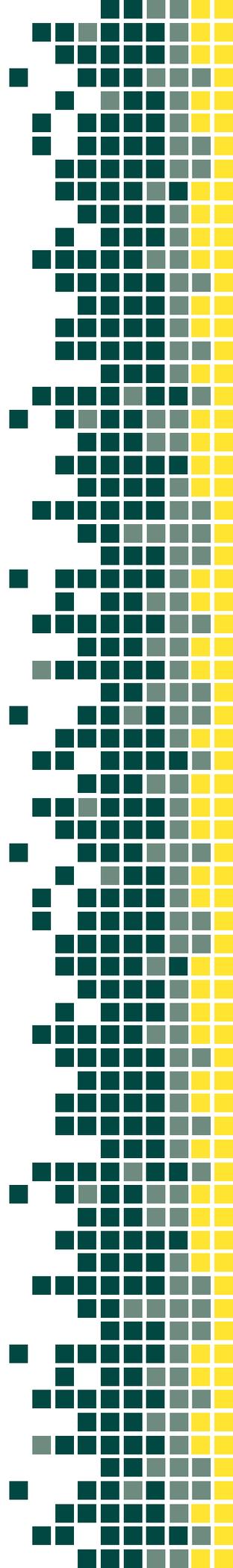




Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IDEA) Board & Committee Report



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Introduction

Boards, committees and commissions serve an integral role in ensuring that resident voices are represented and centered in City decision-making and discussions. For the City of Kentwood, nearly two dozen groups of service-minded residents fulfill a plethora of roles to support key functions and operations for the benefit of the Kentwood Community. The City's board, committees, and commissions (collectively referred to as boards/committees throughout the report) have the responsibility and opportunity to ensure the voices and experiences of all Kentwood residents are equitably incorporated.

As part of its commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (or IDEA), the City requested the services of Inclusive Performance Strategies (IPS) to conduct a review of its board and committee practices. The purpose of the review is to better understand how to ensure diverse representation and inclusive, equitable and accessible participation on board and committee platforms, and to understand how to leverage the board/committee platforms to help the City more effectively realize its IDEA strategic goals.

Methodology

IPS utilized two primary data collection activities to conduct this review: a review of the City's webpages and supplemental materials describing boards/committees and other related information, and an anonymous, online community-wide survey.

Community Survey

Current and former board/committee members, and general community members were invited to complete a survey to better understand 1) the experience of serving on a City of Kentwood board/committee, and 2) perspectives of residents eligible to serve on a board or committee (in order to be eligible to serve, an individual must be a resident in the City of Kentwood). Survey questions were designed to understand the key factors that motivate or enable individuals to serve, as well as factors that would make service on a board/committee more challenging or infeasible.

The survey was made available in English in an online survey platform (SurveyMonkey) and in hard copy form and distributed at City of Kentwood City Hall and library locations. Links to the online survey were distributed via email, on the City website, and on the City's Facebook page.

Website & Materials Review

As part of its overall IDEA assessment activities, IPS reviewed subpages on the City's website list and described all boards/committees. Subpages were reviewed for the amount of information and relevant content, materials, etc., information on how to apply, roles and responsibilities of board/committee members, etc. Additionally, relevant policies to board/committee service (made available on the City website or submitted by City staff) were reviewed for relevant content that influences board/committee service (such as terms and term limits, service limitations and requirements, roles and responsibilities, etc.).

Smart Practice Research

IPS also conducted a review of "smart" or "best" practices related to effective municipal governance practices that explicitly support IDEA priorities. Smart practices are considered to have meaningful results in their original contexts and provide effective solutions that can be adapted in new or different contexts. This research was primarily incorporated into the recommendations of this report.

In This Report

This report includes main findings based on data collection and analysis. Given the different experiences and perspectives of those currently serving on a board or committee, and those who are not, findings are divided into two subsections: ***Experiences of Currently Serving Members*** and ***Experience of Residents***.

Within each sub-sections, *Enabling Factors* (factors that help or enhance inclusive and accessible participation on a board/committee) and *Inhibiting Factors* (factors that prevent or are a barrier to inclusive and accessible participation) are discussed. These factors are based on key survey results and relevant findings from materials review.

