

Citizen-Driven Government Performance

Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation



Case Studies and Curricular Resources



National Center for Public Productivity
Graduate Department of Public Administration
Rutgers University - Newark
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National Center for Public Productivity

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A few of the National Center for Public Productivity's projects include:

- ***Citizen-Driven Government Performance*** - The case studies highlighted throughout this booklet are the core of the "Citizen-Driven Performance Measurement Curricular Project." The case studies focus on performance assessment and citizen involvement. Curricular resources and course modules are available at our website.
- ***E-governance Institute*** - The E-governance Institute's mission is to explore how the Internet and other information technologies (IT) have and will continue to impact on the productivity and performance of the public sector, and how e-government fosters new and deeper citizen involvement within the governing process.
- ***Public Performance & Management Review (PPMR)*** - Published since 1975, PPMR is a highly respected journal. PPMR publishes articles and commentaries on topics of public administration and public management from practitioners and academicians alike.

These and other projects and publications may be accessed at: www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~ncpp



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Citizen-Driven Government Performance

For several years the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's "Performance Assessment of Municipal Governments Program" has been encouraging the creation and widespread adoption of measures of municipal government performance that objectively measure outcomes that matter to citizens. The Program's approach emphasizes citizen involvement to ensure that what is measured is what matters to citizens and that the data are not corrupted by the natural desire of officeholders to report favorable outcomes. The Program's strategy has two parts: (1) demonstration projects in selected municipalities; and (2) projects that promote the adoption of citizen-based performance. Citizens are involved in these projects in many ways. In particular, some are encouraging the creation of interactive websites that will enable direct citizen participation in performance assessment.

Sloan-related projects are curricular resources for use in such programs as the Master of Public Administration, Master of Business Administration, Master of Public Policy, Master of Social Work, and Certified Public Manager Programs. These case experiences offer important learning opportunities and are available at no charge through the National Center for Public Productivity Website: www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~ncpp/curriculum

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Citizen-Driven Government Performance:

Montclair, New Jersey is an economically and racially diverse community of 38,000 people located approximately 12 miles west of New York City. In 1997, the Sloan Foundation funded a three-year citizen-driven government performance project in Montclair because of its long and well-documented history of citizen participation and close proximity to Rutgers-Newark and the National Center for Public Productivity (NCPD).

The project began with the convening of numerous, informal meetings with citizens, citizen groups, elected officials and municipal managers to develop an understanding of two critical aspects of the township:

How do citizens, municipal managers and elected officials communicate and interact with each other?

How do citizens, municipal managers and elected officials determine the Township of Montclair is doing a good job providing services?

Participants were asked how they knew the township was doing a good job. The response from community stakeholders indicated that most measures of performance at the time were subjective. “The streets are pretty clean.” “I feel safe in my neighborhood.”

The overall project goal was to involve stakeholders in assessing and improving government performance, and influencing how government services could be made more responsive to community needs. In support of that goal, the project sought to:

- Have citizens intimately involved in identifying issues and measures of performance.
- Support the use of performance indicators in public decision processes.
- Develop a partnership built among citizens, local government, and Rutgers University.
- Encourage participating citizens, elected officials and government administrators to learn from each other and from related projects across the country; and
- Develop a long-term institutional capacity to support citizen participation.

The NCPD involved as many people as possible in identifying service delivery areas and community conditions that were priorities for citizens, and developed ways to measure performance related to those issues. The NCPD team worked with citizens to identify their aspirations for Montclair and helped citizens and municipal managers connect performance issues and indicators to those aspirations and to municipal program budget objectives. In particular, the Montclair project:

