

Immigrant Voting Rights Taskforce

January 14, 5:00-6:30 PM

City Hall, Room 370

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Sharon Maeda, Many Uch, Rich Stolz, Alex Miller, Dorothy Wong, Heather Villanueva, Laura Flores Cantrell,

Members Absent: Luis Fraga, Tania Santiago, Diane Butler, Trang Tu, Arsalan Bukhari

OIRA Staff Present: Aaliyah Gupta, Sahar Fathi

Call to Order: 4:50 pm

Welcome (Sharon)

Sharon opened the conversation – she went over the agenda and draft framework. She noted that this meeting would focus on getting volunteers to begin drafting sections of the report.

Debrief from May 8 roundtable (Sharon)–

The group debriefed the roundtable discussion. The general consensus was that it had gone well and there was a good level of participation. They agreed that some issues rose to the top and they would want to continue thinking about them. In particular, Sharon mentioned that it would be helpful to think more about Michael Ramos’s comment around working in silos and the clear overlap between immigrant voting rights and ex-felon voting rights.

The group discussed the importance of creating overlying principles or guidelines, as a value statement in the beginning of the report. They agreed that they wanted to have some more anecdotal stories and discussed additional ways to get those stories.

Drafting Report (Sharon)

The group began the conversation around the exorbitant cost of citizenship. Rich noted that there is a national campaign trying to bring down the current cost of \$680 over the next couple months. It would also be good to look at fee waivers around the cost of naturalization and the cost of attorneys – possibly to support more low cost naturalization services. Another thought might be to ask the City to put money into a fund so that a credit union or a bank could use it as collateral for a revolving loan fund for naturalization. Rich will take the lead on this portion of the draft. Sharon added that Express Credit Union was set up to help the unbanked. Rich also noted that the Cities for Citizenship was looking at a coalition of Mayors and hoping to have announcement in June about the development of a program. Seattle might be looped in; all mayors will be asked to put resources into a fund.

The group decided that they would list the issues that they definitely wanted to include in the report.

The first piece they wanted more information around was data. One recommendation from the community roundtable was to change the criteria locally to come up with a new threshold for translation. At the moment, only Chinese and Vietnamese are required languages – even Spanish has been left out. There was also discussion around sharing the onus of good outreach to make sure that populations who receive information in English know what to do with it.

In addition, the group wanted to touch on systemic barriers, barriers in the inefficient systems that have been set up. There was discussion about the Affordable Care Act and how systems can become a logistical nightmare.

The group agreed that voter's education was critical and wanted to examine policies like "Sex Education," and create a similar class in school for "Voting Education." They also wanted to examine funding options for programs that embraced voter education.

Sharon suggested that the title of the report could be "Meeting voters where they are" and the subtitle could be "Access for all." The group discussed at length the issue of noncitizen voting and the extent to which residency sets up a voter to succeed. It was agreed that there should be some residency requirement, and it was agreed that it was important to include the immigrant and refugee voice in things like school board elections where 75% of the students are of color. There was discussion around the importance of community organizing and whether it could be done well for this population.

The discussion returned to the report and it was agreed that the principles and values be the preamble. The recommendations may be divided by the principles.

The group discussed that the local districting effort might come into play in the report, and posited that they might invite folks who have involved in these and regional redistricting efforts to the next meeting.

The discussion returned to funding mechanisms – whether it be through a Neighborhood Matching Fund cycle or levy dollars. There were questions about whether public agencies are doing voter registration. The group didn't know if the policies were being enforced, or whether a scan should be done to see if there is compliance. There was additional discussion about asking shelters and dinner feeding programs to register people.

The following principles and values were decided upon:

Principles

Voters where they are: outreach/civic education (Alex/Many)

- Language (Heather)
- Varying reading levels of education materials (Dorothy)
- Drop boxes (Laura)
- Technology/Access (Trang)
- Limited data = wrong decisions (Luis)
- Elections systemic barriers: "Modernizing" (Diane)

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- No programs to inform (Alex/Sharon)
 - Outreach/Civic Education (Alex/Many)
 - Re-Entry (Alex/Sharon)
 - HS must offer “opportunity” to register (OSPI) (Alex/Sharon)
 - Lack of funding for community advocates (Alex/Sharon)
- All residents vote
 - Naturalization (Rich)
 - Noncitizen Voting (Laura/Tania)
- Citizen complaint + involvement process (Heather)

Values

- Racism, immigration system and criminal justice system
- Every vote should be heard
- Radical inclusion
- Income inequality
- Restoration of democracy
- Implications of districting
- Cultural competency
- Transparency/accountability

Wrap-Up (Sharon)

Sharon stated that she doesn't want paragraphs, just the main points/recommendations. They can be bullet points that are phrases or sentences. Even if we haven't discussed whether we all agree, just list them anyway so that we can begin a discussion. We can wordsmith later. Items are due to Sahar by June 5.

Adjournment

6:20 pm.