The Dilemma of Online Participation: Comprehensive Planning in Austin, Texas

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Images (clockwise from top left): Austin Skyline by Dave Wilson Photography, Meeting-In-A-Box at Asian American Cultural Center, Imagine Austin Website, and Community Forum Meeting, all courtesy the City of Austin.
Executive Summary

Can comprehensive planning be democratic? More specifically, is public participation open to citizen views and input, involve people representative of all citizens, and communicate to participants what they need to know to provide relevant input? To answer these questions, I conducted a study of a comprehensive planning process in Austin, Texas. Through the use of secondary sources and a participant survey, I studied 11 participation approaches in the city. These included a combination of offline and online approaches: public meetings, online and mail surveys, and social networking websites.

The Dilemma: Through the study, I found online participation creates a dilemma for planners. These approaches were created because they are convenient and accessible to many citizens. However, they allow highly motivated citizens to more easily participate, giving them a disproportionately influential voice in the process.

Open? As a result of differing views about the purpose of public participation by citizens, staff, and consultants, not all approaches were designed to receive input from citizens. Additionally, most approaches were conducted in English, which restricted the ability of non-English speakers to participate. Most input was possible at in-person public meetings, in-person Meeting-In-a-Box exercises (a guided exercise for small groups to use and submit results to the city), and an online and mail survey.

Representative? In general, participants in the plan did not resemble the city in demographics. Participant views shared some similarities, but also important differences, with city residents. The most active participants in the process were whiter, more affluent, and more educated than the city as a whole. However, among this group, participants of online and offline approaches had similar characteristics. In addition, although the mail survey was representative by race and ethnicity, it contained fewer renters, low-income residents, and younger people than city as a whole.

Relevant Input? Although a comprehensive plan can cover a broad range of topics, at a minimum the plan will include those required by law and where existing policies on certain topics are missing of conflict. Through a review of planning documents, I conclude input on certain topics may be more of interest to others, which planners did not always communicate clearly to participants.

Recommendations: The tension between openness and equality is common in democracy. I propose several solutions to the dilemma of online participation.
1. Online approaches should continue to be used as an alternative to in-person meetings for receiving input.
2. Greater control and consistency among online participation approaches could help planners monitor participation and balance input.
3. Participation approaches should be offered in the languages spoken in the community.
4. Underrepresented groups can be reached through approaches that take into account resources, take advantage of existing social engagement, and utilize recruitment.
5. Planners should communicate to citizens the topic and role of the plan at the point of participation.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Can Planning be Democratic? ........................................ 4
   1.1 Democracy in Austin Comprehensive Planning
   1.2 Theoretical Framework
   1.3 Research Methods
2. Previous Research: The Problems of Participation in Planning ............ 12
   2.1 Openness
   2.2 Representativeness
   2.3 Input Relevance
3. Findings .................................................................................................. 17
   3.1 Inconsistent Openness
   3.2 Lack of Representativeness
   3.3 Participation Approaches Lack Plan Details
4. Conclusions and Recommendations ....................................................... 27
   4.1 The Dilemma of Online Participation
   4.2 Recommendations for Planners
5. Appendices .............................................................................................. 33
6. Works Cited .............................................................................................. 40

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1. Introduction: Can Planning Be Democratic?

Can comprehensive urban planning be democratic, and take into account the views and expertise of citizens? I investigated this question through a case study of a comprehensive plan in Austin, Texas. A city with progressive politics and a history of participatory planning, Imagine Austin is being created with extensive citizen participation.

Most American cities are required by law to periodically create comprehensive city plans. These plans provide guidance for land-use regulation, government policies, and long-term public investment. Although the earliest city plans were usually created by expert consultants or city staff, contemporary comprehensive planning involves extensive involvement from citizens and nongovernmental stakeholders (Brody, Godschalk, and Burby 2003). Contemporary planning processes feature a wide array of participatory techniques, ranging from interactive workshops and meetings to Internet websites. A popular professional handbook contains examples of hundreds of participation methods, which I will call “approaches” (Creighton 2005).

The Imagine Austin planning process is divided into four phases: define the vision, develop plan elements, refine plan elements, adopt the plan. (See Appendix A) I examined 11 participation approaches in the first phase: several types of meetings, committees, and websites. (See Appendix B) I asked three questions about them:

1. Are they open to citizens to contribute ideas and views?
2. Are the participants representative of the city in terms of demographics and views?
3. Are citizens provided information about the plan to provide relevant input?

I selected the City of Austin for several reasons. Austin was beginning a planning process at an opportune time for this study, and I had a pre-existing relationship with city staff. In addition, the process used a wide range of multiple participation methods, including online

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1 The model planning enabling act, which most states adopted as the basis for planning, mandates public hearings. Many states require additional participation. In Austin, the process fell under the state’s open meetings law. However, most participation approaches far exceeded the legally required participation.
approaches (City of Austin 2009). City officials in Austin are motivated to complete a plan in a timely manner since one has not been completed since 1978, and the upcoming City Council election serves a deadline for the process. Additionally, as described below, the resulting plan has statutory authority under city and state law, motivating citizens to participate.

Studying multiple approaches through the same process enabled me to compare these approaches, while holding constant other variables. The research approach, a detailed case study, is well suited to closely examine social processes, achieve high conceptual validity, and address causal complexity (George and Bennett 2005). However, additional research will be required to determine generalizability of the findings between cities.

The primary purpose of the study was to evaluate participation as it occurred, and provide feedback and recommendations that would be useful for later phases of the process. In addition, it uses the opportunity provided by a contemporary comprehensive planning process to evaluate how well common participation approaches measure up to several common concerns.

1.1 Democracy in Austin Comprehensive Planning

In Austin, Texas, the comprehensive plan carries significant legal authority. Under Texas law, cities may only adopt zoning regulations “in accordance with a comprehensive plan” (State of Texas Code). Under the city of Austin’s charter, the comprehensive city plan governs city zoning, subdivision regulations, roadway plan, all public improvements, public facilities, public utilities, and “all city regulatory action relating to land use” (City of Austin).

Like most cities, Austin’s early plans were created by experts without direct citizen participation. The first expert-produced plan was completed in 1928, controversially suggesting the city concentrate facilities for blacks in East Austin. The last “expert” plan was completed in 1958 by planning consultant Harry Wise. This plan featured proposed routes for highways, suggestions for improving automobile access downtown, and recommendations for industrial
development (Austin City Planning Commission 1958). However, private citizens were not involved in its creation and its major recommendations were not adopted. “Few copies even reached [citizen’s] hands,” observed one Austin historian, “and fewer still seem to have been read.” The plan finally adopted by the City Council in 1961 contained only a brief summary of the original plan (Orum 1987).

