

April 18th, 2023

Dear Mayor Fleetwood and Brian Heinrich,

We'd like to thank you for getting back to us on our revisions to the Request For Proposal documents. We are hopeful and excited to continue working together to engage in an equitable and inclusive process to create an Immigrant Resource Center in Bellingham.

After reviewing the document revisions as a subcommittee, we would like to share our ideas on the proposed revisions and find a way to reach a consensus on a final product so that this RFP can move forward and the immigrant community can be served as soon as possible.

We would like to explain why we believe that some of the revisions that Brian Heinrich made to the documents are ineffective in developing a Request For Proposal process that retains a solid commitment to the immigrant community's agency and needs.

Brian's changes to the Scope of Work:

1. Cut out: "Attend all monthly Immigration Advisory Board meetings and provide the board with regular work summary report-back"
2. Cut out: "Continue to research and collaborate with the immigrant community and Immigration Advisory Board to establish best practices for an Immigrant Resource Center"

Currently, the Immigration Advisory Board is the only established point of contact and connection between the government of the City of Bellingham and the immigrant community. Throughout its history, the IAB meetings have allowed for a unique and unprecedented space for the immigrant community to share their stories, experiences, concerns, and hopes. The IAB has a commitment to not only hearing but ensuring that these invaluable testimonies are followed through and received with policy that actively involves the community and equitably aims to address the issues that they are facing.

Additionally, a majority of the IAB's members are immigrants themselves, offering their own experiences, recommendations, and willingness to collaborate with city leaders to create programs and policies that work for the community. The idea of building an Immigrant Resource Center in Bellingham came from Immigration Advisory Board meetings and the distinctive environment and opportunity that it creates for the community to be civically engaged.

It is natural then, for the selected consultant to be required to attend a monthly two-hour Immigration Advisory Board Meeting throughout the tenure of their work, as this board already has established a structure for the immigrant community's engagement. It is illogical and counterproductive to expect a consultant working to create an Immigrant Resource Center in Bellingham to not engage with the immigrant community, listen to their needs, and understand

the preexisting efforts of the IAB in establishing the center. Requiring the selected consultant to report back at these meetings with the state of their work is also extremely important in guaranteeing transparency throughout their process. Without being in the know about the state of the Immigrant Resource Center's creation, it is more difficult for immigrants to actually trust that the center will serve them. Without guaranteeing active engagement and input from the immigrant community during the center's creation process, the center lacks legitimacy, rendering it an inefficient service and a misuse of resources for all stakeholders

These two sentences go hand in hand and they boil down to one specific point: **the immigrant community must remain integral and paramount in the process of creating an immigrant resource center.** Right now, the IAB has created an important conduit between the community and the city, and this connection must be utilized, honored, and respected by the consultant in order to establish best practices and program delivery for the center. Therefore, we ask that these two sentences remain firm in the scope of work as it ensures that the immigrant community will have a source of involvement in the IRC's creation and that the consultant can also be held accountable for the community's specific needs.

Brian's changes to the Evaluation Criteria:

1. Cut out: "in collaboration between" and replace it with: "advisement from"

Words matter here because they define the process the Mayor's office seeks to use. The use of the phrase: "in collaboration between" is extremely important and intentional as we aim to develop a unique and inclusive process for creating the Immigrant Resource Center. Collaborating means working together to achieve a common goal or purpose. Collaboration requires a willingness to listen to different perspectives and work through any challenges or conflicts to construct something powerful together. We, the Immigration Advisory Board, and you, the Mayor, and the City of Bellingham, have expressed a shared goal of creating this center that will meet the needs of the immigrant community. We must realize this goal together by committing to a collaborative process where all four stakeholders (City government, Immigrant Community, IAB, consultant) have an authentic and empowering working relationship and opportunity to create a long-lasting and effective Immigrant Resource Center.

The word "advisement" has important differences from the word "collaboration" and these differences are extremely meaningful. "Advisement" preserves the stark power differential between the advising body (the Community through the IAB) and the authoritative source at hand (the Mayor, and the City Government in general). "Advisement" communicates to our immigrant communities that our City Government is more interested in exerting its authority *over* our communities than in collaborating *with* us. The IAB holds the belief that in order to create an Immigrant Resource Center that is genuinely inclusive and responsive to the needs of the immigrant community, it is essential to prioritize collaboration between the IAB and the City of Bellingham throughout the consultant selection process.

Together with the areas of disagreement regarding the Scope of Work Revisions, we maintain that acknowledging and preserving this crucial distinction in wording demonstrates the City of Bellingham's dedication to genuinely collaborating with the Immigration Advisory Board throughout the process, prioritizing the concerns of the immigrant community in all discussions.

We would like to again extend our most sincere gratitude to you and the team for being responsive to our initial revisions, reading this letter, and carefully considering our points of concern. We are excited and hopeful for the outcome of this process and we simply want to ensure that it involves those affected by the issue as directly and justly as possible.

We look forward to hearing back from you all on these points and hope that we can continue to move the ball forward on the RFP and Immigrant Resource Center as a whole. We would be open to meeting together to discuss these revisions as well. We continue to remain committed to engaging in a collaborative process.

Sincerely,
The City of Bellingham Immigration Advisory Board