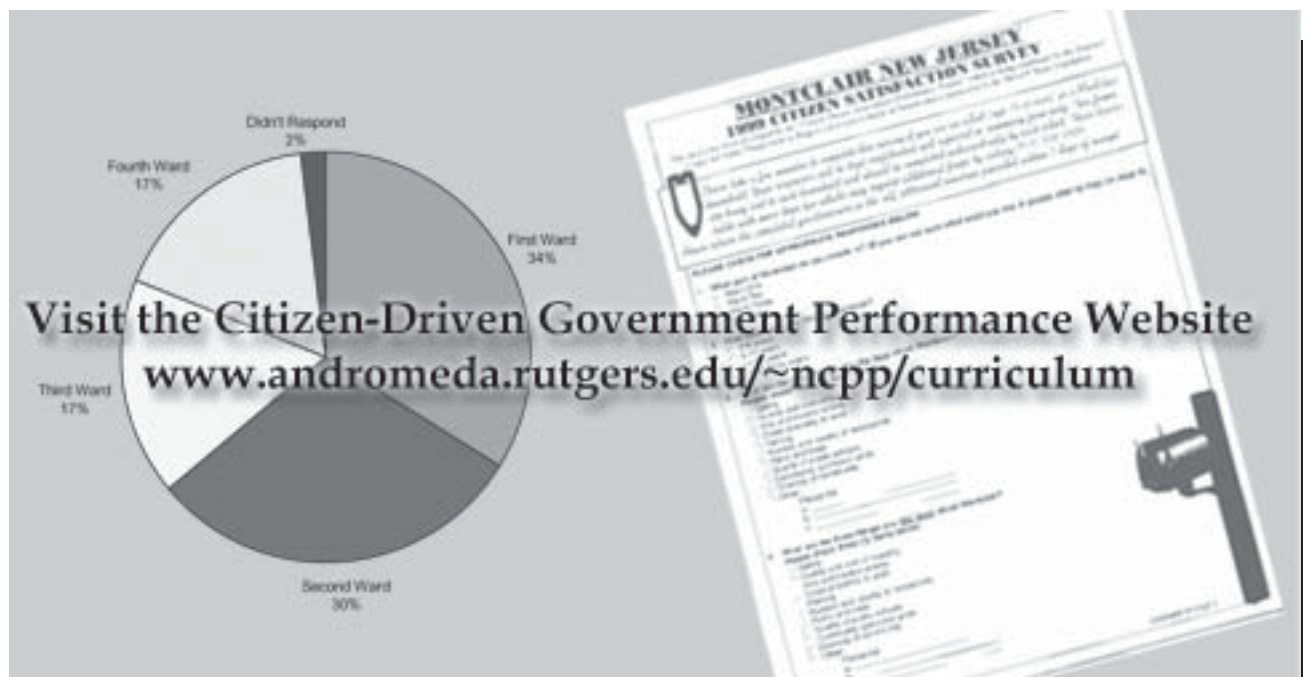
- Demonstrated the citizens’ ability to work effectively with performance issues and select performance indicators. Citizen participation resulted in fourteen major themes that summarized the outcomes citizens expected from government. They also identified over sixty potential indicators for measuring performance related to those themes.



Lessons from Montclair, New Jersey

- Developed citizen-driven “aspirational goals” for Montclair. A “Goals-setting Weekend” generated over 100 ideas that were clustered into six “Aspirational Goals” and were used to frame how citizens and township managers worked with performance measures.
- Resulted in the first citizen satisfaction survey for Montclair, designed and conducted by citizens. Citizens on the “survey committee,” and others who attended open meetings, developed survey questions related to municipal service delivery and aspirational goals. NCPP worked with this committee to hone citizen ideas into usable questions and conducted a volunteer-driven, community-wide survey of citizen perceptions of Montclair.
- Analyzed municipal department objectives based on the aspirational goals, and refined indicators for performance reporting.
- Analyzed objectives for each municipal department. Objectives that related to internal administrative processes and one-time projects were stripped away, leading to focused lists of between 8 and 10 performance indicators for each aspirational goal.
- Established a citizen advisory committee on performance measurement.
- Helped create an advisory committee in the township to institutionalize this process and insure that performance measurement and citizen involvement remain a priority for the township.

Written by Kathe Callahan. She is assistant professor at Rutgers University-Newark. Reprinted with permission from the PA TIMES, monthly newspaper of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org.



Dayton, Ohio has a long established system of citizen participation through seven Priority Boards. The Dayton project had two overarching objectives. The first was to facilitate the selection of Quality of Life Indicators by seven Priority Boards, ensure the initial production of the indicators and institutionalize their annual publication within the City of Dayton Planning Department. The second was to engage in a Priority Board reform process and development of a set of Citizen Participation indicators to assess the degree of citizen participation in the life of neighborhoods and Priority Boards.

The project was conceived with the support of the Priority Boards to promote citizen participation in an effort to influence government policy and neighborhood life. Dayton's seven Priority Boards chose a set of Quality of Life Indicators to serve as goals and as a statistical backdrop for the strategic planning that each board undertook as part of the "CitiPlan 2020" strategic plan. The Sloan-funded project focused on the development, production and institutionalization of six sets of Quality of Life Indicators:

- Economic Development
- Community Development
- Youth, Education and Human Services
- Open Space and Quality of Life
- Downtown
- City Services

The City Planning Board, the Association Chairs and representatives of the more disenfranchised communities established a committee of experts, practitioners and citizens. Each Priority Board in turn formed advisory groups comprised of a cross-section of citizens.