Following the Main Findings section are ***Potential Strengths*** and ***Potential Opportunities for Growth***. Strengths are key themes based on key findings that indicate structures, practices, and other key components that are currently working effectively or can be leveraged to help the City accomplish its IDEA commitment. Opportunities for Growth represent themes of areas for improvement or, if not effectively addressed, could interfere with the City's IDEA-related goals.

Key Considerations & Limitations discuss some limitations of the review, in addition to additional factors in addition to future discussions and decisions related to future implementation of recommendations. Finally, the report concludes with ***Key Recommendations*** for the City to consider related to board/committee practices, based upon key findings, themes, and relevant 'smart' practices.

Survey Respondents

In total, 232 individual responses were collected for the community survey. As individuals must be a Kentwood resident in order to serve on a board/committee, participants were screened on their residency status. 217 respondents were able to complete the survey. Of the respondents:

- 78% were not currently serving nor had ever served on a City of Kentwood board, committee or commission.
- Approximately 36% of currently serving members had initially learned about the opportunity to serve for a City employee, whereas 15% had learned from another board/committee member.
- 80% of respondents identified as White or Caucasian, 7% identified as Black or African American, 3% identified as Hispanic or Latino. Less than 1% of respondents identified as Asian or Asian American, American Indian or Alaska Native, or as Two or More races. Approximately 5% of respondents preferred not to indicate their race or ethnicity.
- 45% of respondents indicated they were ages 55 or older. 16% were ages 45-54, 22% were ages 35-44, and approximately 12% of respondents indicated they were 34 years or younger in age. Approximately 4% of respondents preferred not to indicate their race or ethnicity.
- Of the 124 respondents that indicated their primary spoken language, three indicated a language other than English.

Main Findings

Experience of Currently Serving Members

Enabling Factors

Overall, current board and committee members were generally positive in their responses about their membership experience to date. Survey results indicate current members have a strong appreciation of their community and of the opportunity to participate and serve in this way. The vast majority of current members indicated they were extremely likely to continue to serve on their respective board or committee.

Notable Findings

- 63% of current committee members indicated they were “very satisfied” with their experience(s) serving on a board or committee (27% indicated they were “satisfied”, whereas 10% indicated they were “neither” satisfied nor dissatisfied).
- Of the key factors that motivate current members to serve, the opportunity to publicly serve their community was the highest-selected response (97%). Other top motivating factors were being able to connect with other people or residents and developing skills or gaining experience.
- Approximately 21% of current committee members indicated that increasing diverse perspectives/representation of membership was a motivating factor to serve.
- Members often cited the readiness and resourcefulness of City employees, genuine interest in the issue area, and the enjoyment of investing time into one’s community as aspects that enable them to serve.
- 78% of current members are “extremely likely” to recommend serving a board/committee to people they know.
- 76% are likely to continue service with the City of Kentwood after their current term/service has ended (including participating on another board/committee if there are term limits).

Key Themes

- ***Effective Collaborative Relationships:*** Current members often noted the working relationships they had with City employees and their fellow members as a positive component of their service. Respondents highlighted City employees for their resourcefulness, support, and willingness to collaborate and connect with committee members and residents to meet committee objectives.
- ***Opportunity to Serve:*** The majority of respondents (97 percent) indicated the opportunity to publicly serve their community as a key factor that motivated them to join and/or to stay on a committee. Members appreciate the opportunity to invest their time to improve the community for their neighbors and fellow residents.
- ***Living in Kentwood:*** Current members also indicated in their responses that living in Kentwood is a positive experience for them, noting the rich cultural diversity and a general sense of community they feel (a motivating factor in wanting to “give back” and serve in this capacity).

Inhibiting Factors

Responses from current members indicate a number of factors that could be improved or changed in order to make the board/committee experience both more effective and more inclusive and accessible to a more diverse membership.

Notable Findings

- A majority of current members (approximately 57%) indicated there were no factors (as listed within the survey) that were challenging or inhibiting factors to fulfilling their responsibilities. However, the most cited challenging factor was “Work/Personal Schedule” (30%).

- No respondents indicated that transportation or language barriers were challenging factors (while the survey did not explicitly ask respondents about their access to transportation, nearly all respondents indicated English as the only or one of their primary languages spoken).
- Based on open-ended responses, meeting structures, communication and access to materials, and connection to elected leadership were often cited as factors that could be improved or enhanced to impact the service experience more positively.

