

Identifying and Addressing Systemic Barriers - Public Engagement Pilot Update

ISSUE

City Council directed Administration to identify and address systemic barriers related to recruitment and retention, public engagement and participation on boards and committees. Where is the City at on this issue and what are the future plans to address systemic barriers? This report provides an update on a pilot engagement project with the Black community as a first step. Lessons learned from the pilot will be applied moving forward with other communities experiencing systemic barriers.

BACKGROUND

At its September 28, 2020, meeting, City Council passed 3 resolutions instructing Administration to identify and address systemic barriers related to hiring and retention; public engagement; and Council-appointed advisory committees, boards, and commissions ([Items 14.1, 14.2, 14.3](#)).

In May 2021 City Council endorsed a [“One-City”](#) approach to addressing systemic barriers and resolved:

1. “That the Administration establish an internal advisory committee and an external advisory committee, each made up of people with lived experience and subject matter expertise in these areas to advise and guide both short- and long-term priorities, approaches, and opportunities within this work; and
2. That the Administration report back by October with the guidance of these committees on short term steps that could be taken and advice on how to make the overall process as effective as possible. That this reporting includes a recommended process for regular reporting to Council and/or its committees.”

At its January 31, 2022, meeting, City Council approved the [2022-2025 Strategic Plan](#) with the addition of Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as a Council Priority area. One action identified is to work with local organizations that focus on matters of relevance to Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), people with disabilities and 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities to better understand their needs and support efforts to address the inequities they experience.

A more detailed background outlining reports to Council and relevant community and world events is included in Appendix 1: Background.

CURRENT STATUS

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 sparked global outrage relating to viral incidents of police brutality and anti-Black racism and the exposure of systemic barriers in many

institutions. City Officials and Administration reached out to members of the Black community to discuss issues of anti-Black racism and systemic barriers in Saskatoon. These conversations resulted in the 3 Council Resolutions passed in September 2020 on Systemic Racism.

As reported in the [Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion \(REDI\) Annual Report](#) in June 2022, Administration met again with members of the Black community to gather thoughts on how to engage communities that experience systemic barriers.

Those community members provided clear direction to City staff in terms of an engagement process specific to the Black community:

1. “Inviting members of diverse Black communities and sectors to come together within a focus group to engage in dialogue to address the above concerns.
2. Identifying and inviting members of Black communities and sectors to attend individual interviews to discuss concerns.
3. We recognize there is a staff person in place to lead the community engagement strategy. We acknowledge the expertise of the staff person. We are also recommending that additionally, staff be hired/contracted to ensure recruitment and interview strategies achieve results that will lead to transformation.
 - a. Hiring Black, racialized, and members of culturally diverse communities to conduct/lead interviews will demonstrate a willingness to create a new model of community engagement;
 - b. Hiring Black, racialized, and members of culturally diverse communities will create more trust and openness within Black and other culturally diverse communities.”

The guidance from the Black community aligned with more of a participant-focused approach to engagement – particularly in making sure that the work was led by people from the Black community. In response to this guidance, Administration worked with the Black Community on a pilot engagement project. By piloting this different approach to engagement, Administration learned what may be required before implementing community-led engagement with other communities that have been identified as experiencing systemic barriers.

The City contracted the People Bridge Advocacy (PBA) in December 2021 to lead the pilot engagement project with the Black Community. The PBA is a charitable, non-profit, community-based civic and social advocacy organization dedicated to serving ethno-cultural organizations / communities through diverse programs and services, including reconciliation, organizational capacity building, community engagement, and advocacy. The PBA has established networks, subject matter expertise, as well as the trust in the community to carry out the engagement. The pilot project plan and process were developed in later 2021 and implemented in 2022.

The purpose of this report is to update City Council on the results of the engagement pilot with the Black Community. This in part addresses City Council’s second resolution

from May 2021. The report includes findings and recommendations by the PBA that are specific to addressing systemic barriers identified and experienced by the Black Community and how the City plans to respond to those recommendations, including short term steps.

The pre-engagement has provided Administration insight on the importance of identifying and working with specific communities experiencing systemic barriers to develop engagement processes with their community, and a better sense of the time and resources required for such an approach. Preliminary work has started with some members of the Indigenous community to develop a process for engaging with Indigenous community members. Over time, administration plans to work with other communities that experience systemic barriers to develop engagement processes with their communities.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Pilot Process: Participant Focused Approach to Engagement

PBA worked with external community advisors as well as Administration to develop questions, create communications materials and recruit diverse participants from the Black community. In March of 2022, they held two focus groups including 11 participants total, and conducted 10 interviews.