The Dayton project, however, did not limit its focus to performance indicators relevant to municipal departments. The project also included the city's school system.

Initially, the project encountered some obstacles. This included the difficulty of securing data. The fragmentation and unreliability of the existing information system was compounded by an exodus of some citizens, who had joined the Priority Boards only to leave in frustration as they came to believe the Boards were ineffectual in representing their interests. Yet Dayton attributed the project's overall success to the following:

- Active cooperation of the City Planning Department
- Buy-in and participation of the Priority Boards, including extensive hours of citizen volunteer time, strong political ties, strong group process skills, and strong quantitative data analysis and management skills
- Good political ties by a portion of the project team
- Good group process skills
- Strong quantitative data analysis and management skills

Lessons from Dayton, Ohio

At least four of the seven Priority Boards have since realized immediate benefits using the strategic planning process. For example, the Northeast Priority Board continues with a major initiative to close junkyards that blemish the community. In the Southeast Priority Board, there is a strong initiative underway to provide some additional community support for public schools. The Northwest Priority Board has initiated a tutoring program designed to address the after-school and youth crime problems. Another Priority Board has established its own campaign to enhance the community's general appearance.

The true long-term benefit, however, of combining citizen-driven strategic planning with performance measurement is the promise of strengthened citizen participation organizations. As the Priority Boards move forward within the context of a strategic plan with concrete timetables and periodic measures to remind them of their progress, the chances of retaining and recruiting additional citizens are improved.

Any community considering this process should first gain the support and commitment of three key groups: first, an initial commitment of cooperation by the city government; second, a citizen group that has some authority in the community; and finally, academic assistance with two different skill sets—one involving design and facilitation of public consultative services, and the other involving sophisticated data manipulation and geographic information system capabilities. Although it may be difficult to find this combination of skills within the same organization, a team must typically be comprised of partners with these specific competencies.

Written by G. L. A. Harris. She obtained her doctoral degree in Public Administration from Rutgers University-Newark. Reprinted with permission from the PA TIMES, monthly newspaper of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org.



Community Benchmarks Program:

In June 1996, the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University formally established the Community Benchmarks Program (CBP) as part of the Alan K. Campbell Public Affairs Institute. The mission of the CBP is to collect and disseminate information that describes community conditions, encourages citizen participation, fosters civic discourse and provide a basis whereby the public, private, and non-profit sectors can improve the quality of life within Onondaga County.

Onondaga County, on which the project is based, consists of nineteen towns, fifteen villages, and the City of Syracuse. A Mayor and a Common Council govern the City, while a Town Supervisor and a Town Board govern the Towns. What follows are the results of a series of studies conducted by the CBP. Four studies were undertaken during an eighteen-month period. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation awarded the Maxwell School a three-year grant totaling \$579,000. During this period, the benchmarking criteria were revised to assess local government performance in the following five areas:

- Crime Control
- Fire Protection
- Parks: Safety and Maintenance
- Solid Waste Collection
- Street Condition: Maintenance and Snow Removal

It is difficult to discern whether the responses of the citizens during the initial contact reflected their true perceptions of local government. What became apparent during this exercise was that most of the measures selected by the researchers were of little interest to the citizens. Regarding six predetermined measures, interest was expressed in only police services.

Background indicators provide socioeconomic information pertaining to each of the twenty municipalities. They should be considered when determining the appropriate level of performance for each governing body. Data for twelve background indicators was taken from the U.S. Bureau of Census. Qualitative indicators identify the exemplars municipal officials should strive to meet. Each indicator establishes a clear level or type of performance for local municipalities. For the purpose of this study, qualitative indicators were confined to types of goal-related activities and were used as tools to improve performance. Two examples are the use of customer surveys and clearly written guidelines that are readily available to the public. Data for these indicators came from the municipal surveys. The total number of qualitative indicators was nineteen. Finally, quantitative indicators offer information on the amount and type of activity, in addition to the resources required to support an activity. Citizens and officials in each municipality can use the information to compare, over time, their respective municipalities' historic records, or to contrast their municipalities with others. All but two indicators emanate from the municipal survey. The two indicators are: (1) assessment error/coefficient of dispersion and (2) assessor certification. The New York State Division of Real Property Services provided data for these indicators. The total number of indicators in this area was also nineteen.