Key Themes

- **Lack of Diversity:** Current members noted the need to increase the diversity of board/committee membership. Members who expressed this desire cited it as a way to ensure that membership reflects the population of residents (especially in relation to race/ethnicity, national origin, and age).
- **Meeting Formats:** the City has to comply with legal guidelines and parameters for certain meeting protocols (such as conducting meetings in person). However, trying to accommodate meeting formats to meet all members' needs is a primary challenge. Based on current member feedback, how or when meetings are structured can at times be a challenging factor to navigate. Members mentioned frequency of meetings, meetings times, or conducting meetings in-person, socially distanced, or a hybrid of virtual vs, in-person that can potentially interfere with a productive experience.
- **Orientation to Role/Access to Materials:** Current members noted orientation practices (i.e., how new members are introduced to their roles and responsibilities, communications, materials, etc.) as a potential inhibiting factor. Current members cited the need to readily access materials and resources that outline responsibilities, meetings agendas and materials, and other relevant documentation. Feedback indicates a desire for a more consistent or clear orientation process in which members get a clearer understanding of protocols, what to expect in meetings, communication practices, etc.
- **Personal Commitments:** All board and committee members are volunteering their time to participate, and of course, have to balance their commitment with their own personal commitments (family, work, etc.). 29.7% of current members noted "Work/personal Schedule" as a potential barrier to maintaining their participation or staying engaged, as meeting times or overall calendars may not be fully adaptable across competing schedules. Additionally, "Child/Family Care" was also significantly noted as a barrier. All respondents indicated that they were aged 35 or older (that is, individuals likely to be working professionals, parents/guardians of young children, or responsible for caring for adult family or friends).
- **Health/Safety Concerns:** the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly challenging for community-driven work. The unpredictable nature of the pandemic means that health concerns will continue to be a key inhibitor for members, particularly for those who are (or close to those who are) more at-risk population. Committee participation can vary in terms of frequency of meetings, whether or not they can be conducted remotely, the overall size of a board/committee, and the level of community engagement that is necessary to meet certain objectives.
- **Perceived Lack of Connection with "City Hall":** Boards and committees, in part, function as an extension of the City's operations, and are structured and empowered to make informed decisions and recommendations on key priorities and strategies. While current members generally felt they had effective working relationships with City staff and were motivated to continue to serve, several responses indicated a desire for more information on how their recommendations or suggestions are utilized to inform elected leadership decisions. Other respondents expressed a desire for connecting with other committees and the City Commission to better understand how all groups contribute the City's broader strategic goals and plans, and more communications or updates on how/if recommendations from committees are utilized by elected leadership.

Experience of Residents (Non-Currently Serving Members)

Enabling Factors

Overall, residents that responded perceive board and committee service as an important way to support the community (similar to current members). Serving as a member can also be a great way to establish more relationships throughout the community.

Notable Findings

- All of the potential boards and committees were selected as an option when residents were asked which groups, they were interested in potentially serving, indicating a widespread interest in the service opportunities the City has to offer.
- The Parks & Recreation committees were the most selected options (40% were interested in the Parks & Recreation Commission, whereas 41% were interested in the Parks, Trails, & Recreation Advisory Committee). 20% of respondents indicated an interest in the Election and Planning Commissions. Note that respondents could select all options that applied on the survey.
- Similar to currently serving members, residents are highly motivated by the potential opportunity to publicly serve their community (82% of respondents selected this factor in their response. 57% of respondents would be motivated by the opportunity to connect with other residents, whereas 52% would be motivated by the opportunity to learn a new skill or gain new experience.
- According to survey results, residents not currently serving are more likely to cite increasing their professional development or network as a motivating factor compared to currently serving members (31% compared to 21%, respectively).
- When asked how likely they were to apply to serve on a City of Kentwood board, committee or commission, approximately 31% rated their response at a “4” or higher (on a scale from 1 to 5, one meaning “not at all likely” and five meaning “extremely likely”). The majority of respondents (approximately 42% rated their response at a “3.”

