

Bylaws for the Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC)

January 2020

ARTICLE I. Background and Purpose

The Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC) was created in the fall of 2017 by the City of Austin's Office of Innovation in coordination with Austin Public Health and the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO). Beginning March of 2019, the administration and facilitation of AHAC is managed by Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC).

The role of AHAC is to have conversations, share stories, and get feedback from the group to:

- Educate and inform City of Austin departments, service providers, and policy makers on the realities of homelessness, including disability, mental health, substance use disorder, and other issues faced by individuals who are homeless
- Advise on current services and resources available for individuals and families experiencing homelessness
- Inform the improvement, expansion and implementation of services and resources for individuals and families experiencing homelessness

AHAC members may be asked to:

- Provide feedback on communications and created content from a variety of City of Austin departments, service providers and community groups
- Share lived experiences and knowledge on homelessness and services and factors that help individuals and families to exit homelessness
- Give ideas and opinions on specific policy issues
- Provide input via different communication channels, including offline (during group) and offline (email, text, in writing)
- Co-create possible solutions for current issues
- Be a spokesperson for AHAC

ARTICLE II. MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Eligibility for Membership

Membership is coordinated by DACC. When vacant slots are available, DACC will initiate a selection process to identify potential new members of AHAC with consideration for diversity in terms of demographics and homeless experiences. New members may serve after completion of an Advisory Council orientation, and agreement to the requirements outlined in these Bylaws including attendance expectations. Application for AHAC membership is open to anyone who is currently or has previously experienced homelessness in Austin, Texas.

Section 2. Number of Members and Composition

The number of members of AHAC will not exceed 15 members. When selecting a new member to fill a vacancy, DACC will work to ensure that the diversity, both demographic and in terms of homeless experiences, is reflective of the diversity of the City of Austin such as:

- Homeless status
- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender Identity
- Veteran Status
- Disability
- Sexual Orientation
- Homelessness Services History
- Family Composition including relationship status, children and/or dependents
- Neighborhood(s) in Austin where individual has resided while experiencing homelessness

Section 3. Terms

A normal term for an AHAC member is 24 months. When an AHAC Member's term expires they can request another term. Terms will be staggered so there will always be experienced members in the group. Approval of additional terms will be contingent on attendance, active contributions, and participation. DACC will meet with AHAC Members wishing to continue service on AHAC to review and discuss each of these factors before reappointment.

Section 4. Resignation and Termination

Any AHAC Member may resign at any time by contacting DACC. An AHAC Member may be terminated:

- At the end of their term

- If they do not attend three consecutive meetings and do not notify DACC ahead of time
- As a last resort if there is an established and documented pattern of disruptive and detrimental behavior
 - AHAC Members may communicate to DACC in writing, over email, in person, or on the phone if there are any concerns about conduct of fellow AHAC members
 - Any formal reports of concern about conduct of another member shall be specific to how the conduct being reported has negatively impacted the productivity of the group and/or meeting decorum standards established in these bylaws

If an AHAC member resigns or is terminated, their position on AHAC may be filled and resigning members are not entitled to reinstatement or future compensation.

ARTICLE III. MEETINGS

Section 1. Regular Meetings

Regular meetings of the members shall be held every other Monday of each month from 11:00am to 1:00pm. AHAC Members will adopt a calendar annually for the following calendar year that finalizes meeting dates and locations, and will accommodate conflicts resulting from holidays and other community meetings when possible.

Members will receive a participation incentive valued at \$25/hour to attend the regular meetings, and may receive a weekly bus pass when 1) bus passes are available and 2) a need for transportation is established. Financial compensation for an individual cannot exceed \$50/meeting. Lunch will be provided by DACC.

DACC will strive to secure funding each fiscal year for participation incentives, bus passes, and food for regular meetings but these items are not guaranteed and may be eliminated at any time if funding is no longer available, with little or no advanced notice.

Section 2. Voting

All issues to be voted on shall be decided by a simple majority of the membership of the group, which is 8 AHAC members when all 15 slots are filled. DACC staff, presenters, and community guests do not have a vote.

Only items that have received a majority vote from AHAC Members may be represented as a recommendation or viewpoint of AHAC as a whole. When speaking with policy makers or speaking publicly, AHAC Members will clearly identify if information provided is a personal opinion or an item formally endorsed by AHAC.

ARTICLE IV. DACC Responsibilities

In addition to responsibilities stated in other Articles of these Bylaws, DACC will:

- Before regular meetings, DACC will make arrangements for standing meetings, including:
 - Reserving the meeting space
 - Sending a text and/or email reminder for the group based on each individual member's preference for contact method
 - Providing lunch

DACC will also be responsible for recruiting, selecting, and orienting new AHAC Members.

ARTICLE V. Confidentiality

Part of AHAC's purpose is to share stories and provide feedback as part of discussions. Input provided as part of agenda items is given by AHAC Members to help improve public processes and services, and is not confidential.

Personal stories that AHAC Members choose to share as part of group discussions that are not relevant to formal input activities should be kept confidential within the group.

Members will sign an agreement form annually, either upon joining the group or by January 30th each year. This form will include consenting to the overall mission and purpose of AHAC, meeting decorum standards, and provide DACC with updated contact information and preferred communication methods. This will also include a form where AHAC Members may decide whether they want to share images taken of them during AHAC activities. DACC will make a good faith efforts to ensure that these wishes are adhered to.

Article VI. Rules of Order

Each person and board member attending a board meeting should observe decorum. A person or Member should not speak out of turn, use disparaging or abusive language, or make threats of violence against any other person during an AHAC meeting.

No guest or Member shall engage in conduct or use language that is offensive, harassing, or sexually suggestive toward an individual or a group when interacting with other City board members, City employees, or members of the public, when the interaction is part of the board member's official duties. Examples of prohibited conduct include:

- use of profanity, racial slurs, or disparaging epithets, innuendos, or names;
- distribution, display, or discussion of any written or graphic material, including online content, voicemail, email, text messages, calendars, posters, and cartoons, that is sexually suggestive;
- unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favors; or
- physical assault, threat, or intimidation.

During presentations, Members will raise their hands to be recognized to speak. Members will be called on in order of hands raised. In instances where an individual has not had an opportunity to speak on the agenda item being discussed, they will be called on prior to other members that have already spoken on that issue. Reasonable accommodations will be made by DACC staff to set clear expectations about the time allotted for each item, and to provide an equitable opportunity for all Members to participate in each discussion.

Members should direct feedback and comments to the presenter, and ensure that all comments are respectful, constructive, and related to the discussion topic. DACC will help facilitate presentations and group discussions to support all Members having an opportunity to voice opinions, and to keep conversations on track to gather feedback related to each discussion item.

Article VI. Political Activity

AHAC is supported through City of Austin funding and staff, and AHAC Members are paid for their time to provide expertise on City practices, policies, and procedures. City resources, equipment, and money may not be used on any activities related to election campaigning. This includes prohibition against using City worktime, property, websites, workspaces, and the like to support or oppose a campaign, candidate, or ballot measure. It also includes a prohibition against distributing materials such as signs, brochures, flyers, cards, buttons, bumper stickers, or the like in the workplace, including making materials available to be viewed or picked up. During AHAC meetings, which are City resourced and on City property, these restrictions apply. AHAC Members may not engage in political activities outside of AHAC meetings in their official capacity as AHAC members, but may participate in any political activities outside of AHAC meetings as individual members of the community.

Article VII. Bylaws

DACC and AHAC Members may recommend changes and amendments to these Bylaws, which may be adopted by a majority vote of AHAC Members at any regular or special called meeting. Bylaws will be adopted annually in January.