Overview

CivicLex is working pro bono with the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current public comment system and generate suggestions for procedures that could make public engagement more effective and efficient.

This is focusing on the public comment process after COVID restrictions are lifted.
The issue as we see it

LFUCG’s primary system for public comment on issues before the Council centers around in-person feedback during public meetings – and it’s not great!

BAD FOR RESIDENTS
Inopportune timing; confusing and underwhelming process; timing in legislative process leads to mistrust and disempowerment.

BAD FOR COUNCIL
Bad for your constituents; derails work at last minute after lengthy process; demoralizing for city staff; cost inefficient due to excess labor.
Engagement tiers

- Very engaged
- Somewhat engaged
- Likely to engage
- Not likely to engage
Background

• Began conversation with several councilmembers in Fall 2020.
• Was referred to and reviewed proposal with CIO Aldona Valicenti.
• Was referred to and reviewed proposal with broader Admin. Spoke with CAO Hamilton, CIO Aldona Valicenti, Tyler Scott, Glenn Brown, & Jenifer Wuorenmaa.
• Project approved unanimously by GGSS Committee & Urban County Council
Progress to date

- Created survey protocol with Drs. Cory Curl and Iuliia Shybalkina of Martin School of Public Policy, Dr. Alan Bartley of Transylvania University Department of Economics, and their students.
- Released survey protocol on April 22nd
- Field scan of public input methodologies in process
- Survey closes on Friday, June 18th
How we’re reaching people

• 200+ direct contacts
• CivicLex’s media channels
• 100+ poster locations – bus stops, laundromats, plasma donation centers, markets, etc.
• 4 grocery store/market parking lot flyerings & tablings
• $200 in social media advertisements
• Incentives from Kroger, Ramsey’s, Wilson’s and Starbucks
• Council Member newsletters & community media
Preliminary Data Overview - Respondents

873 Responses*

- Very Engaged: 46%
- Somewhat Engaged: 25%
- Not engaged - would not likely to engage: 18%
- Not engaged: 11%

*All following responses are as of 1:00pm - 06/08/21
Prelim. Data Overview - Respondents by Education

- Up to High School / GED: 34%
- Some College: 7%
- Associate's Degree: 7%
- Bachelor's Degree: 36%
- Advanced Degree: 15%
Prelim. Data Overview - Respondents by Gender ID

- 71% Female
- 25% Male
- 4% Non-Binary/Other
Prelim. Data Overview - Respondents by Race

- White: 81%
- African-American: 10%
- Hispanic/Latino: 2%
- Native American: 4%
- Other: 1%
- AAPI: 1%
Prelim. Data Overview - Respondents by Age

- Under 20: 2%
- 20s: 1%
- 30s: 8%
- 40s: 14%
- 50s: 17%
- 60s: 21%
- 70s: 18%
- 80s: 18%
- 90s: 18%

Age distribution:
- Under 20: Green
- 20s: White
- 30s: Red
- 40s: Blue
- 50s: Purple
- 60s: Pink
- 70s: Gray
- 80s: Orange
- 90s: Yellow
Prelim. Opinion Overview - Already engaged

The primary motivator for those already engaged is to “get involved in issues that impact my community” (77%), followed closely by “get involved issues I think are important” (69%).

OF INTEREST:
Only 52% of residents respond that they get involved in city government because of “issues that impact them personally”
Prelim. Opinion Overview - Already engaged

The main way that residents get involved in city government is to email councilmembers (80%). This is followed distantly by emailing city staff (50%), signing petitions (49%), and engaging in protests (48%).

**OF INTEREST:**
Only 21% of these residents reported ever giving public comment.
44% of those that have already engaged think their options for doing so are inadequate.

74% want to be more engaged with city government.

OF INTEREST:
While 44% think their options for engaging are inadequate, 56% think that the current options are adequate. With that said, almost all said that there need to be additional and more diverse options for engagement.
45% of surveyed residents who have never engaged with city government don’t even know what issues are possible to engage on. 41% are confused about how to participate. Over 30% don’t think their input will matter.

**OF INTEREST:**
Many residents expressed that the time and location options of meetings made it impossible for them to ever participate.
73% of residents say that they can trust LFUCG to make decisions a fair way “some of the time”. 25% of residents say that they don’t trust LFUCG often or at all.

OF INTEREST:
20 residents said that they didn’t trust LFUCG to make decisions in a fair way, but said that those decisions were what was best for Lexington.

24 residents said that they trusted LFUCG to make decisions in a fair way but said those decisions were not what is best for Lexington.
Only 18% of respondents said they understood how to engage with LFUCG well. 14% said they didn’t know how to engage at all.
54% of residents expressed that city meeting times were either “somewhat inconvenient” or “very inconvenient”.

Prelim. Opinion Overview - All respondents

54%
14%
4%
42%
40%

Very inconvenient
Somewhat inconvenient
Somewhat convenient
Very convenient
Surveyed Lexington residents are evenly split between whether or not LFUCG takes their input seriously.
Of options presented, the most popular new method of input was a way to provide comments outside of meetings and have them entered into the record (64%), followed closely by a better way to track issues in city hall (58%).

**OF INTEREST:**
This was out of nine total options presented.

Some residents expressed that the city’s language use – jargon, legalese, etc. – makes it much more difficult to engage. The rules and topics don’t make sense to residents.
However, when asked to choose just one option, it was very close between five methods:

- More options for virtual public input (zoom, etc.)
- Providing public input/comment outside of city meetings
- A better way to track issues through the entire legislative process
- More ways to communicate directly with government officials
- A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input
Options for where and how we want our Taxes spent. give people the option and let them decide how to use it

[Public Comment should be...] Something more invigorating, attractive, and appealing than what we have now. More fun. More cafe like. Something that puts more power and control in the hands of real people.

Some real response that addresses an issue instead of a &$^@ form letter.

When neighborhoods are going to be changed in their personality and character by new development going into them, the neighborhood needs to have an easy way to offer input.

Sometimes it seems like the city gathers public input just to say they have done so, like the decisions had been reached even before the collection of input.

My councilman is awesome! Seems like he cares about those that he serves. Give him a raise.
Moving forward

- Final report of survey responses
- City staff survey
- Presentation of full findings to administration & council
- Work with CIO Valicenti to understand and rank/rate potential services to address these issues
Questions?