Key Themes

- **Opportunity to Serve:** Having the opportunity to support the community through public service was a motivating factor that residents highlighted. Like currently serving members, residents who are not serving appear to appreciate the potential opportunity to represent their neighbors and fellow residents.
- **Connections with Others:** Public and community service can be an excellent way for residents to get more engaged in community and to meet other residents across culturally diverse backgrounds. Residents indicated establishing relationships with fellow committee members and other residents they would encounter through their service as a motivating factor.
- **New Experience:** Residents indicated that the opportunity to learn new skills and gain new/further experience through service as a motivating factor to apply. Serving on a board or committee can provide different opportunities to learn about the City, its resources, residents, and for people to utilize their strengths and talents in a unique or new setting.
- **Professional Development & Networking:** More specifically, residents indicated the opportunity for professional development and to grow their professional network as a motivating factor to engage in board/committee service. Volunteer opportunities like committee service can be an effective way for residents to align their volunteerism as a way to advance their career or professional goals.

Inhibiting Factors

Notable Findings

- Of the factors that would most discourage residents from applying to serve, 62% of respondents indicated that they were unaware of service opportunities and/or responsibilities. 56% were concerned about their lack of experience or qualifications.
- About 20% of respondents indicated other factors that would discourage their participation. Most frequently cited were time constraints or other commitment, lack of awareness on function/purpose of boards/committees, or concerns about health, safety, and accessibility (particularly in relation to the pandemic).
- “Work/Personal Schedule” was the most selected factor that would make participation for residents difficult (62% of respondents indicated as such).
- 17% of respondents indicated that health and/or safety concerns would make participation difficult.
- 17% of respondents indicated that low or lack of compensation for their time was also a mitigating factor participation.

Key Themes

- **Lack of Awareness of Opportunities:** Residents most often cited their overall lack of awareness around the board/committee opportunities the City offers as a barrier to service. In some instances, residents indicated (via open-ended responses) that they did not even know what committees exist. Overall survey responses across both currently serving members and residents indicate that most opportunities are made known through word-of-mouth among the existing networks of City employees or current members (which can be a barrier to broadening interest or participation among a more diverse network of potential committee members).
- **Lack of Experience/Qualifications:** Residents indicated that they felt they lacked the qualifications and/or experience necessary to serve on a committee. Some survey comments also indicated that residents were not clear on what experience is actually needed or required to serve on a board or committee.
- **Time Commitment:** Residents indicated that necessary time needed to serve on a board/committee as a potential barrier to their participation. Similar to experience or qualifications, residents are unclear of the time commitment serving a given board/committee would take or assume that they would be able to accommodate the service calendar and demands of time.

Overall Strengths

- **Positive Service Experience:** Overall, the City is able to provide a positive and productive service experience for board and committee members. Currently serving members appear to truly enjoy their service and the people with whom they interact and collaborate.
- **Collaboration with City Employees:** Specific City employees are assigned to work with various committees depending on their job responsibilities and functions; they serve as the primary point of contact and conduit between members and the City and help guide a given board/committee's progress. The collaboration and efforts of City employees was often commended as a strength among current members.
- **Opportunity to Make a Difference:** for all respondents, the opportunity to make a difference in their own community is seen as a strength of the City. As a municipality, the City offers a plethora of services to residents while also relying on residents to serve on boards and committees to ensure responsible stewardship of City resources. The various opportunities to serve are greatly enticing for residents across the board.
- **Diverse Interest in Committee Service:** The City of Kentwood oversees approximately two dozen different boards or committees that serve various purposes and functions. Residents in particular indicated a widespread interest across all board/committee options.
- **Compensation:** for some boards and committees, there is a "pay per meeting" model that compensates members for their time. Compensation is increasingly seen as a foundational equitable practice for public participation platforms.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- **Proactive Recruitment Strategies:** Current staff and board/committee members indicated that recruitment of new members is heavily reliant on the professional and personal networks of individuals. At times, it can be challenging to meet goals around diverse recruitment and representation because there is no established structure to promote ongoing service opportunities to broader audiences of residents. Additionally, individual networks cannot serve as an effective conduit for diverse recruitment if they do not reflect the diversity of the community itself. Recruitment seems to be done on an as needed or reactionary basis to vacancies, rather than as an ongoing process to build new relationships with interested residents.
- **Clarifying Expectations for Service:** descriptions of the purpose and role of boards/committees and any requirements are clear and provide essential information on service (such as function of committee, limited description of interests or experience, meeting frequency/timing, committee size and current rosters, etc.). The City is able to provide the fundamental information potential applicants might need, but the lack of proactive or intentional recruitment structures does not “drive traffic” to the website or City employees who can answer questions. Additionally, while informative, the City’s website does not in a consistent manner provide additional information that illustrates what it is like to actually serve on a committee, the impact a committee has on the community, and other information that might be enticing (for instance,
- **Increasing Awareness:** It is clear that one of the greatest challenges to cultivating membership is due to the significant lack of awareness of the service opportunities that exist. The City’s website lists and describes all board and committees and does list in a clear or centralized manner current openings. Additionally, there is little information on the overall experience, roles and responsibilities, key committee accomplishments or achievements, or other information that would both increased awareness and provide prospective applicants with information that would motivate them to apply. Without a more robust digital resource or engagement strategy, this causes additional reliance on existing employee/member networks.
- **Application & Onboarding Process:** Currently, interested residents can complete a PDF form available on the City’s website to apply for consideration. All board/committee member applications are then approved by the Mayor. Residents indicated that the process to apply is not broadly known, and that there are aspects of the application process that deter from applying (for instance, the lack of clarity on the type of experience, qualifications or background a given committee might be looking for might lead someone to assume that they are unqualified).

