

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION COMMUNITY BOARDS NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Background

In 2018, New York City voters supported the establishment of the Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) whose broad mission is to enhance civic participation, promote civic trust, and strengthen democracy in New York City. Chapter 76 of the City Charter charges CEC to “provide assistance and training to community boards, in consultation and coordination with city agencies and borough presidents,” in the following areas: impartial land use assistance; the needs of limited English proficient individuals; utilizing tech tools and assistance in uniform meeting procedures.¹ After CEC was formally announced in April 2019, the Commission conducted a brief needs assessment in order to understand usage of current trainings provided by agency partners and borough presidents and potential opportunities for training and support that could add value.

Although the needs assessment prioritized training on topics listed in the charter as CEC responsibilities, a few additional questions included participatory budgeting and training to promote equitable representation of communities (complete survey is available [online](#)). Initially, CEC planned to conduct the assessment through in-person convenings of district managers and/or chairs in each borough, and to include a written survey. Although convenings were completed in Queens and the Bronx (representing 17 boards), due to the COVID-19 pandemic and limitations on in-person meetings, CEC staff completed the remaining assessment through 1:1 conversations over the phone (representing 32 boards). In total, 83%, or 49/59 boards participated, and the needs assessment concluded at the beginning of June, 2020. It is important to note that the needs assessment was conducted only with CB staff and board leaders; 43 district managers, 1 assistant district manager, 7 board chairpersons, and 2 vice-chairs completed the survey. While findings are not generalizable to all community board members, they provide a citywide summary of opinions of leaders from boards serving diverse constituencies. Below we summarize key findings.

Land Use Resources & Trainings

- Between 20-25 boards reported consulting with planners from borough presidents’ offices, Department of City Planning (DCP), or from their own boards; 12 stated they relied on staff members with relevant expertise. Seven indicated using an independent land use consultant. Thirty participants said they attended the borough president land use training; 20 indicated they attend the DCP training.
- Board leaders expressed interest in a variety of trainings related to land use: advanced land use (24)²; land use tech/Geographic Information System (24); environmental review (26); community land trust (18) and community owned micro-grid (17). As expected, boards also requested more access to land use consultants (21) and neutral planning experts (23).

Strengthening Outreach & Engagement of Diverse Constituencies

- Participants requested additional trainings to help achieve greater and more equitable participation from their district residents, with a higher number of requests for digital engagement training (28); youth engagement outreach (20); and translation services (22).

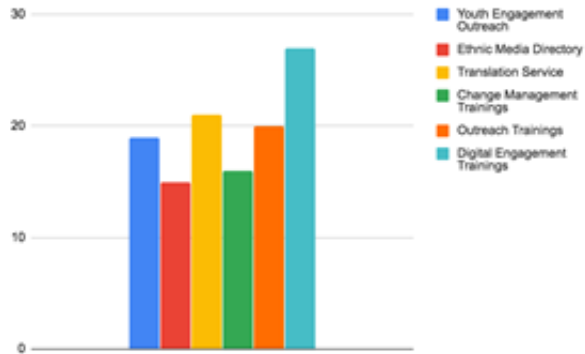
¹ NYC Charter, Chapter 76, 12/3/18

² Numbers in parentheses indicate total number of participants who responded yes.

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Additional requests included training on outreach (21), change management (16), and community and ethnic media directory (15) (see Fig 1).

Figure 1. Additional trainings of interest



- About 56% of participants (29) requested more support to engage youth to take action in their districts, and 23 asked for support to create Youth Leadership Councils.

Capacity building & professional development

- When asked what professional development trainings board members would benefit from, participants requested tech tools (29), data analytical skills (27), and graphic design (23) more frequently than volunteer management (16) or cultural sensitivity (12)(see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Professional development trainings



Conclusion

The findings of the CEC Needs Assessment will be used to help shape future training for community board members. To date, CEC has offered language line to boards, and is working with agency partners including DCP and Department of Informational Technology & Telecommunications to help boards be more ready to meet and hold hearings in fall of 2020.