However, beginning in the 1970s, the city completed two plans through more participatory processes. The “Austin Tomorrow” plan, completed in 1972-1975, featured extensive involvement from citizens. Conceived by city planner Dick Lillie, and supported by mayor Roy Butler and the city council, the project was overseen by well-known neighborhood activist Joan Bartz. In the course of the process, 250 citizens were appointed to a Goals Assembly, 500 more were trained, and over 2,800 people participated in 56 neighborhood meetings for a total of over 3,500 citizen participants. The final plan, presented to the mayor in 1975, featured dozens of photos showing diverse groups of Austinites participating in the many meetings involved in creating the plan (City of Austin 1975; Orum 1987).

The most recent planning process was called AustinPlan. In 1985, the city adopted a revised city charter that clearly established that a comprehensive plan should guide a wide range of regulations. Initiated shortly after, with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the AustinPlan process included a 94-member steering committee and
multiple public meetings in each of the city’s neighborhoods. Although two scholars observed “unlike most city planning processes in which the plan is primarily prepared by planning staff or outside consultants, citizens in AustinPlan had an active and direct hand in actually writing and formulating the plan,” they go on to explain that no open public forums on the entire plan were held. Only specific components and the “neighborhood” or sector plans had public meetings (Beatley and Brower 1989).

The most controversial element to the plan became target densities assigned to each neighborhood. As the process continued, these densities elicited frustration from outlying neighborhoods concerned the plan would prevent new infrastructure and growth. The business and real estate communities, including owners of outlying land, became vocal opponents of the plan, voicing concerns about regulations and the plan’s limited densities. With the national economy in recession, the City Council voted down the final plan in early 1989.

In this study, I evaluated the first phase of the city’s Imagine Austin comprehensive planning process. Austin city auditor Stephen L. Morgan issued a report on long-term planning by the city government in 2006. Observing the city’s long-range planning function was fragmented or nonexistent, he urged the development of an updated comprehensive plan, arguing it could function as a guide for decision-making, protect property values, contribute to private investment, and support financial sustainability (Office of the City Auditor 2006). The plan was initiated in September 2008 when the city council issued a request for qualifications for a consultant. The winner, Wallace, Roberts, and Todd (WRT) was selected in April 2009. WRT and city staff created a four-phased approach. I studied participation in Phase One, which concluded in January 2010 (City of Austin 2009).
1.2 Theoretical Framework

For this study I used two types of theory. First, normative democratic theory provided my definition of the purpose and nature of citizen participation, and therefore provided the frame for the research questions. Second, the theory of civic voluntarism explained the cause of unequal levels of civic participation. In addition, it explains why some participation approaches succeeded in reaching underrepresented populations and how the city can build on these successes.

In the twentieth century, theorists have disagreed about what type or amount of participation is desirable in a modern democracy. I follow those who believe it is a positive addition to voting alone, particularly for complex policy issues. Schumpeter ([1942] 2008) argues modern democracy is primarily defined by free and open elections. In this view, voters decide which policies they prefer by voting for the candidates who propose policies they agree with. Other theorists have disagreed. Writing in the context of urban renewal, Arnstein (1969) argued in support of direct democracy by delegating government power to citizen groups. She also warned about activities that governments may call participation, but actually result in manipulation of citizens and no opportunity for input. For this paper, I concur with Fung (2006) who argued direct citizen participation with government can help achieve three democratic values: legitimacy, effectiveness, and justice. For this study I focus on two. Participation can contribute to legitimacy, by allowing citizens to express their views in more detail than what is possible through the act of voting alone. Participation can also improve government effectiveness by allowing citizens to contribute ideas or local knowledge. Comprehensive plans often contain topics far beyond the platforms or expertise of elected officials. Participation provides a way for citizens to contribute their views or ideas directly on these issues.

As a result of the caution provided by Arnstein about meaningless or harmful participation, I considered the context of participation. Assuming the Imagine Austin staff
genuinely desired citizen views and input, which topics are most likely to be included? Are citizens told about these topics, and asked for their views and ideas regarding them? To answer this question, I explain the topics that are legally required to be included. I do not discuss how the plan will be implemented, or propose how power may shape the input which is offered before the plan is approved. I follow Stein and Harper (2003) who contend that a pragmatic view of power is required to critique and improve democratic practices.

Next, theories that explain individual political behavior can help explain why certain types of people participate at higher rates, and what can be done to equalize participation in policymaking. Rational actor theory holds that individuals act rationally to maximize personal benefits. In this view, citizens will be motivated to participate in government to advance candidates who will personally benefit them, or protect personal assets such as home value (See Fischel (2001)) These theories have generally not been applied to studies of comprehensive planning. Plans rarely contain the level of specificity and finality to impact the value of an individual’s property. They include general guidelines for urban growth and public facilities that are implemented through more specific decisions. However, in certain cases, such as AustinPlan, a personal financial stake does exist, motivating people to participate. As a result of this history, planners avoided this level of detail in Imagine Austin. Because the plan is general and will have only indirect legal authority, I turned to an alternate theory to explain individual participation.

Theories focusing on personal benefits to explain participation predict “rational” citizens, especially those with high incomes, will engage in minimal political activity (Downs 1956). However, scholars consistently find greater levels of participation by citizens with high socioeconomic status in activities that won’t result in personal benefit, such as voting or neighborhood organizations. Brady, Schlozman, and Verba have proposed what they call the civic voluntarism model to explain this. This approach argued the role of resources,
engagement, and recruitment all cause political behavior (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Following their theory, political participation is explained not only by socioeconomic variables but also contact with community leaders, exposure to recruiting messages, and participation in non-political organizations. I will use the theory to explain the success of some approaches used in Austin at reaching underrepresented populations, and propose recommendations for improving representation overall. This theory follows international research that argues the successful empowerment of low-income communities in Brazil is not only due to innovative “participatory budgeting” policies, but also local organizations that mobilize the poor to take advantage of them (Lavalle, Acharya, and Houtzager 2005).

1.3 Research Methods

To answer the first research question, about openness to input, I reviewed meeting minutes, photos, videos. I conducted an in-person observation of two public meetings, collected the survey instruments for the mail and online surveys and the Meeting-In-a-Box exercise. The resulting data were organized and systematically reviewed, and I organized 11 participation approaches into four categories: open to input, guided prompts, closed-ended surveys, and not open to input.