Key Considerations

The general makeup of respondents does not fully reflect the general population of the City of Kentwood. A majority of respondents that replied to demographic questions indicated identifying as white or age 55 years or older or indicated English as their primary spoken language.

While the survey does provide valuable insight and information about the City's current board and committee practices, it is limited in providing more specific information or perspectives across the richly diverse groups within Kentwood's population. With that consideration in mind, findings and recommendations within this report are presented as a strong starting point for the City to identify strategic next steps, including ways to establish more effective feedback loops with residents to identify future members.

These findings also illustrate the importance of centering the perspectives and voices of residents who may not be represented among current committee members. It is evident that boards and committees aim to ensure they make the most effective decisions on behalf of all residents. However, as the City implements strategies to cultivate an even more effective board and committee platform, it will be critical to view opportunities for growth through the lens of residents that might face the greatest barriers to participation. Doing so can help ensure that structures, practices, resources, etc. are as inclusive and accommodating as possible across diverse membership and helps to maintain that diverse membership in the future.

Findings in this report highlight different factors that either enable or inhibit participation across various resident groups. Certain factors may appear of small concern among survey respondents but would be more influential among other groups not as heavily represented among results (for example, child/family care might be a greater barrier for residents who care for younger children or adult family members).

Recommendations

Based on the Main Findings and Key Considerations of this report, the following actions are recommended for the City of Kentwood:

Application Process

- Transition the City’s online application from a PDF format to an online form (that is either linked to or embedded on the City’s website). Transition to online form can make for a more user-friendly and accessible experience for potential applicants and allow for changes to be made more readily.
- Include explanatory language for application prompts that require applicants to provide information on their relevant experiences and qualifications (such as work experience, previous volunteer or community experience, formal or informal community advocacy work, education, etc.). Providing brief but informative explanations can encourage applicants and provide clarity for those who might assume they are not “qualified enough” and are deterred from applying.
- Like the current PDF form, keep the online application continuously “live” and encourage residents to apply regardless of any open positions.
- Include a mechanism for applicants to voluntarily provide their own demographic information (an optional section within the application form itself, or a link that redirects to a different or external survey form). Collecting such information can help the City have a better understanding of how individual committee members identify, in addition to being able to monitor the demographics of both applicants and members overall.
 - It is important to acknowledge that while collecting such information can help the City better understand and monitor the population of residents applying, having such information can also unintentionally trigger unconscious biases of any individuals reviewing application forms. The City should consider at what point that information is being collected, reviewed and stored (for example, keeping the demographic information separate from the application itself, collecting the information in a separate form, or collecting demographic information after an applicant has been selected for service).
- Include a “Request for Additional Information” form along with the application form so that residents can specify what information they need before they consider applying, or if they need accommodations made in order to submit their application.
- For all boards/committees, develop and include position descriptions that can be accessed on respective web pages along with other resources (meeting agendas and minutes, annual reports, etc.) so that individuals have a clear understanding of responsibilities and expectations.

Recruitment

- A key factor of the City’s current recruitment process is the reliance on current staff and members’ personal and professional networks. In order to grow the City’s formal and informal networks, it is recommended that the City conduct periodic recruitment and informational “drives” in addition to continuously encouraging applications and posting open committee positions.
- Similar to fundraising drives, recruitment efforts could include regular informational sessions (virtual or in-person) in which current committee members and staff provide essential information on boards/committees, share how residents can engage their board/committees effectively, and encourage residents to consider applying. These efforts could be conducted on a regular basis or be scheduled to coincide with available openings.

