



Community Involvement Committee

To: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson and Board of County Commissioners (8 pages)

From: Community Involvement Committee

Date: May 12, 2023

Subject: Youth Engagement Subcommittee Recommendations

Background and Process

Introduction:

Each year the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) makes recommendations on Community Engagement policies and practices for Multnomah County. The community volunteer members of the CIC chose a topic, area, or subset of our community to focus on learning how the County engages on the issue and/or with the group, and recommends practices, policies, or other recommendations to improve community engagement. For the CIC, Community Engagement and Involvement encompasses any processes and opportunities where members of the community, defined as anyone living, working, and playing in the County, with a focus on underrepresented groups, are included in County decision making. (See Multnomah County Code § 3.251 and Resolution No. 2021-036). Modes of engagement include advisory bodies, surveys, public feedback and comment opportunities, volunteering, and more.

Youth under 18 years old make up approximately 18% of Multnomah County's population (U.S. Census, 2021 Estimate). Multnomah County considers youth programming as that serving youth up to 24 years old, an ever larger portion of our community. Historically, young people are often overlooked and under-represented when decisions are made, especially those that directly affect them (education, health and mental health care, transportation, and more) as well as in conversations about the long-term effects of decisions on their communities.

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Why We Chose this Topic:

The CIC advises on County involvement and engagement policies, programs, and strategies. The CIC chose to focus on this topic due to a collective understanding reflected in individual personal and professional experiences that youth in Multnomah County are underrepresented in decision making, especially about decisions that impact them. In alignment with the Bill of Rights for Children & Youth (2006), we affirm that youth have the “right to be accepted and active members of the community... to ask questions, receive answers, and have our views acknowledged by adults when making decisions that affect our lives.: and that Youth “have the right to engage in respectful and open dialogue with adults and... [be] taken seriously when we participate.”

We believe that the environment our children grow up in should be fun, safe, supportive and encouraging for them to play, learn and be themselves in community with other children, youth, and adults in the County. As Multnomah County’s advisory body on community engagement, we hope for a County government where youth and their communities are meaningfully involved in the programs, operations, and decision making at the County. Further, many CIC members are parents, educators, and organizers who recognize the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on young people in Multnomah County, and chose this topic to see how the County is or isn’t involving youth in responding and adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic and our rapidly changing world. We hope to see the County become a local government where youth and young adults are considered equal members of the community, and where youth are interested and empowered in County decision making. The members of this subcommittee believe in the power of the younger generation and their ability to create change. Together, through youth involvement and leadership development, we can work to ensure that the voices and perspectives of the younger generation are heard and that they are included in shaping today’s policies and tomorrow’s realities in Multnomah County.

For the purpose of our research and recommendations, we considered youth engagement in formal Multnomah County Advisory Boards, including the Multnomah Youth Commission (MYC) and other advisory bodies such as the CIC, youth volunteerism, and how the County involves youth in procurement and ensures contracted CBOs prioritize youth voice and power in youth programs. We considered two groups of youth: youth and young adults aged 13-21 (the ages eligible for Multnomah Youth Commission and more likely to self-represent in surveys, advisory groups, and volunteer opportunities) and youth infancy to age 12 (ages more likely to be represented by or alongside adult, or young adult, advocates).

Subcommittee members: Ta’ Neshia Renae (Chair), Angel Brophy, Brian Outlaw, Jenny Shadley, Kristina Edmunson, Lung Wah Lazum **Staff:** KellyAnn Cameron

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Our Process:

This subcommittee began meeting in October 2022 and met 8 times to better understand how young people and their families, from birth through young adulthood, are involved in County programs and decision making. In our learning process we consulted:

- Raffaele Timarchi, Youth Workforce Development Program Manager, Multnomah County
- Erika Molina Rodriguez, Youth Development Coordinator, Multnomah Youth Commission
- The Multnomah Youth Commission through attendance at the January 22nd, 2023 MYC meeting, Public Comment at May 8th MYC Meeting, and received MYC staff input via email and at their May 10th staff meeting.
- Anna Marie Allen, Interim Director of the Office of Community Involvement, Policy and Engagement Advisor to former Chair Kafoury
- Lakeitha Elliott, Community Engagement and Policy Advisor, Office of the Multnomah County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson
- Kathi Braeme-Burr, Sr. Procurement Analyst, Multnomah County Purchasing
- Reviewed materials from the MYC: the *COVID-19 Youth Survey (2020)*, the *Youth Manual (2010)*, and *The Bill of Rights for the Children and Youth of the City of Portland and Multnomah County (2006)*.
- Reviewed materials from Procurement: *Contracting and Procurement for Culturally Specific and Responsive Services* guiding document (2017) and the [Proposal Evaluation Handbook](#) (2020).

Observations:

- Teens and young adults have access to the Multnomah Youth Commission (MYC), and other select advisory boards (such as the Library board and Juvenile services).
- Youth and young adults have significant volunteer opportunities in the Library.
- The County has abundant youth programming and youth participation in volunteer opportunities, the distribution of youth engagement is focused on youth-only programs and the MYC, and not present in County programs that aren't specific to youth.
- Both youth and youth programming staff are unclear on the possibilities for youth involvement.
- MYC recommendations are not clearly followed up on by the County.
- Many youth programs are administered by nonprofit partners, such as SUN school programs, who may or may not have youth advisory boards or other accountability and

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transparency measures.

In general, we found that opportunities for engaging young people in meaningful ways are underexplored in the County. Involvement by youth may look different from adult/voter/client relationship to the county. We ask that the county provide opportunities that meet youth and families where they are at to understand what their needs are. When engaging educators, supporting organizations, service providers, etc that serve and affect youth and families, it is imperative to the health of the county that youth have a voice at the table.

Recommendations

1. Conduct a crosswalk analysis of youth engagement and involvement points in the County, culminating in a report back to the MYC and CIC with a plan for increasing opportunities and efficacy of meaningful engagement of youth and their advocates throughout the County.

Youth, young adults, and advocates for children and youth are already engaged in the work of the County, but we did not find clear and publicly available information on youth participation. Outside of the Multnomah Youth Commission, other youth-specific advisory groups, and the Library Advisory Board, it is difficult to determine participation of youth (aged under 14, 14-18 or 18-24) in advisory bodies for the County, though youth receive services in many County programs. Further, we encourage the County to center and engage youth, especially system involved, BIPOC, immigrant and refugee, justice involved, and low-income youth, in ongoing reports on County programs, policies, and services.

We recommend the County dedicate time and resources to identifying strengths and gaps in youth involvement. We ask the Office of Community Involvement and Chair's Office to collaborate on research and create a plan of action to better understand the existing dynamic and increase meaningful youth voice on County issues. The County has an obligation to involve youth beyond the MYC. The County should look for more opportunities to engage youth in decision making related to all county programs, through diverse pathways.

We also charge ourselves and fellow Community Involvement Committee members to examine our own outreach efforts, policies, and procedures to be more accessible to youth, youth adults, and families with young children, and collaborate with other Advisory bodies in improving youth voice in our spaces. The challenges faced by the youth commissioners and

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their staff seem to be largely shared by the CIC and other advisory boards and committees, therefore, we also recommend that the Office of Community Involvement and the Board work to evaluate and develop better systems for supporting, informing, and following up on the substantial work that volunteer advisory group members are putting into advising the County.

2. Improve utilization and support of the Multnomah Youth Commission.

Increase support of the MYC by the Board and other County staff, training on youth engagement among County departments, and youth outreach among other advisory groups, alongside other youth involvement opportunities. We recommend that the County support the MYC in following up on the COVID-19 Youth Survey, and report back to the MYC on the County's responses to the policy recommendations included within.

We encourage the CIC and other Advisory groups, as well as the MYC itself, to build more opportunities and paths for members to engage and consult with one another in their advisory work. This would de-silo committee work, build collaborative relationships between committee members, support all boards and committees in crafting more intergenerational and youth-centered recommendations and reports, and create pathways for youth members in and aging out of the MYC to connect to other advisory bodies that they can join. We also encourage the Board of County Commissioners to build a stronger relationship with the Multnomah Youth Commission and encourage more cross-communication among County leadership, department staff, and Advisory bodies and youth-led County Advisory Groups and organizations.