In order to answer the second research question, on representativeness, I conducted an online survey of plan participants. The survey was distributed by email in April 2010 to the entire Imagine Austin general email list maintained by the city. This list included everyone who signed up on the plan website, most attendees of public meetings, all participants in the online survey who provided an email address, most Meeting-In-a-Box participants, and anyone who requested to be informed of events since the launch of the process. The email solicitation and the first page of the survey both contained a Spanish invitation to complete a Spanish language version,
also online. The survey asked participants about their participation, whether they were able to use each to contribute views and ideas, as well as demographic information.

The survey received 73 respondents, all from the English language version. Although this group is not a statistically valid sample of all participants, it contained identical questions about demographics and views used in the Imagine Austin online survey and the mail survey of city residents. Therefore, the views and demographic profile of different types of participants can be compared, including the city mail survey, online survey, public meeting attendees, and a small group of highly active participants. To evaluate representativeness, I compared these data to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006-2008 American Community Survey estimates for Austin.

Third, I completed a review of legal and government documents to describe the context of the plan and the history of comprehensive planning in Austin. This included a review of books and journal articles on Austin city planning, and a systematic review of contemporary news articles in the Proquest database using the keywords “Imagine Austin,” “comprehensive plan,” and “city planning.” In addition, archival materials and government documents were obtained through archival research at the Austin History Center to obtain data about participation in previous plans.
2. Previous Research: The Problems of Participation in Planning

I reviewed previous research about participation in planning to see what researchers have found when researching similar questions. On openness, language and culture barriers and well as confusing meeting formats have been obstacles for receiving citizen input. However, previous research does not cover the same participation approaches as Imagine Austin. On representation, researchers have found citizens with higher socioeconomic status participate at higher rates, especially citizens with high educational attainment. Minority racial and ethnic groups are also often underrepresented. On representation in terms of opinions, one study found policy views do not differ sharply except on the role of government. Another argues that despite the unrepresentative views of highly motivated participants, the only realistic solution is to expand participation through more convenient approaches. Finally, some researchers cast doubt on the importance of formal methods, arguing participation can occur outside the formal meetings and channels described here, but through “hidden systems,” or distorted by powerful interests.

The previous research on participation in planning have examined all participants in each case as a group, instead of comparing characteristics of participants from different approaches as I have done. In addition, none of the studies consider online approaches, which is a relatively recent development in professional practice.

2.1 Openness

Researches have critiqued the most common approach to participation, the public meeting, on several grounds. An individual case study examining stakeholder input into a general plan for a city in the Netherlands, Monnikhof and Edelenbos (2001) conclude many of the specific proposals brought by citizens to public workshops were lost in a “fog” because the
workshops were not designed to capture and develop citizen input. As a result, I collected not only agendas and evidence from the meetings, but also the recorded input that resulted. Imagine Austin also differs because it involves a greater variety of meetings and participation opportunities.

Another key factor researchers have identified are language and vocabulary. Through an ethnographic account of planning in North Dakota, Tauxe (1995) argues participation worked to “reinforce dominant organization, ideological, and discursive forms and marginalize and disempower others.” In particular, the planning process privileged bureaucratic and legalistic rhetoric, practiced by professional planners, mining corporations, and outside government agencies, over the traditional moralistic rhetoric of the agricultural community. Although I found an effort was made to avoid jargon during participation opportunities in Austin, language barriers emerged as an important issue.

2.2 Representativeness

Another issue of interest to researchers has been the representativeness of citizens who engage in participation. I analyzed two types of representation: descriptive representation (does the group share descriptive characteristics) and view representation (do they share opinions). In terms of descriptive representation, the demographic profile of participants generally differs from the public at large. However studies are mixed about how the views of these citizens differ from majority views.

In a study of the AustinPlan comprehensive planning process, Beatley, Brower, and Lucy (1994) examine the representativeness of the AustinPlan participants compared with the general public. They find that the citizen participants had much higher incomes and much more education than the city at large, and Hispanics and African Americans were underrepresented. While both favored environmental protection, historic preservation, parks, and compact
development, Austin residents in general where “skeptical about the virtues of government regulation, higher density, developers, environmentalists, and even neighborhood organizations” (Beatley, Brower, and Lucy 1994). The authors speculate the planning process itself is expected to shift the views of participants as they become better informed about the nature of problems and potential solutions.

In contrast with the AustinPlan study, my research compares the demographics of different types of participants. In addition, while involving a large number of citizens, the AustinPlan process did not include any general citywide meetings, making it distinct from Imagine Austin and other processes that do. All meetings were for neighborhood-level plans, and citywide policy was established by committees.

Citizens also participate in planning through neighborhood or advisory groups. Although observing these groups are not always representative of the neighborhood, scholars are generally positive on their ability to foster participatory democracy (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993). A study of neighborhood councils in four cities found homeowners, college graduates, high income, and professionals are all overrepresented on the neighborhood councils (Rich 1986). In addition, public officials felt they were useful, and trusted them to represent community views accurately. The study found council members and the general public raised different issues in response to open-ended survey questions, but provided no evaluation of the differences. An earlier study of a voluntary regional citizen advisory organizations found the participants were “overwhelmingly white and male,” but on issues the results were more nuanced. Views of active citizens and the general public were consistent on some issues, but gaps appeared on the issue of whether the metropolitan region should grow, and whether new taxes for transportation should be approved (Redburn et al. 1980).

Finally, critics have argued participation opportunities can be unfairly exploited by unrepresentative factions. Through a case study of a dispute in Concord, Massachusetts,
Fiorina (1999) argues the expansion of participatory democracy has caused a decline in trust of government because it provides unrepresentative factions, “extreme voices,” the opportunity to dominate the political process. In the case study, a small group of local activists caused significant delay to a new athletic facility. Although the views of Imagine Austin’s most active participants were not as extreme as in this cases, because they differed from the city at large they could be considered a faction. Fiorina concludes the only way to ensure participation results in representative views is to expand participation. In particular, he proposes exploring newer forms of participation like digital technology, that require less time than public meetings for participants. It is not clear whether the extreme voices would also dominate in a different context, such as a large, city-wide process with diverse participants. However, this study finds evidence that confirms his proposal that Internet technology can expand participation. While it may dilute the type of small faction he observed – with intense, unrepresentative views – my study finds expanded participation facilitates the creation of another type of faction. This group is a highly motivated and well-intentioned, but also unrepresentative subset of the population.