- Recruitment “drives” could also consist of asynchronous activities (i.e., determining target numbers that current staff and committee members are encouraged to meet of a) submitted applications, b) sign-ups for additional information, c) “pledges for sharing committee information or open positions, and so on).
- Include user-centered or more specific descriptions of the characteristics or lived experiences that would benefit the board/committee in addition to including the type of experience or interests a potential member might have. This might include examples of previous work experience (i.e., teachers, accountant, business owners, etc.), language that communicates the importance of geographic representation based on neighborhoods or encouraging language for individuals who might not typically “see themselves” as board/committee members. Inclusion of such language can reduce the impact of perceived barriers to membership.
- Include information about accessibility for committee members, including whether or not they will consistently have access to language translation services during committee meetings, specific meeting format and locations in addition to dates or times (virtual, in-person, etc.), access they will need to technology to access different resources (i.e. consistent personal access to Wi-Fi, use of personal devices to access confidential information, ability to use video conferencing software, etc.). Include information in posted position descriptions (see recommendations for Application Process).

Onboarding & Member Engagement

- Update the board/committee onboarding process to ensure a consistently accessible process for all new committee members. Make all materials available in a shareable or distributable online packet (via email, on the City website, etc.) so all members can readily access.
- Aim to make materials available in both written and video formats (welcome videos, building tours, recorded informational sessions or presentations, etc.). This will enable committee members to access the materials at any time outside of designated committee activities, as needed.
- Ensure that all new committee members review a one-on-one “meet and greet” meeting with their assigned City staff contact and/or a fellow
- Consider assigning “mentors” or “buddies” (currently serving members) for prospective or new members to ask questions, gain additional insight on board/committee protocols and practices. As the City continues to broaden its reach for recruitment, it is likely that there will be individuals who might be serving on a public committee for the first time. Having a designated peer to reach out to can ensure that new members feel included, comfortable, and equipped in their role.
- Establish IDEA-focused standards of behavior that all board/committee members are encouraged to demonstrate as part of their membership commitment or roles (this might be informed by language used in the City’s IDEA Policy).
- Conduct periodic (quarterly or biennially) gatherings to which current staff and committee members are invited to fortify relationships, receive strategic updates from the City, follow-up on recommendations or action items from committees, provide time for Q&A, etc. These sessions could be primarily geared toward newer committee members and/or members for boards/committees that do not meet regularly or have significant interims between their committee meetings or activities.
- Establish a budget to provide bus passes for members that might need to rely on public transportation in order to commute to committee meetings or other activities.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is essential to the vibrance and health of a city. Having a presence and cultivating relationships within diverse communities is important to fostering trust and understanding. As a city, it is not only necessary to engage with businesses and residents, but it is also important to offer opportunities for employees

to network with each other and get involved in various initiatives throughout the community. Boards/committees serve an integral role and can be a conduit between residents and the City government to establish and maintain inclusive and productive relationships.

Much of the City's success in relation to its IDEA goals depends on the City's ability to foster trust and collaboration within the community. As already discussed, engaging community members and organizations through boards and committees can be an effective way to build those connections. It is also important for individual City stakeholders to do the same. In the IDEA Assessment Report, several actions to support the development of intercultural competence among staff have been recommended, which can support employees' use of skills, knowledge, etc. to support inclusive decision-making and foster genuine and authentic relationships within the culturally diverse community of Kentwood.

Keeping those capacity-building efforts in mind, the following recommendations are put forth to leverage the City's board/committee platform to increase intentional Board/Committee and relationship building, a vital goal

