

## Track 2: Community Engagement Task Force Post-meeting #4

## Follow-up Reflections and Comments

A gap or shortcoming of the present system is the arbitrary nature of geographic boundaries. In many/most cases the served areas were imposed and do not reflect the actual social geography. I suggest uniting people along corridors in place of the current structure which makes the other side of "Main Street" foreign territory.

When the TF breaks into small groups it seems the already over-weighted influence of legacy geographic-based orgs becomes insurmountable. Fragmenting our TF "community" further marginalizes the input of those of us who are not on a neighborhood group payroll.

The legacy groups seem proud of what appears to be modest success. At the top, NRP was fantastic for leveraging and focusing tax expenditure, but really not so great accomplishing widespread engagement. It may well be the best in the nation, and that's something to build from. Counting perhaps 1000 volunteers from a population of 368,000 suggests 367,000 people are not engaged. There's vast room for improvement. In the same sense that we should not be afraid to acknowledge NRP's successes, we might also not be afraid to make plain its shortcomings.

Legacy groups, too, seem to assume a mandate for their activities with minuscule positive support. As we on the TF seem to expect to be asked for assent and permission to our facilitators and chair, so should any group obtain widespread consent before imposing its design on a community. I suspect that a pattern of leaders acting without consent has the same effect on the public as it does to us on the TF.

Widespread consent is something we can define and measure. It could become a base for concrete recommendations to the City Council. As I see it, measures of consent are essentially founded in headcounts. Here's a beginning brainstorm list of measuring questions:

- --How many people does a group represent?
- --How many members can a group demonstrate?
- --What the ratio of membership to community size?
- --How many unique responders did a proposal inspire?
- --How many are first-time responders?
- --Are responders also members of/responding to any other groups?

The TF has a wonderful opportunity to shape the yardsticks by which our work is measured. If we only look at how much we send out, we can be easily replaced. Our orgs get most of their value from a unique ability to collect and pass useful information upward to the City enterprise.

At the root (and still unaddressed in our minutes), engaging people is realistic only if the people believe they can influence something they care about. Without distributing power to the people the particular form or process of engagement will remain largely irrelevant and widely ignored. Everyone working under the City enterprise (department, board, commission or "silo") whether elected, appointed, employed or contracted has to find humility and accept less power and control. Groups, officials or administrators who seek to increase their power (even in the name of doing good) are working against the goal of increasing public participation. We must share power with our neighbor, not exercise authority over him.

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