2.3 Relevance

Finally, scholars have argued several factors may make formal participation meaningless, including private back-channels and manipulation by the powerful. Through a case study of a Canadian estuary management program, Hanna found nongovernmental organizers were able to get information and influence the process through “secondary” or “indirect” participation opportunities instead of public meetings. He argues this constitutes a paradox since participation seems important, but may not be as significant as these “hidden systems” (Hanna 2000). Hanna’s research provides an important caution that the formal participation opportunities should not be exaggerated, and private meetings and communications not included in this study may be providing an opportunity for influence for the individuals and
organizations able to take advantage of them. This is a limitation of this study, and a possible avenue for further research.

Some scholars have argued powerful interest groups can manipulate participation. Flyvbjerg (1998) argues business elites subtly influenced the implementation of a transportation plan through their redefinition of the terms of debate. Instead of agreeing elites defined the terms of discussion, Stein and Harper (2003) urge a pragmatic approach. While arguing the power imbalance he identified existed, they argue planners should be aware of practical realities of power and power structures, without letting this awareness dominate and overwhelm their view of planning. Therefore, I analyze whether participation is meaningful in only the most limited way: whether citizens are told the general topics and role of the comprehensive plan. This question is both answerable and useful for planners trying to determine what should be done for participation. I do not address the deeper concern about whether the form of discourse and prevailing ideology restrict citizens’ ability to participate.

Although a diverse body of research, these studies contain guidance on key factors and predict expected results. I also observed that studies of participation to create plans differ from studies of participation in policy implementation. In the aggregate, participation in plans produces more detailed and successful plans (Burby 2003), and although participants are not usually not demographically representative, their views may be similar in some ways to the general public (Beatley, Brower, and Lucy 1994) but different on others like growth and taxes (Redburn, Buss et al. 1980). Studies of implementation of regulation find irreconcilable cultural and linguistic barriers to equal participation (Tauxe 1995), domination by elites (Flyvbjerg 1998), and participation in back channels (Hanna 2000).
3. Findings

My research began with three questions about public participation: openness, equality, and input relevance. My study was limited to the planning process’ first phase: “creating the vision.” In this phase, planners deliberately delayed discussion of specific policy issues in some approaches. As a result, the survey contained questions about views and specific policies that were not addressed during public meetings, but will be discussed in future meetings. However, my analysis of openness, representation, and relevance is designed to be useful later on in this process or in other contexts. In addition, even if the process starts with the most general vision, it is still regarding specific topics such as growth, infrastructure, and public investment, something citizens may not know. The Imagine Austin process asks citizens to contribute input on the general vision first, and more specific information later. This paper will not consider whether this is an ideal arrangement, or whether alternate arrangements are possible, since answering this question would involve different theories and data. Investigating these questions, about the process and sequencing of participation, is an avenue for future research.

3.1 Inconsistent Openness

Which approaches were open to citizen input, and in what ways? I found most input was received through public meetings, the online survey, and the Meeting-In-a-Box exercise. Despite the range of approaches, major barriers existed. Some participation approaches were closed to input almost entirely, others were available only in English, and the choices of some survey questions resulted in ambiguous feedback. I organized the participation approaches into four categories, according to how open they were to citizen input.

First, public meetings were the primary means for capturing citizen input. Resulting ideas and views were collected and re-published online as a list in a spreadsheet. The plan consultant
analyzed the resulting content for themes and issues in a document called the Common Ground Working Paper, which was reviewed by the Citizen Advisory Task Force several times before being finalized. The meetings also provide the opportunity for more in-depth face-to-face discussions on specific topics not possible through any other means. However, this type of input was not captured systematically if it occurred outside the boundaries of the planned exercises.

Second, the Meeting-In-a-Box exercise and online survey contained short prompts for open-ended feedback. Both asked citizens to list four strengths, four weaknesses, and four ideas for the future for Austin. As discussed later, although clearly asking for ideas, neither prompted the citizen about the scope of and topics covered by the resulting plan.

Third, the mail survey contained 23 questions, on the topics of public services and facilities, transportation infrastructure, budgeting priorities, and the location of future growth. It contained one open-ended question, with only two lines of space for a response. It was successful for measuring views about a list of pre-determined topics. Its weaknesses were the limited open-ended questions and several vague questions, described below.

Fourth, several approaches did not provide the possibility of citizen input at all, or if feedback was possible, city staff said it would not be formally considered. These included comments on the plan website, responses on Twitter, and Facebook posts. For example, in response to a series of comments posted by citizens to Facebook responding to an article about transportation in February, Imagine Austin account posted, the “Imagine Austin” account wrote the following: “Thank you so much for all your input! This dialogue is great and can be continued at the Imagine Austin Community Forums in the late spring!”

I found three major limitations to whether participation approaches were open to input: some were not open as a deliberate policy, some had limited availability in languages other than

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2 Several versions of this document is available online at [http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/compplan/commonground-paper.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/compplan/commonground-paper.htm)
English, and the choice of questions on the survey resulted in ambiguous results. As noted above, comments posted online discouraged citizens from submitting input through the Facebook and Twitter accounts. These were managed by a subconsultant with experience in marketing who also conducted outreach to media organizations and community organizations about meetings and events, but not receive input from the plan. Because some cities are using Facebook to receive input, this practice may result in confusion for citizens about whether and how government is listening.

Opportunities to participate in languages other than English were limited. The website and online survey were limited to English, however a Spanish version of the survey was available at public libraries. One public meeting was held in Spanish, and the Meeting-In-a-Box exercise was available in Spanish. The scientific survey was in English, but Spanish speakers were instructed to call to complete the survey over the phone. The survey results available does not disclose how many Spanish language surveys were completed.

Although the survey reached a more representative population than the other approaches, the number and type of questions limited the ability of respondents to provide detailed views or ideas. For example, a major component to the new plan is the location of future growth. The only question about this topic on the survey is below (City of Austin 2010).