- As noted in the Main Findings, current recruitment is heavily dependent on the individual networks of City employees and committee members. A more immediate and persistent concern, however, is how committees are able to establish solid relationships and feedback loops to ensure they are able to center the voices of residents in their decision making, particularly voices of groups not represented within current membership.
- As the primary organizers or facilitators of board/committee activities, employees fulfill a key role in implementing actions that support broader IDEA goals. As such, it is recommended that the City establish broader community networking goals that help to ensure that boards/committees are connected to key stakeholders, including community-based organizations. Appendix A includes a list of Community Engagement & Networking Resources cultivated for the City of Kentwood to consider.
 - **Note:** it is assumed that the City already has formal or informal relationships with the organizations featured, as individual employees may be connected in some way, and/or the City might have formal agreements or working relationships. Taking that into consideration, this recommendation is meant to encourage that the City specifically “take stock” of its current connections and think critically about how they can be leveraged to ensure that board/committees are well-connected to those vital community platforms.
- Establish a more visible community profile of the contributions and work completed and/or influenced by the boards/committees. Though each group varies in their purposes, functions, and meeting schedule, each board, committee, and commission fulfill a unique role in ensuring that residents receive equitable access to City services and therefore equitably benefit from what the City has to offer. Findings clearly demonstrate that the general community is relatively unaware of those contributions. Consider enhancing community presence by:
 - Featuring blog posts, narratives, etc. sharing the perspectives of current committee members
 - Testimonials of residents who have specifically worked closely and productively with boards/committees (distributed via newsletter, on the City webpage or social media).
 - Compiling an annual impact report that highlights key outputs, outcomes, success stories, etc. specifically highlighting the contributions and accomplishments of boards/committees
 - Occasional appearances on local news stations/sources to highlight board/committee activities, efforts, recruitment “drives”, etc.

Increasing Accessible Participation

Access to participation is about eliminating and reducing any barrier of any kind (physical, social, etc.) for residents to engage as a board/committee member. In addition to increasing awareness of opportunities to serve,

the City should also consider how its current practices may present barriers to individuals would eventually like to serve.

- Consider how to support equitable and adequate compensation for all members moving forward. Compensation is a clear and tangible way for an organization to demonstrate its value and contributions of all board/committee members and their expertise. It also can help reduce barriers for residents to participate. Expanding the compensation could include expansion of the pay per meeting model, and/or stipends for transportation or food.
- Consider meeting schedules that can accommodate across different work or personal schedules, especially for residents who do not work in traditional “first shift” positions.
- Engage in targeted outreach activities to better understand the unique barriers marginalized or historically underrepresented populations face within the Kentwood community and how they might differ. For instance, the barriers and concerns tied to individuals across different socio-economic groups may differ from the barriers and concerns across different racial groups. Conducting community listening sessions at places of worships, community-based organizations, or hosting at City facilities can not only increase awareness but provide valuable insight for City employees and current board/committee members to consider while determining more effective recruitment strategies moving forward.

APPENDIX A – Additional Resources

Community Engagement/Networking Resources

The West Michigan community has several community-based organizations that center equity and justice within their respective missions and have robust and effective programs and practices to foster equitable community engagement and public participation. Establishing formal partnerships could create opportunities that more effectively increase awareness of the City's opportunities across different groups within Kentwood.

- Ferris State University Leaders Program: [Ferris Latino Business & Economic Development](#)
- Hispanic Center of Western Michigan: [Hispanic-center.org](#)
- NAACP Grand Rapids: [www.naacpgr.com](#)
- Latina Network of West Michigan: [About the LNWM – Latina Network of West Michigan](#)
- Refugee Education Center: <https://refugeeeducationcenter.org>
- Urban Core Collective: [www.urbancorecollective.org](#)
- Urban League of West Michigan (aka Grand Rapids Urban League): [grurbanleague.org](#)
- West Michigan Asian American Association Inc.: [www.wm-aaa.org](#)

Smart Practices

The City of Kingston, Ontario (Canada) strongly highlights its board and committee platform as a key strategy of its commitment to equity and inclusion. In particular, the City solicited ideas from residents to specifically improve its board/committee recruitment process.

[Committee and Board Recruitment Process | Get Involved Kingston \(cityofkingston.ca\)](#)

As part of its Smart Cities series, Deloitte identified several best practices for urban areas to ensure inclusive and equitable public participation. In particular, the organization emphasized the role of resident advisory committees to strengthen ties with underrepresented communities. This resource provides extensive recommendations for incorporate resident voices within municipal decision-making platforms (such as boards and committees).

[Future of inclusive smart cities | Deloitte Insights](#)

The National League of Cities highlighted the efforts of six U.S. cities that innovatively supported diversity and inclusion within their communities. This resource includes examples of campaigns and other initiative specifically aimed at raising awareness and mitigating barriers to public participation and resources.

[How Six Cities Promote Diversity and Inclusion for Residents - National League of Cities \(nlc.org\)](#)