

June 2022

**Multnomah County Charter Review**  
**Affinity Focus Groups and Community Survey**  
Summary of Topline Themes and Findings

*Prepared by: Espousal Strategies, LLC*





# Overview

## Affinity Focus Groups

### BIPOC Focus Group

- 11 participants
- Majority of participants stated they are moderately familiar with the services Mult. Co. provides
- Half of participants shared that they are moderately familiar with their County Commissioner and/or other county elected officials, while the majority of the other half was either slightly familiar or not familiar at all
- When asked which general issues were most important, participants ranked Safety in Community and Diverse Representation in Governments as the top two, followed closely by Oversight of Criminal Justice System

### East County Focus Group

- 15 participants
- Majority of participants stated they are moderately familiar with the services Mult. Co. provides
- When asked how they typically engage with the County and/or County processes, most participants indicated that they engage through services the County provides, while others cited that they do not know how to engage.
- Participants ranked Diverse Representation in government, Voting Rights, and Oversight of the Criminal Justice System as their top three most important issues.

### Youth Focus Group

- 11 participants
- Majority of participants stated they are moderately familiar with the services Mult. Co. provides
- The participants reported that the most common way they typically engage with the County or county services was by attending a public meeting, followed by submitting public comment/input and seeking/receiving county services
- When considering the top issues most important to them, participants cited Oversight of the Criminal Justice System as the clear priority, followed by Diverse Representation in Government and Public Access to Elected Officials



## LGBTQIA+ Focus Group

- 12 participants
- Results were mixed when asked how familiar participants were with the services the County provides
- The majority of participants cited that they typically engage with the County and/or county processes through attending public meetings, followed by seeking county services and contacting elected officials
- When asked which issues were most important, participants ranked Safety in Community and Oversight of Criminal Justice System as the top two, followed closely by Diverse Representation in Governments

## Community Survey

- 268 total respondents
- The majority of respondents self-identified as either African American/Black or White/Caucasian
- The majority of respondents indicated at least a moderate understanding of Multnomah County services and their elected officials.
- The two issues respondents prioritized the highest were: *Increasing opportunities for the community to learn about county government and services* and *Safety in the community*



# Summary of Focus Group Feedback on Proposed Recommendations

## Safety & Justice Subcommittee Recommendation

### Overall Feedback

For each of the focus groups, oversight of the criminal justice system was a priority that ranked in the top three most important issues for participants.

Discussions around the county jail inspections reflected a desire for transparency across all of the focus groups. Participants asked several questions related to the implementation and details of this proposal that included:

- How constituents will be chosen
- What they will have access to (e.g., information, individuals, facilities)
- Who will be interviewed at the prisons
- What the guidelines for the inspections will be
- If the constituents would be provided training
- Whether the visits would be accompanied by listening sessions

Participants also had questions around accountability, and what the follow-up for these visits would include. They wanted to know how the information gathered would be considered or utilized, and what impact the findings could potentially have.

Overall, the feedback across the focus groups was supportive of the recommendations for the county jail visits and participants recognize the importance of oversight. The various questions posed by participants indicated that communities have a desire to understand processes, their purpose, and how information gathered will be utilized.

### BIPOC Focus Group

Participants raised concerns around the issue of for-profit practices related to the prisons that have affected BIPOC community members. The common theme in these concerns was the perception that the County Sheriff was making deals and/or contracts with vendors that were leading to the financial exploitation of BIPOC individuals. Examples given were cash seizures in relation to the arrests of BIPOC protestors as well as undocumented workers. Another example cited was the fees for videocall communication for incarcerated individuals.



## East County Focus Group

Participants shared that they anticipate the proposal around jail visits will have a positive impact on the communities in East County since it houses a large portion of BIPOC and low-income populations, which tend to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Multiple participants supported an increase in oversight, which was consistent with the poll results for the session that showed Oversight of the Criminal Justice System was one of the top three most important issues to this group.