6. **From the following list, please check the THREE (3) areas you would most support growth and development occurring.**

   - (1) Downtown
   - (2) Centers outside of Downtown
   - (3) Along roadway corridors
   - (4) In suburban areas
   - (5) Near public transportation stations, stops, and routes
   - (6) Other: _______________________
   - (7) None

   Each option aside from “other” received at least 40% support when the consultant presented the results (ETC Institute 2010).
The choice to allow respondents to pick three choices makes interpreting the results particularly difficult. A question regarding transportation improvements found similarly ambiguous. The question asked respondents to assign $100 to different categories of transportation infrastructure. The reported results averaged the responses, resulting in moderate support for every choice: $28 for freeways, $18 for major streets, $12 for neighborhood streets, $14 for bus service, $14 for rail service, and $12 for walking and biking (ETC Institute 2010). These limits aside, at best a closed-ended survey of moderate length, can provide only a general sense of priorities of the respondents. Other questions asked for input through ranking or scales, providing more nuanced feedback.

### 3.2 Lack of Representativeness

The participants in the Imagine Austin process were not representative of the city at large. By comparing the city’s data with the study survey, I found participants of online and
offline participation approaches did not differ substantially in terms of demographic factors. In order to identify the views from a representative group of citizens, the city conducted a mail survey that successfully reached a population similar to the city as a whole in terms of race and Hispanic ethnicity. I asked the active participants in my study survey an identical question from the mail survey, about priorities for capital improvement, and found the highly active study survey group’s views differed on several key topics. However, the population of even this “scientific” survey failed to reach a representative numbers of renters and low income residents.

Over the past thirty years, the descriptive representation of citizen participants in planning in Austin has not improved. Instead, as the city has grown more diverse, planners have struggled to ensure plan participants look like the city. According to city statistics drawn from self-reported data, participants in public meetings, online survey, and Meeting-In-a-Box exercise were whiter, less likely to live alone, highly educated, had slightly higher incomes, and were more likely to own their own home than the ACS estimates of the city as a whole (See Appendices C and D).

The participant survey found 59.7% participated in one of the public meetings and 89% participated in one of the four online approaches: visiting the website, taking the online survey, Facebook and Twitter, and posting to another website. Although only surveying a small group of active participants, the demographic profile of those who participated in the public meetings was similar to those who participated in online approaches.

The lack of Spanish speaking and Hispanic representation in the process is particularly troubling. The ACS estimates the city is 35% Hispanic. The mail survey reached 34% Hispanic households, all phase one events reached 10%, and the study survey of active participants 9.4%. According to the 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS), 35% of city residents speak a language other than English at home, and 15% reported speaking English less than
“very well.”³ The plan website, online surveys, and most public meetings were in English. Although Hispanic and Spanish speaking participants were underrepresented, as noted elsewhere planners made a number of efforts to increase these numbers, including arranging special meetings and conducting community-specific media outreach. Without these efforts, the participants may well have been even less representative of these important communities.

In addition to descriptive representation, scholars have also examined view representation. Recognizing participants lacked descriptive representation, a 1989 study conducted a random telephone survey of Austin to measure whether their views differed from participants. They concluded the groups’ views shared some similarities, and differences – such as the belief of the efficacy of government to address problems – may be influenced the process of participation itself (Beatley, Brower, and Lucy 1994). As part of Imagine Austin, city planners commissioned a “scientific” survey to supplement the voluntary online survey and other participation approaches. Conducted by a polling consultant, the survey was distributed by mail with follow-up phone calls. This survey was representative of the city’s Hispanic population, however other statistics varied significantly. Among the respondents, 17% were renters versus 53% in the ACS. The mail survey’s age distribution was also skewed, with 41% of the survey respondents over 55, versus 15% of the city according to ACS. (See Appendix E) These differences, beyond the margin of error for each survey, cannot be accounted for by excluding the University of Texas undergraduate population (38,168), who constitutes just 5% of the total population.

To assess how closely the views of the most active participants resembled those of citizens at large, a question from the city’s mail survey was included on the study participant survey. The question asked respondents to allocate $100 for capital improvement among eight

³ Plus or minus 0.8% and 0.6%, respectively.
categories of public facilities. The results are mixed. Both groups agreed transportation was the top priority for spending, and infrastructure maintenance was important. However, city residents allocated more funds to health and human services facilities than the study survey respondents, and also more money for public safety facilities. Study survey respondents allocated more funds for open space, community facilities, and parks and recreation facilities than the city at large. The result for active participants was within the margin of error for spending on transportation infrastructure maintenance and “other.” This question suggests the two groups share some preferences, however with some major and important exceptions.

The city has used three strategies to address demographic representation. First, the Citizen Task Force included representatives from the African American and Hispanic communities. Second, in response to representation gaps, the city’s consultants together with Task Force members planned two special meeting in a box exercises, one at the Asian American Cultural Center (December 16, 2009), and the other at the Mexican American Cultural Center (January 25, 2010). These events attracted significant attendance, and were so successful it produced a temporary overrepresentation of Asians in the process. The success of these strategies suggests their differences from a conventional public meeting could be used to
reach racial and ethnic communities elsewhere. The events were planned with community members (either consultants or Task Force members) and at a community venue.

City planners and consultants were aware of the unrepresentative nature of participants, and took some steps to address the gaps. However, the most successful approach – community-based meetings organized through community organizations – was also considered adjunct to the more traditional public meetings that constituted the majority of the participation opportunities.

The first two research questions examined whether the participation approaches are open to input and whether representative citizens are being reached. For public participation to be able to provide direct citizen input into a plan that must cover certain topics, their input must at least cover these areas.

### 3.3 Participation Approaches Lack Plan Details

The law requires the Imagine Austin plan to cover certain topics. In addition, the city government will turn to it for guidance for infrastructure planning and where existing policies are ambiguous or contradictory. Are citizens asked questions and provided the best information to elicit relevant responses in these areas? Fully answering this question would require a range of factors: the individual backgrounds of participants, cultural variables, psychology, and more. I consider this question from two, limited perspectives. First, I review the topics the plan will cover because of its legal role as a guide for public policy. Second, I examined whether and how these topics are shared with citizens. I find the most representative participation approach, the mail survey, provided the most information about the topics. As previously described, the mail survey attempted to evaluate views on the specific issues of growth and infrastructure. Less representative approaches were more open ended, and did not describe to citizens the specific topics that will be included and the plan’s role in influencing city policy.
Austin’s City Charter requires the comprehensive plan to include ten sections:

1. Future land use
2. Traffic circulation and mass transit
3. Wastewater, solid waste, drainage, and potable water
4. Conservation and environmental resources
5. Recreation and opens space
6. Housing
7. Public services and facilities, including a capital improvement program
8. Public buildings and related facilities
9. Economic development
10. Health and human services

According to the city charter, “all land development regulations including zoning and map, subdivision regulations, roadway plan, all public improvements, public facilities, public utilities projects and all city regulatory actions relating to land use, subdivision and development approval shall be consistent with the comprehensive plan…” (City of Austin). Therefore the plan will not only cover these topics, but also play a role in guiding overall city policy in these areas.

