

5/12/2023

Dear IAB subcommittee,

I write to the subcommittee, the Board, and the City my reflections on my experience on IAB. I hope this information is useful.

I resigned from IAB on Monday due to personal reasons but there were things that unsettled me. Also want to highlight some positives!

- The fact that the Board exists is amazing and assistants who have supported the board like Nalini and Jackie have tried to help us function. Grateful for these two women. A board structure is an amazing vehicle for civic engagement for our immigrant community ...by and for them. Immigrants are not being asked to complete surveys, participate in stupid focus groups, and interact with the City in superficial engagement. The Board is a formal governance structure within a larger City structure. Oh, what a gift to tap into the wisdom and diverse experience of a Board of that caliber. I know that our elected officials do not knock on the doors of immigrants for their campaigns, we are not rich, and we do not have the time to serve on school boards and other important matters that affect us and our babies and neighbors. It's not that we don't want to but we have different realities for working class families from immigrant backgrounds. We are neglected intentionally in a systematic way. Enough with "that's just how it is...immigrants don't participate" So the best thing to do as an immigrant is to participate in our local government is this Board. We are not charity receivers just wanting services and services all the time, we are GIVERS, and we have a lot to offer to the City. I pray that the City is willing to receive feedback from IAB even if the feedback is hard to take in, even if there is a difference in politics/opinions, etc. The City must embrace this Board as a sign of respect for immigrants and recognize "we need to do better and do right."
- We need to improve the lives of Bellingham immigrant and refugee communities by engaging them in decisions about the City's future and improving the City's programs and services to meet the needs of all constituents.
- The City needs to consult with IAB in terms of other needs the City is working on e.g. housing, accepting money from the Department of Homeland Security to subsidize our police force, etc. We seem to be an afterthought even though we have been in existence for 3 years so far!
- Relationships via authentic community engagement will build trust with the City and immigrantswhen we are not in the right relationship with each otherthere is frustration about being part of the IAB ...City's processes need to prioritize community engagementfrom respecting recruitment processes set forth by the Board's process committee. Focusing on recruitment of people already with lived experience as an immigrant, working alongside the immigrant community...not someone who needs to "learn" the immigrant experience. To engage in dialogue with IAB about how to IMPROVE the process for engagement, invest in \$ in Board support for

translations/interpretation more than what is being provided. City be open to us, we are not your enemy, nor do we want your jobs, nor do we want to deal with white-collar processes. Make processes accessible to us, the majority of us from blue-collar backgrounds, mixed education levels, and participation styles. We want to have our local government accessible to us so we can inform policy and vital decisions that affect us!

- Have translated Board applications manually translated? The plug-in feature for the board and commission's page on City's website is not translated well.
- Grateful for bilingual English and Spanish board packets for meetings! Please make sure to add in the top right corner of meeting packets, the top common languages identified by the communications subcommittee
- Have ASL sign language and indigenous language speakers doing introductions of the Board and what we do (videos on our IAB website)
- Have a support staff person for Jackie who works on receiving calls from the community about IAB and setting up ASL and other language translation support for them
- Stop having the City/Mayor's office refer ALL immigrant issues to the Board. The city needs to back off funneling "all things immigrant" and analyze the nature of calls/inquiries related to immigrants. Has the city stopped to think about how would immigrants with various language needs go to get a business license? Where can immigrants go to report violations of health hazards/safety? Issues to address at Mayor level-...Phone trees for city services (e.g. courts) need to have greetings and prompts in other languages...for website pages on the City website that don't have an interpreter at that department, say so
- I noticed during my time on the Board constant stalling from the City's previous liaison/staff to get clarification on written ordinance writing and process. The Board always had to initiate the relationship with City on clarification on "what does this mean?" etc. Frustrating that our previous City liaison, a well-known immigration attorney didn't pass on an archival file of our meetings to the current City liaison person. Or City officials can't invest sweat equity into the Board by reviewing our meeting notes and decisions which are public records to understand the flow and inner workings of the Board.
- Also noticed, is the lack of recognition of the importance of interpretation and translation... the assumption that no one on the Board would benefit from improved language access, etc) and how that leads to community members leaving the Board or not wanting to join. As a child of immigrants who had to interpret for my mother and family members, it sucks being on the end of the stick where there is little to no interpretation present in the mode of communication (telemedicine, phone, in person). Y'all need to figure out an interpretation option in Zoom during the hybrid mode and in person, check the translation of interpreters, and get those headsets for our meetings so our community members can get simultaneous interpretation. Get qualified people who do simultaneous interpretation because that is a high skill that a small portion of interpreters can do.

- The Board's previous meetings/notes/decisions which are public records and the presentations made by our Board who put in countless hours of research and meeting up with immigrant advocacy groups and Boards from various cities put a lot of sweat equity into giving the City vital information for decision making. Also, all the community input via public comments and report backs from Board members is community-centered data. Just feel that IAB has become an information warehouse and information doesn't go past our IAB meeting walls into implement mode for City's consideration. I feel our community data has been devalued.
- Also, notice during my time enforced limits on the IAB's purpose and scope of our work. Instead of putting so much energy into enforcement, redirection would have been a better alternative. A recognition that the Board is aiding the City to rethink the civic, physical, and social needs of immigrants and put forth energy on adapting the IAB's purpose and scope to fit the needs being presented to the City. The source of issues of immigration relates to policing and then connects to other aspects of the immigrant experience. One of the outcomes of the IAB which is positive is the Immigrant Resource Center (IRC) subcommittee which responded to community need for a place that engages community immigrant members who are in a spectrum of total nonengagement with City (undocumented peoples) to naturalized citizens/children of immigrants (electoral voters) who may engage more with City.

Thank you again for reviewing my feedback. God bless!

Respectfully,

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