



To: Mayor and City Council
From: Casandra Eames, DEI Coordinator
Date: 12/10/2024
Subject: 2024 City Boards and Commission Survey Results

At the March 12, 2024, City Council meeting, the City Council approved its updated [City Council Values, Goals and Tasks](#). Included in that update was the following section:

Value D. WE VALUE A DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY
D1. Further diversify membership on City Boards and Commissions.
D1.T1. Identify the barriers to increased diversity and participation on boards and commissions (e.g., childcare, transportation, virtual meetings). Include evaluation of best practices from other communities who are successful in achieving diverse membership.
D1.T2. Adopt solutions that are within the Council’s control to improve diversity and participation.

To address the Council goal and tasks above, City staff sent a voluntary survey in October to all current board/commission members (119 of the 127 positions) to learn more about:

1. What the volunteer board/commission member experience has been like
2. Who are the volunteers serving on boards/commissions
3. How might the City improve board/commission member experience
4. How might the City make serving on a board/commission more attractive, accessible, and doable for Ames residents.

The survey questionnaire and results are attached. **It is important to note that participation in the survey was voluntary and therefore the survey results are not representative of all board members. Fifty-two volunteers responded (44% response rate).**

The survey results contain the following notable themes:

1. The majority of respondents reported largely positive experiences serving on boards and commissions. Twenty-seven mentioned community service and betterment. Twelve shared they like being part of local government decision-making. Eleven like

learning about the City and what is happening in the community. Eight respondents enjoy connecting and building relationships with fellow board members. Four enjoy representing and communicating with Ames residents.

2. The demographic diversity of respondents is not reflective of the levels of diversity in the Ames community; however, when asked about different forms of diversity, 23 people answered with specific experiences, identities, connections and perspectives.

3. When asked about suggestions on recruitment of volunteers, the following ideas were shared:

Suggestions not currently implemented to consider:

- Conduct more targeted outreach
 - Reach out to professional, service, and identity-based organizations
 - Reach out to employee resource groups (ERGs) at local employers
 - Develop list of community partners to notify of vacancies
- Announcements during government meetings
- Improve communication after receipt of applications

Suggestions that are in progress:

- Improve website
 - Clearly identify desired qualifications and eligibility standards
 - List a staff member as the point of contact for questions about recruitment
 - Keep an updated list of current/upcoming vacancies on the website
 - Add information about average time commitment to board descriptions
 - Make the board member handbook publicly available
 - Standardize webpages for individual boards, including contact information for staff liaison
- Update application for ease, clarity, and provide it in a mobile-friendly format
- Update auto response to submitted application to include information about the review process and timeline, including when the applicant can expect to hear back

4. The following ideas were shared about retaining volunteers:

- Clarify open records law as it applies to use of personal emails for board business
- Offer opportunities to build leadership capacity and learn about government processes beyond the general brief orientation session
- Provide mentoring by pairing new board members with more experienced board members
- Provide a file sharing platform for board members

5. When asked if volunteers know of anyone who has wanted to serve on a board/commission but hasn't because of a barrier, the majority (85%) did not know of anyone with this experience; however, the time commitment was a notable identified barrier. As of July 1, 2024, all City boards and commission are now required to offer a virtual participation option for board/commission members to

attend meetings. Staff anticipates that this change may reduce some barriers to participation and will allow for more people to serve on a board/commission.

6. When asked what the City can improve on, there was a repeating theme of "better communication." Respondents asked for clear guidance in the following areas:

- What boards and commissions do
- Expectations and responsibilities of the position
- Desired qualifications of applicants
- Average monthly time commitment

The survey results provide staff with insights from boards and commission members that were previously collectively unknown. It revealed that most respondents enjoy their experience volunteering on boards and commissions and want to be a part of creating a positive impact in their community. It also provided some important information regarding recruiting volunteers and how to enhance volunteer experience.

The results will be shared and discussed with staff liaisons. The survey will be sent out annually to current board/commission members in the fall.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Survey Questionnaire](#)

[Number Survey Results Nov. 2024.pdf](#)