3. Intentionally engage youth and families in procurement processes for youth and children programming contracts.

We recommend Procurement explore ways to engage youth and youth advocates in contracting processes for programs that will work with youth. The contracting process has been working hard to include more DEI principles and strategies to recruit and retain culturally competent community based organizations led by impacted communities as well as smaller and newer organizations. We noticed that while youth are part of many culturally specific categories (such as race/ethnicity, gender, disability, etc) there is less focus on youth as a social class and cultural group. Youth have specific cultural and social needs which impact their methods and barriers to engagement and involvement, which vary by age and access to technology as well as cultural, religious, and other intersections. Since many youth programs are contracted out, it is imperative that the County ensure that the organizations who the

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County contracts with to provide services for youth are culturally responsive to the needs of young people.

Invite youth to participate in the application review process for youth-related contracts, encourage departments to incorporate questions about how applicant organizations ensure youth voice and accountability in their programs, add a multigenerational focus to their cultural and sustainability questions, and consider how the County can support more youth-led groups and organizations.

Finally, a readable and publicly available list of groups contracted to provide youth programming would be helpful for community members, youth, and community partners in understanding available resources. This could be achieved by making the existing County services list more usable and accessible for the public, locating lists in Procurement of active partners by theme, or other creative method.

4. Respond to youth calls for increased mental health support, and commit to youth direction and engagement in mental health and other programming.

We believe the County should engage existing County committees (like MYC, Health Department committees) related to youth and mental health needs and services. We call upon the County to review the COVID-19 Youth Survey conducted with the MYC and respond with how the County is and will address the #1 policy priority of increasing mental health service (fill what it was) and work closely with youth-led advisory bodies and youth groups to support youth mental health. The County has a responsibility to partner with schools and students to provide staffing and programs to close the mental health gap affecting children in Multnomah County's schools. We also recommend the County support the MYC in a follow-up COVID survey in the coming year or two, to hear about how things have changed and what needs to happen next, and ensure County mental health programs are responsive to youth needs.

Subcommittee Member Bios:

Ta' Neshia Renae (she/her) serves as the Subcommittee Chair and is the owner of Stamped & Signed and an Air Force veteran. She is an active member of her community and serves on the N/NE Oversight Committee, Portland Housing Center Board, and Bridgeton Neighborhood

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Association. She dedicates her time to giving back to the organizations that helped her achieve her goals.

Angel Brophy (she/her) is a Program Coordinator/Data System Specialist with Human Solutions. Angel also volunteers her time to be a Community Health Worker for her Filipino Community to provide wrap-around services with the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns, as well as with the Pacific Coast Coalition for Seafarers.

Brian Outlaw (he/him) is a Board Member of Portland Free Play, which provides opportunities for underserved youth to play in nature. He is also an Educational Assistant at elementary schools in Portland and facilitates youth BIPOC affinity groups.

Jenny Shadley (she/her) works in the communications and marketing department at Clark College. She has engaged with youth in her work at the college, as well as was a volunteer instructor with GirlStrength, a youth empowerment and self-defense program. In her work at the community college Jenny regularly works on committees related to governance, climate, strategic planning, social equity, and public art.

Kristina Edmunson (she/her) has more than 15 years of strategic, political, and crisis communications experience advising senior government officials, business leaders, and non-profit executives and organizations. She has worked with both state and local governments and non-profit leaders throughout Oregon on issues ranging from social justice, climate and education.

Lung Wah Lazum (he/him) is originally from Myanmar and moved to the United States in 2019. He has a Bachelor's in Medical degree from Myanmar and MBA in Management and Leadership from George Fox University, Portland. He is working as a Public Health Assistant Director at East County Community Health. He is a member of the Community Adversary Council of Health Share and the Asian Pacific Islander Business Adversary Council.

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