## LGBTQIA+ Focus Group

Participants in this group posed many questions related to the implementation of the prison visit recommendation and the selection criteria for the constituent visitors. One participant expressed that given that the LGBTQIA+ community is overrepresented in correctional facilities, it would be important that the evaluations are conducted through this lens with a specific focus on protections for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

## Youth Focus Group

Participants of this focus group raised various questions around the details of what will be evaluated during the prison visits and whether they would be scheduled or surprise visits. There was specific interest in whether juvenile detention centers would be included as part of these visits by commissioners and constituents. Multiple participants expressed that the inclusion of juvenile facilities this would be important to understand the impact of incarceration on the youth specifically and their development.

## Government Accountability Subcommittee Recommendations

### Overall Feedback

While several recommendations have been considered by the Government Accountability Subcommittee, the focus groups only discussed and offered feedback for three recommendations related to the auditor, which were the codification of a Good Governance Hotline, establishment of an Ombudsperson Office and the Auditor's access to information and records. When discussing the Government Accountability Subcommittee Recommendations, there was not much differentiation amongst the focus groups and very little specific feedback. Generally, the discussions focused on questions the participants had related to understanding the roles and responsibilities of the Auditor and the ombudsperson, the types of issues or



services they could each look into, and if the public would have the means to pressure investigations. Overall, the feedback from the focus groups was positive and supportive of the proposed recommendations discussed.

## **Equitable Representation Subcommittee Recommendations**

### **Overall Feedback**

When discussing the recommendations around the expansion of voting rights and adoption of ranked-choice voting, there was minimal differentiation amongst the various focus groups on the type of feedback received. For each of the focus groups, responses were mixed when asked about their level of familiarity with ranked-choice voting.

Discussions around the adoption of ranked-choice voting were positive and supportive, with many participants across the groups expressing support for greater representation this change could offer. Some participants expressed that this voting system would allow for a greater focus on policies and issues rather than parties. One participant felt that ranked-choice voting could make it more possible for campaign finance reform to be implemented, which would further lead to greater diversity of representation. Another focus group member advised that it is important to include an educational component with implementation of the new system so that community members understand how it works. When providing this education, there needs to be an intentional effort to ensure that is accessible for all (e.g., multilingual materials).

Feedback expressed in the different focus groups related to the expansion of voting rights was consistently supportive. A couple of respondents specifically mentioned support for expanding voting rights to non-citizens given that they are part of the community and are impacted by County policies. Some participants had questions around whether there would be education provided for non-citizens so that they can understand the changes and their rights. Other participants posed questions related to whether changes would be required through the legislature for the expansion of voting rights and the associated challenges.



# Survey Toplines

The majority of respondents are at least moderately familiar with the services Multnomah county provides – approximately 80%

- 32% moderately familiar
- 35% very familiar
- 13% extremely familiar

The majority of respondents are at least moderately familiar with their County Commissioner and/or other county elected officials – approximately 71%

- 30% moderately familiar
- 29% very familiar
- 12% extremely familiar

Respondents are twice as likely to engage with the County/County processes by attending public meetings (virtually or in person) as other methods

The most important issues to respondents were:

- Safety in the community – 56%
- Government accountability – 50%
- Voting rights – 40%
- Oversight of criminal justice system – 37%

Of the more specific issues we asked about, respondents prioritized the following 3:

- Increasing opportunities for the community to learn about county government and services – 58%
- Oversight of the way tax dollars are spent by the County – 53%
- Safeguarding the community's ability to report wrongdoing by the county – 52%

The overwhelming majority of respondents reported that they vote in every election – 82%

- Opinions on voting systems were mixed:
  - 35% prefer ranked-choice voting
  - 30% prefer the current voting system
  - 24% prefer STAR voting
  - 11% had no opinion

The majority of respondents were represented by the following racial/ethnic demographics:

- 44% African American/Black
- 40% White/Caucasian
- 9% Latinx/Latina/Latino



Approximately one in four respondents reported that they live with a mental or physical disability.