The findings were summarized in a report that identifies systemic barriers to City hiring and recruitment, Committees of Council, and public engagement, and makes 24 recommendations to address those barriers specifically with the Black community).

Through the process of working with PBA, Administration identified internal barriers to public engagement and outlined interim and longer-term solutions to begin to address those barriers. Therefore, the engagement pilot resulted in two areas of work that are outlined in this report:

1. Recommendations from the People Bridge Advocacy to address systemic barriers and Administration's response.
2. Administration's findings on internal barriers and plans to address systemic barriers in the City's current engagement process.

Recommendations from the People Bridge Advocacy and Administration's Response

The People Bridge Advocacy (PBA) made 24 recommendations (see Appendix 2 for a list of all recommendations and Appendix 3 for the complete report):

- 2 related to developing a strategy as well as evaluation measures and accountability back to the Black community on addressing systemic barriers;
- 10 were specific to City hiring and retention;
- 3 related to Committees of Council;
- 8 related to public engagement, and
- 1 for the Saskatoon Police Service.

Proposed Focus for 2022-2023

Administration identified 6 criteria to assist in prioritizing the recommendations from PBA that can begin to be addressed in 2022-2023. Based on this, the Administration will focus on the following five areas for 2022-2023 (See Appendix 4: City Criteria for Prioritizing PBA Recommendations and Proposed Focus for 2022-2023 for more details).

1. Coordinate the Cities response to the PBA recommendations and communicate the Cities progress back to the Black community.
2. Develop an overarching internal education strategy.
3. Work with members of the Black community to explore and develop a strategy for building leader to leader relationships.
4. Take a community development approach to networking and relationship building between the City and the Black community.
5. Collection of Baseline Data at the City.

Implementation plans will be developed for the five areas identified above. Each plan will include interim opportunities and solutions as well as developing more long-term processes to address systemic barriers.

Addressing Systemic Barriers in the City's Engagement Process

The pilot offered a different approach for the City through using a participant-focused approach to engagement rather than a project focus. It presented learnings for Administration on ways to improve public engagement for all communities by removing process-related barriers:

1. Administration takes a community development approach to strengthen and build connections to more communities that experience systemic barriers.
2. Those with living experiences of systemic barriers (Black, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities, people experiencing poverty) co-develop or lead City engagement processes on projects that impact them.
3. The need for processes and standards to equitably remunerate community members for their time and expertise.
4. The need for timely action and accountability back to community.
5. Working in a manner that is trauma-informed and does not cause additional harm.
6. The need for processes related to research ethics, informed consent, cultural protocols, and how data/stories/knowledge are stored and shared.

Proposed Focus for 2022-2023 & Implementation Plans

Based on lessons learned, Administration plans to focus on the following engagement activities:

1. Administration takes a community development approach to strengthen and build connections to more communities that experience systemic barriers. Interim

solutions include identifying where we have gaps, consulting with subject matter experts who are internal and external to the City and working to build capacity amongst staff for relationship building.

2. Those with living experiences of systemic barriers co-develop or lead City engagement processes on projects that impact them. Interim solutions for 2022/2023 include hiring those with living experiences on a contract basis, developing an engagement procedure that includes early consultation with those with living experiences, and making sure those with living experiences are part of decision-making processes for the project.
3. Develop processes and standards to equitably remunerate community members. In 2022-2023 Administration will develop interim solutions to address current barriers and develop a strategy for remuneration that identifies when and how remuneration would be provided.

Learnings from this work that may apply to other communities will be used in future engagements. Administration will continue to identify and address systemic barriers in City public engagement processes throughout the project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time. All recommendations and initiatives identified are being carried out within approved budgeted resources.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal, environmental, privacy or CPTED implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

1. Implementation plans will be developed for the five areas identified to begin addressing the recommendations from the PBA in 2022-2023. Any financial and staffing implications would be further reported and brought forward during future budget deliberations.
2. Work will begin to develop a remuneration strategy in 2022-2023 and any financial implications may be brought forward for consideration at future Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

APPENDICES

1. Background
2. The People Bridge Advocacy Recommendations
3. The People Bridge Advocacy Engagement Report
4. City Criteria for Prioritizing PBA Recommendations and Proposed Focus for 2022-2023

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