 candidate campaigns engaged in the process.

We saw 250% more votes cast in the November 2014 City Council elections than we had seen in the previous 2012 cycle. There is momentum to increase civic participation if we demonstrate a change in how we engage each other. Our community wants innovative ways to participate through new technologies, creative platforms and forums to engage, increased decision making transparency and accountability --- all while recognizing there are new voices in community that want to be heard.

We look forward to the City's participation in the Pioneer program and stand ready to support our mutual goals of community engagement, inclusive dialogue, and collaborative relationships. We embrace all efforts to have Austin, Texas on the leading edge of open and transparent government practices. Thank you for the work being done by the Open Government Partnership and please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Regards,

Christopher Kennedy
Chief Executive Officer

Debbie Johnson
2015-16 Board Chair