



Meeting minutes

Meeting: Metro Council research briefing
Date/time: Thursday, May 25, 2023, 12:30-2 p.m.
Place: Room 328A, Metro Regional Center
Purpose: The Metro Council received a briefing on recent focus groups and a survey conducted in the Portland region by FM3 Research.

Attendees

Councilor Juan Carlos Gonzalez, Deputy Council President Christine Lewis, Councilor Mary Nolan, Metro Council President Lynn Peterson, Councilor Ashton Simpson

Absent

Councilor Duncan Hwang, Councilor Gerritt Rosenthal

Deputy Council President Christine Lewis called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.
(Council President Peterson arrived shortly after.)

Introduction

Toby Van Fleet, Principal Public Affairs Advisor, and Craig Beebe, Policy and Communications Advisor, who co-project managed the research project, provided an introduction on its three primary goals:

1. Understand key priorities of people in the region - how they are thinking about issues and how they relate to Metro.
2. Inform communication strategies - how we talk with people to engage.
3. Help inform future research by understanding trends, priorities and awareness of Metro.

Jenny Lee, Deputy Director, Coalition of Communities of Color, discussed the role of her organization in advising on the project's application of racial equity goals.

- Previous work with Metro, but how this is new work for them.
- Public opinion – find motivations, concerns and shaping narratives.
- Metro, FM3 and community partners all want to increase racial equity outcomes in public opinion research. Practices are evolving such as questions, ideas, etc. that can be used by Metro in future research.

Presentation of research

Dave Metz (President and Research Partner, FM3 Research), lead research contractor, shared the methodology and findings of the research.

The two phases:

1. In-person focus groups. They tried to get diversity within the groups. Feedback from these groups helped to form questions and phrase survey questions.
2. Survey in April (1,405 respondents by phone and online): The goals were to get a representative sample of adults in the region, with oversamples of approximately 100 additional people identifying as Black, Asian or Latinx.

Overarching conclusions included a general sense of concern about the direction of the Portland region, particularly relating to houselessness/housing and personal/public safety. Respondents most highly value the creation of a Portland region where “people feel safe”. The project explored ways that the housing crisis is impacting people across the region, perceived causes and awareness of solutions. The project also explored attitudes toward jobs in the region, finding there is more concern about a lack of “good jobs” relative to concern about a lack of jobs more generally, and perceptions about some of the things that might hamper the region’s ability to create more good jobs. Finally, the research explored awareness of Metro and attitudes toward the agency’s work, finding that respondents were overall not well aware of Metro but generally support its purpose when it is described to them.

Questions and discussion

President Peterson asked how Metro can better communicate so that people are more aware of it, and would that help with some of the negative perceptions people may have? Metz replied that Metro should consider the cost-benefit of raising broad public awareness about Metro in a challenging media environment, versus more focused strategies about key issues and policy proposals.

President Peterson asked what kinds of information are most important to residents to understand what Metro and partners are doing to address the housing crisis (through the affordable housing bond and Supportive Housing Services fund). Metz noted that the focus groups were asked to respond to different kinds of information about housing progress. People generally liked a combination of personal stories or information about new housing developments, combined with a sense of context through data or graphics.

Councilor Lewis asked how Metz interprets the fact that a large percentage of respondents said they believe Metro is “powerful”. Metz noted that many of these more negative perceptions of Metro simply aren’t grounded in solid awareness of what Metro is or does.

Councilor Nolan asked about where respondents get news and information. Is it possible to sort findings by where people get information? Metz noted that it is very hard to reliably tell where people get information – partially because what they tell a pollster may be different from reality, intentionally or not. But it can be assumed that most people get information via social media and Google, while certain ideological news outlets speak to specific types of audiences.

Interim Director of Communications Lia Waiwaiolo asked about cross-tabs that can provide more specific information about certain populations’ views on questions. Metz said there is a wealth of cross-tab information available to answer specific questions.

Deputy Chief Operating Officer Andrew Scott asked about a slight majority of respondents saying they believe local taxes are a serious concern. Metz noted this is part of a broader level of concern about costs in the region, and this is one way to express that. When funding measures are proposed, people are often still willing to support new taxes for issues they care about.

Chief Operating Officer Marissa Madrigal noted the widespread concern about crime and personal safety, and asked how Metro can be sensitive to this concern while also telling a positive and credible story of work it is doing. Metz noted that Metro’s work in having affordable places to live and access to service can be described as helping people feel safer.

Government Affairs director Andy Shaw discussed how people have trouble understanding the causes and effects of broader economic trends like unemployment. Metz noted that the economy is an abstract issue to most people. Personal experience is how respondents talk about economy. They

do not think about industries, they think about being able to save and take care of their families. If they are personally doing well, they tend to think the economy is too.

Councilor Gonzalez talked about perception vs. reality, and whether people want Metro to hold other governments more accountable for addressing some of their key issues. Metz replied that people generally want to see government fixing the problem, not fixing blame.

Councilor Nolan talked about the co-mingling of the issues of safety and homelessness. What information can help people get the bigger picture in addition to their own direct experiences? Metz noted that perception of change takes time, and if people are still seeing or experiencing concerning things in their community, they will struggle to see the bigger picture. That said, Metro should continue to share the news of what's working and find multiple ways to do so.

Councilor Gonzalez asked how to make data stick better in people's minds. Metz replied that certain types of indicators are broadly understood and noted by most people – like gas prices. But others are harder for people to grasp unless it mirrors their personal experience.

Next steps

Toby Van Fleet and Craig Beebe described next steps, including that this information would be presented to key staff leadership and Communications department staff in the following days. Future staff conversations will consider how to apply these findings to messaging development, as well as informing future public opinion and messaging research on key topics and policy proposals.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 p.m.