In addition, since no updated comprehensive plan exists currently, the city relies on departmental requests and neighborhood plans to decide which new capital construction projects to propose to voters (Office of the City Auditor 2006). Therefore, the play’s guidance for public facilities will influence the decision-making process.

In addition, the existence of dozens of separate plans and policies has created the need for a comprehensive, integrated plan to resolve areas of confusion and disagreement and establish overarching priorities for the city’s limited resources. One city memorandum catalogues 67 separate policies, initiatives, and ordinances related to planning and land use adopted since 1979 (City of Austin 2009). The plan scope described analyzing these existing plans an important function of the comprehensive plan, and consultant reports have already begun to cite the relevant policies in each area (City of Austin 2009; Wallace Roberts Todd LLC et al. 2010).
Although the City Code and related information about the legal power of the plan is available on the Imagine Austin website, most participants will learn about the plan’s scope at the point when they are asked for input. Therefore, I examined how several of the input mechanisms ask for input. The “Meeting-In-a-Box” exercise asked participants to contribute (1) strengths or “precious resources,” (2) the city’s challenges or “weaknesses or problems that need attention,” and (3) values and ideas for a vision for the city in 2039. The online survey also asked for strengths, weaknesses, and ideas for the future, without mentioning the required plan elements.

The mail survey provided the greatest suggestion of the actual contents to the plan. It included questions on a variety of issues such as crime reduction, economic development, and homelessness. Although the survey weighed the intensity of concern about various issues, it did not ask about the proper strategies to address them. Beatley found a major difference between plan participants and the general public was not which issues were the biggest public priority, but whether they should be addressed through government regulation and programs, versus private action (Beatley, Brower, and Lucy 1994). The desire to resist imposing an agenda may result in irrelevant input as citizens are provided with few cues about the topics the plan will cover.
4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The capital of Texas and home of the University of Texas, Austin has always had a dynamic intellectual and political life. The city’s two previous comprehensive planning processes, Austin Tomorrow and AustinPlan, involved sophisticated and innovative public participation techniques. However, like in most American cities, comprehensive planning in Austin takes place in a political environment involving citizens with diverse views, interests, and backgrounds. This combination of innovative planning and diverse people attracted me to Austin for this study. Like its predecessors, the Imagine Austin reflects a spirit of democracy and innovation. The tone of the project was documented in the Making Austin participation plan (City of Austin 2009), which proposed challenging conventional participation approaches through a range of innovative techniques. During my research, I witnessed city planners, consultants, elected officials, and citizens committed to improving life in Austin through innovative participation in a comprehensive plan.

My study takes advantage of this innovation to evaluate how well the participation approaches chosen met narrowly defined criteria. Even where my conclusions are critical, they should not be interpreted as criticisms of experimentation itself. Decisions made about Imagine Austin may reflect goals for participation not considered here. Even when the results do not satisfy shared criteria (such as representativeness), they provide useful and necessary results. The evolution of professional practice requires both deliberation about the definition and purpose of participation, as well as empirical investigation of specific participation approaches. In particular, the only way to investigate how new technologies like the Internet can be utilized effectively in professional practice is through learning from experimentation. For these reasons, this report will be disseminated to the Imagine Austin staff, plan participants who requested a copy, and posted on a public website. In addition, this section containing conclusions and
recommendations will be translated into Spanish, and the entire report will be translated if resources can be found.

Despite the variety of participation methods used, I found that large segments of the city have not been consulted and some voices have been heard disproportionate to their size in the city. Even the most successful participation approaches have not always clearly described the scope of the plan, or asked sufficiently focused questions to garner useful results. The most innovative features, including the community outreach meetings, have been organized in an ad-hoc way and did not affect the overall participation approaches.

4.1 The Dilemma of Online Participation

Online puts city planners in a difficult position. Transparency advocates and even critical scholars of participation have urged governments to use the Internet to disseminate information and for participation (Fiorina 1999). In this study, I found many citizens of Austin shared this perspective. They expected to find a wide range of information as well as opportunities to participate online. Indeed, many citizens reported visiting the Imagine Austin website in order to find information about meetings, read reports and previous input, and obtain a wide variety of data about the process including other ways to be involved.

However, these very participants are unrepresentative of the broader city: they’re older, better educated, English-speaking, and have higher incomes. In order to prevent this from creating bias in the input to the plan, planners attempted to shunt input to conventional public meetings. As previous studies have shown, these approaches have their own limitations: time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Meetings</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Task Force Meetings</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Forum Meetings</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting-In-a-Box Meetings</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kick-off Open House</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other presentation</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Participation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook page</td>
<td>1,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>2,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mail Survey                      | 1,140                  |
costs, record-keeping challenges, and language barriers. In addition, they have generally not succeeded in reaching representative groups. The data confirmed online approaches resulted in greater total numbers of participants. Although roughly 886 attended public meetings and the mail survey polled 1,140, over 1,185 people are receiving updates about Imagine Austin on Facebook and over 2,247 have completed an online survey, and most likely well over that number have visited the plan website.

The study survey participants, who included some of the most active people, participated in multiple opportunities. A typical pattern might be: the citizen visited the website to hear about upcoming meetings, then participated in the survey, and heard about other meetings through the email list. Among survey participants, 85% have visited the website, 51% attended a Community Forum meeting, 26% completed an online survey, and 26% follow the plan on Facebook or Twitter. Significant overlap exists between each approach for this population. For example, among the 85% of respondents who had visited the website, 52% of this group had also completed the online survey, 38% participated in a Meeting-In-a-Box exercise, 26% followed the plan on Facebook or Twitter. (See Appendix F for a visualization of the overlapping participation between approaches). The convenience of online participation combined with multiple participation approaches allows highly motivated participants to participate in many ways, potentially providing them with disproportionate voice and input.