The studies demonstrate the use of benchmarking through a presentation of qualitative and quantitative indicators and overall municipal grades. These two areas were chosen as demonstration studies because the comprehensive set of indicators was developed for each, and reliable data were



Lessons from Syracuse, New York

collected. Municipal comparisons were then provided in the areas of: (1) clerk, (2) code enforcement, (3) financial management, (4) highways/streets, and (5) parks and recreation. These selected indicators for each of the five areas further serve as a framework to devise a more comprehensive list of measures.

The project's initial goal was revised to produce an annual report that would compare government performance in the five areas and publish them after the first year. Following a June 1997 meeting convened by Sloan, it was decided to explore a variety of strategies to develop an approach that would use benchmarks to improve government services in a way that was comprehensible and supported by stakeholders. Customer surveys were used for select areas. The goal of using benchmarking for community problem-solving as the focal point of the project was postponed in order to concentrate on improving government performance. A dual approach was adopted by working with government officials in a total quality management framework, while involving the media and the public in certain instances as a way to pressure government for better performance. Data on benchmarks was collected for all of the towns in the county.

Lessons learned -The first disappointment encountered had to do with the results of the Citizens' Survey, which indicated high levels of satisfaction in the five government service areas and extremely small variations across different geographical areas. While these results were viewed positively by the Mayor's office, critics believed them to be a whitewash. To CBP, the results were an indication that little had been done to measure that which could have served as a catalyst to improve government performance, either directly or through the pressure of stakeholders. It appeared to represent a lack of any real knowledge of government services by citizens.

CBP learned that relating community perceptions through general public surveys on performance measures is difficult, if not impossible. It makes little sense to ask people how government is doing in the five general areas, as most people do not directly use, for example, fire and police services. Even for those services citizens use regularly, such as garbage collection, the public is unlikely to have a viewpoint regarding such services. The conclusion is that there is a role for citizen surveys, but only with respect to individuals who are direct clients of specific services. This could include applicants for zoning permits, or individuals who have called their police or fire departments for service. It seemed as though focus group discussions, similar to those conducted by the Fund for the City of New York, also a Sloan Foundation recipient, might have been a viable approach. It is one, however, that CBP had chosen not to follow given resource constraints.

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Community
Benchmarks
Program



State and Local Government Performance Reporting:

During 1999, researchers from the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) visited twenty-six state and local governments to determine the depth and breadth of actual use of performance measures by these governments for budgeting, management, and reporting; the effect of their use; and the extent to which governments are ensuring the relevance and reliability of performance measures. Through a comprehensive series of in-depth interviews, information was gathered about the reasons those governments are using performance measures, how they are being used, the degree to which they are being reported to citizens and other users, their effects, and what changes in the use of performance measurement those interviewed believe would improve their effectiveness. The overviews of the case studies below are just a small sample of the twenty-six cases that were researched.

State of Arizona

The primary focus of the performance measurement movement in the State of Arizona is on “what matters.” The direction has been primarily from within the executive branch with departments developing performance measures and the Governor focusing on key “themes” of government. Legislative use of performance measures is just beginning and expected to expand during the 2000-2001 budget cycle. There are a number of citizen groups that are active in the state. Although there are no clear indication that these citizen groups helped choose the performance measures that are used, their interest in the government and its programs certainly helped identify areas of concern to the agencies. Although legislation was passed in 1993 and subsequent years, the first test of performance measures comes in the 1999-2001 biennium budget cycle. Agencies have been using performance measures for many years, many before the 1993 required use. Because of the length of time, approximately seven years from formally requiring the use of performance measures and the use of performance measures in the budget cycle, agencies, in general, realize the management purposes for using performance measures. Many agencies are using performance measures to improve “what matters.”

City of Austin, Texas

The government of the City of Austin is in the midst of implementing a system of performance management designed to build on prior performance measurement, performance auditing, and program budgeting experiences, and strengthen performance management by making it more results oriented and systemic. The systemic nature of this citywide performance management initiative starts with departmental business plans in which departments define their programs, desired results, and related program goals and performance indicators. All employees’ individual performance evaluations are also intended to be linked to relevant department and program goals and performance indicators, to align goals and performance throughout the organization, down to the point of service delivery to the public. The program performance indicators are also included in department budgets, creating the policy and resource link to the business plans. Performance reporting and performance auditing are also an important part of the system, creating the accountability link and a feedback link for performance improvement.

