

**Background:**

During the August Executive Committee meeting, the Committee discussed methods to assist self-advocates with developmental disabilities and family members to provide input to the Council given the travel constraints for many individuals across the state. The Committee asked staff to outline other options that allow individuals to provide comments to the Council and Committees, and asked both the Public Policy Committee and Project Development Committee to consider when public input is most needed in both Committees' usual discussion topics. The attached Executive Summary summarizes the information gathered thus far.

**Project Development Committee**

**Agenda Item 9.**

**Expected Action:**

The Committee will consider information concerning strategies to bring additional public input to the Committee and may offer recommendations to the Council for consideration.

**Public Policy Committee**

**Agenda Item 11.**

**Expected Action:**

The Committee will consider information concerning strategies to bring additional public input to the Committee and may offer recommendations to the Council for consideration.

**Executive Committee**

**Agenda Item 5. C.**

**Expected Action:**

The Committee will review information concerning strategies to bring additional public input to the Council and Committees and may determine appropriate action.

**Council**

**Agenda Item 11.**

**Expected Action:**

The Council will review recommendations from Committees and determine appropriate action.

## **Executive Summary Support for Public Input**

### **Background**

The TCDD Executive Committee first expressed interest during an April 2009 meeting in strategies to encourage and support more public comment and input at TCDD business meetings. Members discussed ways to encourage public input on Council activities in a way that allows a dialogue, not just brief comments, and discussed how TCDD might facilitate such participation in the future. TCDD staff often receive comments and input at various meetings, conferences, grantee on-site visits, etc., and TCDD receives input electronically on proposed State Plan activities and other matters. However, members noted that it is difficult for individuals from outside of central Texas to provide comments in-person at Council and Committee meetings. During the May 2009 TCDD Executive Committee meeting, members continued this discussion, noting in particular the desirability of cultivating a “standard practice” that promotes and encourages further solicitation of public comments and input on various issues that come before the Council or Committees. During the August 2009 TCDD Executive Committee meeting, members requested that staff explore options for various ways to receive public input. Information was subsequently reviewed with the Committee during the August 2010 meeting during which the Committee asked for information on ways to receive input in addition to reimbursing for travel, and asked that the Public Information Committee and Project Development Committees each discuss the various topics and/or points in time when additional public input would be helpful in informing those discussions.

### **Public Input: Content**

Staff suggest that Council members discuss the following items before considering how to receive public input from self-advocates and their families:

- On what topic areas is additional public input desired and helpful?
- When/how often would additional public input be useful (quarterly at Council meetings, year-round, coinciding with the State Plan draft process, etc)?
- From whom is public input desired? Are there specific groups, individuals who receive specific services, certain geographic areas of the state, etc. that are important audiences?
- Why is additional public input desired? (What will the Committee do with the information)?

## Public Input: Methods

Once the Council better defines the topic areas about which they'd like to have public comment and has identified groups from whom they'd like to hear, there are a variety of ways the Council and/or Committees might receive public input.

### Expansion of Existing Opportunities

- TCDD could partner with grantees, network partners or other organizations to reach a broader audience and request input.
- TCDD could request input in conjunction with other projects, such as State Plan outreach, Biennial Report research/focus groups, etc.

### Internet and Social Media

- Using existing tools, TCDD could request and encourage public input via Twitter and Facebook. Input could be submitted as comments or notes to TCDD via Facebook, or as concise feedback via Twitter (140 characters or less).
  - Might receive input from beyond Texas
  - Allows connection to both individuals and organizations
  - Allows focus on topic or issue if desired
  - Might limit access by some constituents who don't have necessary technology
- TCDD could explore creating a YouTube channel, allowing people to submit videos for the purpose of providing public input. Videos could then be shared during Council meetings.
  - Requires person to have video recording and other technology expertise
  - Does not allow TCDD to control appropriateness of content; would be viewable by public
- The TCDD website also has capabilities of hosting online surveys and web forms for people to fill out and submit electronic input to the Council.
  - Could reach a wide audience and direct them back to TCDD website
  - Allows focus on topic or issue if desired
  - Might limit access by some constituents do not have necessary technology

### Virtual Town Hall Meetings

Individuals could log-in via the Internet to see a scheduled presentation. Audio could be available via computer speakers and/or synchronized over the phone by also providing a call-in number. Interactive features could include real-time chat, and a question and answer period.

The "meeting" could be archived and posted online.

- Requires person to have specific technology and expertise
- Allows focus on topic or issue if desired

### Town Hall Meetings

TCDD could explore funding a project to coordinate a series of Town Hall meetings in various locations around the state. A summary of comments could be presented at the next Council meeting. Town Hall meetings could also be video or audio taped for future presentation and/or website archiving.

- Requires significant additional effort to coordinate when less familiar with area, facilities, etc
- Allows focus on topic or issue if desired
- Provides some of the same benefits of holding out-of-town Council meetings but with less expense.

### Real-Time Video Chat with Council (ie, Skype or FaceTime)

TCDD could explore funding a project to coordinate a series of “live chats” with Council members at each quarterly meeting. The use of personal computer video-conference capabilities would provide comments to Council members in real time.

- Requires specific technology skills and equipment
- Allows focus on topic or issue if desired

### Council Meetings Out-of-Town

Regular quarterly meetings of the Council and Committees could be held in locations outside of Austin. Public input sessions could be scheduled around the meeting times, and/or specific outreach could occur to encourage people to provide input during the meeting times.

- Increases cost for staff necessary to support meetings
- Creates Increased cost for council travel expenses
- Requires significant additional effort to coordinate when less familiar with area, facilities, etc
- Allows focus on topic or issue if desired

### Other Considerations

*Keep in mind that each of the options summarized above involve different expenses. The cost of encouraging more public input into Council business should not discourage consideration of various strategies if that input is meaningful and lends to healthy discussions about key items of interest to the Council.*