The result is an apparent dilemma between the value of openness and representativeness. So long as resources and interest in planning varies in society, this gap will exist in some way. Although it may never be fully resolved, there are several steps planners can take to avoid them. As online participation expands, it will be important for planners to take steps to acknowledge and mitigate the dilemma.
4.2 Recommendations for Planners

Openness

1. **Online approaches should continue to be used as an alternative to in-person meetings for receiving input.**

   Many planners hesitate to use online channels to receive citizen input because of concerns about the representativeness of the people they will reach. This study found that historically traditional participation approaches have not succeeded in reaching representative populations. The City of Austin reached considerably more people through online channels than through public meetings, confirming the argument by Fiorina (1999) it can expand participation by reducing the direct and indirect costs on participants. Used appropriately, online participation can remedy some of the weaknesses of offline approaches. Record-keeping is easier, demographic data can be discretely captured, and the pool of participants can be informed of additional opportunities or information through email. In particular, it is ideal for soliciting ideas and detailed information, and complement more representative approaches such as surveys.

2. **Greater control and consistency among online participation approaches could help planners monitor participation and balance input.**

   In an effort to reach as many citizens as possible, Imagine Austin used an online survey, Facebook account, website comments, and Twitter feed. The only channel where the input was formally incorporated into the process was the online survey. Although the Facebook and Twitter feeds contained similar content, it differed from the material posted to the website. And citizen participation across each of these channels could not be easily integrated. Allowing multiple types of participation through a single system that allowed users to register could allow planners to better understand the diversity of views. In addition, it could simplify the experience...
for citizens by providing a central place to look for information and participation opportunities.\textsuperscript{4} Even if multiple platforms are used, their management and content could be more tightly coordinated. In this case, several city staff maintained the website and email list, WRT and other consultants planned events and wrote reports that were posted, marketing subconsultants posted articles and updates to Facebook and Twitter and communicated with media. As a result, only the most involved could be sure to hear about all facets of the plan.

**Representativeness**

3. **Participation opportunities should be offered in the languages spoken in the community.**

Reaching the Spanish-speaking community is a challenge in Austin. Although conducting a comprehensive planning process in more than one language requires additional expenses and complexity, it is a requirement for more representative participation. According to ACS estimates, over 35\% of residents speak a language other than English at home, and 15\% report speaking English less than “very well.” Tauxe (1995) observed language barriers can impede participation among native English speakers. Along the same lines, given the complex policy topics contained in a comprehensive plan, nonnative English speakers may prefer their native language for participation opportunities.

Imagine Austin planners held a Spanish-language meeting, and created Spanish versions of the mail and online surveys and the Meeting-In-a-Box. These versions should be as easily available as the English versions. In addition, simultaneous translation may be needed for public meetings where the process is discussed, such as the Citizens Task Force and Planning Commission meetings. Finally, the study survey found active participants used the website to learn about the process and identify additional participation opportunities. Although the City of

\textsuperscript{4} In fact, this is the approach used by several online participation consultants, including WikiPlanning and Limehouse Software, who organize all participation opportunities through a central portal that requires registration.
Austin website contains some Spanish material, the Imagine Austin documents are not available in Spanish. Taking these steps will mean additional expense and complexity, and may require difficult trade-offs, however they are required to make participation accessible to a significant population in the community.

4. **Underrepresented groups can be reached through approaches that take into account resources, take advantage of existing social engagement, and utilize recruitment.**

Two special events, which used the Meeting-in-a-Box, succeeded at reaching communities that had not been attending more general events. These events were planned in community-specific spaces, which may be better known and closer to their place of residence. They were organized through community members, and existing organizations. Similar approaches were advocated by several members of the Citizens Advisory Committee, who had backgrounds in political organizing. These people proposed organizing house parties, canvassing door-to-door, and other approaches used in political organizing. These ideas were not adopted, but are examples of approaches that follow from civic voluntarism theory. Planners can use the theory of civic voluntarism to create strategies that build on this early success and engage diverse populations.

**Resources** – Hold public events at convenient times and places, ensure online participation is available 24/7 in appropriate languages. Making childcare and food available at public meetings reduces the indirect costs of attending.

**Recruitment** – Tap advisory committee members and others to recruit others from their community to participate. I observed this was done in a limited way already, but could be expanded or done more systematically. For particularly difficult communities, approaches such as canvassing and phone banking invitations to events could result in greater participation.
Engagement – The theory holds that greater social engagement in general results in greater political participation. Pragmatically, working in partnership with organizations that have members such as churches could encourage participation in planning. Outreach to these groups should go beyond contacting the heads, and involve visiting their meetings and events with information and participation opportunities.

Their model reminds planners success at public participation also relies on the characteristics of the community. Places where citizens lack knowledge and experience in the substance of planning present additional challenges. It also reminds planners that public participation is not a natural or enjoyable act for all people, but instead a political one people choose to do for a variety of reasons. Like other political acts, like voting, it can be influenced by a pragmatic combination of resources, recruitment, and engagement.

Relevant Input

5. Planners should communicate to citizens the topic and role of the plan at the point of participation.

The Imagine Austin plan will respond to a legal mandate for which topics to cover, and also play a particularly important role for areas where policy is lacking or conflict. However, this type of information is not made known to participants when they are asked for input, but known by the most engaged and educated participants. The open-ended participation prompts used in the online survey, public meetings, and Meeting-In-a-Box encourage creativity, but may leave citizens unsure what topics are of interest. This phenomenon is a result of the deliberate decision to focus on creating a general vision during this phase, as I discussed earlier. However, providing opportunities to participate on specific, focused policy areas to contribute information, views, and ideas will be critical to empowering citizens to contribute relevant input. My normative theory of participation stresses citizens’ role is not only to help establish general goals or priorities, but also contribute their knowledge and ideas. Every community, in particular
cities with diverse population, contains knowledge about local conditions, policy insights, and creative ideas. Tapping these can help create a plan tailored to the local context and that truly captures citizen wishes, not just solutions provided by planners.
APPENDIX A: IMAGINE AUSTIN TIMELINE

This study evaluated participation in the first phase of the planning process. The actual timeline was delayed roughly six months from what is shown, although the overall sequence was retained.

