

Location: City of Bell

Issue: Priority-Based Budgeting

Methodology: Workshop

Davenport Institute Role: Consultation

In 2010, the tiny city of Bell, California was rocketed into the national spotlight when the Los Angeles Times broke a story involving misappropriation of funds with ridiculously high salaries for appointed and elected city officials, allegations of voter fraud, and general scandal enough to sound like something out of the pages of a novel. But what was, in many ways, a disaster for the small city also brought real opportunities for change and a renewed sense of community responsibility.

Early in 2012, the Davenport Institute was invited to work with newly appointed city staff and the new city council of the City of Bell, serving as a consultant and facilitator of a budget prioritization workshop. Despite the dark days of the city's recent history, Director Peterson noted an enthusiasm among residents to restore their city's good name, "They realize that this took place in part because they weren't paying attention. Now their eyes are open and they are ready to be part of the solution."

The workshop was conducted bilingually, with simultaneous Spanish/English translation to accommodate the large Hispanic population. The meeting kicked off with a brief and transparent overview of the city's finances before shifting to small group discussions at round tables of 6-8 residents. The table discussions focused on what issues the City should prioritize in its upcoming budget plans. Each table voted on the top five issues for their group which were then reported out to the whole group. These ideas were then categorized and posted around the room and participants given five red dots that they could place on the ideas they felt were most important.

Peterson noted that the morning revealed that the most important items related to economic development, police, and administrative reorganization.

You can read more [here](#).