Timeline and Steps for Developing New Comprehensive Plan for Austin

1. DEFINE THE VISION / FRAMEWORK PLAN
   - Evaluate data
   - Analyze trends
   - Complete zoning capacity analysis
   - Identify key themes
   - Meet with the public
   - Establish vision framework
   - Test Alternative growth scenarios

2. DEVELOP PLAN ELEMENTS *
   - Incorporate public input
   - Develop policy options and recommendations
   - Develop maps and other illustrations
   - Meet with the public

3. REFINE PLAN ELEMENTS
   - Release Draft Plan for public comment
   - Meet with the public
   - Incorporate changes

4. ADOPT THE PLAN
   - Public Review Draft
   - City Council and City Planning Commission hold public hearings
   - Adopt and finalize the Plan

* CHARTER REQUIRED PLAN ELEMENTS WILL INCLUDE:
   - Future land use element
   - Traffic circulation and mass transit element
   - Wastewater, solid waste, drainage and potable water element
   - Conservation and environmental resources element
   - Recreation and open space element
   - Housing element
   - Public services and facilities elements including a capital improvement program
   - Public buildings and related facilities element
   - Economic element for commercial and industrial development and redevelopment
   - Health and human service element

CONTINUOUS WEB ACCESS AND FEEDBACK

Opinion Surveys  Focus Groups  Advisory Boards and Commissions Review  Visual Preference Surveys  Advisory Boards and Commissions Review  Focus Groups  Advisory Boards and Commissions Review

Planning Commission and City Council Work Sessions  Planning Commission Work Session & Hearing  Planning Commission and City Council Work Sessions  Planning Commission Hearings  City Council Hearings  City Council Adoption

JAN  FEB  MAR  APR  MAY  JUNE  JULY  AUG  SEPT  OCT  NOV  DEC  JAN  FEB  MAR  APR  MAY  JUNE  JULY  AUG  SEPT  OCT  NOV
2009  2010
## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF APPROACHES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation Approach</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Number of Participants Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kick-off Open House (Oct. 12, 2009)</td>
<td>Public meeting</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>Online video Participant survey (20) Summary memo</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Community Forum (Nov. 9-12, 2009)</td>
<td>Series of public meetings in schools</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>Results Spreadsheet Participant survey (32) Summary memos</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Website</td>
<td>Part of City of Austin domain Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td>Participant survey (56) Comments posted</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Online survey</td>
<td>Linked off website, on SurveyMonkey</td>
<td>2,247</td>
<td>Survey instrument Participant survey (38) Summary memo</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Citizen Task Force Meetings</td>
<td>Monthly meetings of appointed Task Force, open to the public 40 members, approximate 30 additional attendees</td>
<td></td>
<td>Notes from 6 citizen task force meetings Participant survey (17) In-person observation (30)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Meeting-in-a-Box</td>
<td>An exercise that could be complete with a small group</td>
<td>300 (est.)</td>
<td>Demographics of participants Meeting instrument Participant survey (24)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a Facebook page</td>
<td>Page for Imagine Austin plan 1,185 fans 45 comments</td>
<td>Citizen comments (45) Participant survey (14)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b Twitter feed</td>
<td>Contained news and updates; published to Facebook 124 followers</td>
<td>Participant survey (5)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Other presentation</td>
<td>Invited presentations by plan staff</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Participant survey (12)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Posted to own website/newsletter</td>
<td>Citizens conducting their own outreach</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Participant survey (17) Searched postings</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Mail survey</td>
<td>City-sponsored sample survey 1,140</td>
<td>Survey instrument Results presentation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Other</td>
<td>All other approaches</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Participant survey (12)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5,697 (est.) TOTAL: 322

*Note: The number of participants observed includes survey respondents, in-person observation, and public online comments. It does not include the aggregated information such as minutes, notes, and demographic summaries of participants provided by the city.*
## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATION REPRESENTATIVENESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Community Survey, 2006-2008¹</th>
<th>Community Forum Series ¹² (N=1,240)</th>
<th>Mail Survey³ (N=1,140)</th>
<th>Study Survey (N=73) Public Meetings (N=43)</th>
<th>Online (N=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more or other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school graduate</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college/Associates degree</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors degree or higher</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live alone</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with spouse or partner only</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with spouse or partner and children</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with children or parent only</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with housemates/roommates</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $24,999</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 - $49,999</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 - $149,999</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $150,000</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

1. ACS margin of error all for all less than +/- 1%. The ACS is for a slightly smaller population than the planning process, since it was open to participants outside the City of Austin but within the extraterritorial jurisdiction.
2. Community Forum Series estimated from charts (Appendix D)
3. Mail survey margin of error +/- 2.9%
5. Available age ranges for ACS data not comparable with mail and study survey.
6. Household status not included in mail survey.
7. Mail survey allowed for a “not provided” response.
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPATION REPRESENTATIVENESS CONTINUED

Who participated in CFS1 events (forum, survey, MIAB)?

These charts show who used three different ways to participate in Imagine Austin Community Forum Series #1: attended a public meeting, completed a survey, or participated in a Meeting-in-a-Box. These figures are combined for a “Total CFS1” breakdown. Please note: “Total CFS1” figures count each instance of a person participating, rather than counting each person once, regardless of how many ways he or she participated.

Legend with approximate # of responses

- City of Austin (2007)
- Total CFS1 (~1240)
- Attended a forum (~220)
- Completed survey (~900)
- Meeting-in-a-Box (~120)

Age

- Under 18
- 18-29
- 30-44
- 45-64
- 65 and over

Gender

- Male
- Female

Race/ethnicity

- Anglo
- African American
- Asian American
- Hispanic Latino
- Other

Household type

- With spouse/partner only
- With spouse/partner and children
- With children or parent only
- Housemates, roommates, etc.
- Live alone

Educational attainment

- Less than high school graduate
- High school graduate (inc. equivalency)
- Some college/associate degree
- Bachelor’s degree or higher
APPENDIX E: MAIL SURVEY REPRESENTATIVENESS

Austin Household Tenure, ACS and ETC Estimates

- American Community Survey, 2006-2008
- ETC Community Survey, 2010

Austin Annual Household Income, ACS and ETC Estimates

- American Community Survey, 2006-2008
- ETC Community Survey, 2010

Percentage

Household Tenure

Rent

Percentage

Annual household income

Under $25,000
$25,000 - $49,999
$50,000 - $74,999
$75,000 - $99,999
$100,000 - $149,999
$150,000 and up
Not provided
APPENDIX F: ACTIVE PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS

Study Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Forum Meetings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting-In-a-Box</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kick-off Open House</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook and Twitter</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted to newsletter/website</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Task Force Meetings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other presentation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each section corresponds to the numbered participation approach above. The bands represent the number of survey respondents who participated in both approaches.
WORKS CITED


City of Austin. Austin City Code. In *Article X. Planning*.


———. 2009. Imagine Austin Meeting in a Box.


ETC Institute. 2010. 2010 Austin Community Survey Draft Results.