State of Texas

The State of Texas is an excellent example of a state government that has effectively institutionalized the use of performance measures. Performance measures have been used for more than twenty years, and the most notable improvements have been the legislative requirements for including performance measures in the printed budget beginning in 1991 and the actual use of performance measures in the budget allocation process. This most recent initiative has survived changes in the executive administration and appears to be thoroughly institutionalized in the state government.

Lessons from the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB)

It is evident that the state of Texas is serious about performance measurement. It has invested in this effort through refocusing energies and reorganizing around performance measures. There have been no new funds appropriated for this effort, with the price being shouldered by each agency and department. While it appears that this effort will continue to evolve, there are important linkages expected between performance and appropriations, which are expected to materialize in the next biennium.

State of Oregon

This case study is of the State of Oregon, which is best known in the field of performance measurement for its Oregon Benchmarks, a comprehensive set of indicators of various societal attributes identified as being important to the well-being of citizens and businesses in the State of Oregon. The site visit and interviews for this case study were done jointly with researchers from the Urban Institute's project on state efforts to encourage use of performance measurement. However, these benchmarks grew out of a statewide planning initiative of the 1980s called Oregon Shines. Because of the broad nature of these benchmarks and because they were developed without concern for the programs and responsibilities of the state government, a lengthy process has followed in developing methods to use Oregon Benchmarks within the state government to provide strategic direction for its programs and to monitor progress in achieving desired results. Oregon provides an excellent example of the difficulty of trying to link government services to broader, society-wide issues and concerns.

City of Portland, Oregon

The City of Portland, Oregon, has several systems that incorporate use of performance measures for decision making, strategic planning and performance improvement, and accountability and communication. These systems include the Portland-Multnomah Benchmarks and Oregon Benchmarks; strategic planning; the annual budget; departmental use of performance measures; performance audits by the City Auditor; and the City's *Service Efforts and Accomplishments (SEA) Report*, which incorporates an annual citizen survey as well as performance reports on major city programs. The *SEA Report* began in 1988, when the Audit Services Division was authorized to pursue experimentation with Service Efforts and Accomplishments reporting (Tracy and Jean, 1993). In 1991, the Portland Auditor's office concluded a feasibility study on SEA reporting (Office of the City Auditor, April 1991), and the *SEA Report* has been annually produced since that time. Those interviewed for the case study report that despite the number of measurement activities, the measurement systems and processes are not necessarily related. The City is arguably best known for the *SEA Report*, since Portland has been producing the *SEA Report* for a longer period of time than any other jurisdiction, and for the Portland-Multnomah Benchmarks, which have received extensive national coverage. It is on the basis of the SEA Report and the Benchmarks that Portland stakes its reputation as a hotbed for accountability related activities.

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Citizen-Initiated Performance Assessment:

In 2001, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funded a three-year project called “Citizen-Initiated Performance Assessment” (CIPA) in Iowa, which engages citizens, city council members and departmental staff to develop and use performance measures to evaluate public services. Thirty-two Iowa cities with populations above 10,000 were contacted initially. Eventually, the city councils, departmental staff and citizen representatives of nine cities (Burlington, Carroll, Clive, Des Moines, Indianola, Johnston, Marion, Marshalltown and Urbandale) made the commitment to the project.

The Iowa CIPA project differs from traditional performance measurement in three major respects. First, it emphasizes collaboration among citizens, elected officials and managers in developing performance measures to ensure political credibility and receptivity of the measures. Second, it emphasizes the citizen perspective in performance measurement, rather than the managerial perspective that often emphasizes input and cost-efficiency. Third, it emphasizes public dissemination of performance measurement results to hold government accountable.

In the first year of the CIPA project, each participating city formed a “citizen performance team.” Citizens from diverse backgrounds are the majority of the team. For example, the city of Des Moines asked representatives from neighborhood associations to participate. Some cities pursued public recruitment of citizens through newspaper announcement, city newsletters and the city cable TV. Many also recruited members from other citizen committees and community organizations. In addition to citizens, each performance team had one or two staff representatives and a city council member.

In the initial meetings, the performance team had a brief review of city government operations. Some cities also asked citizens to develop strategies to recruit additional members based on a city’s demography. Then the team selected one or two public services for performance measurement, usually based on fiscal significance, direct impact on citizens and current citizen concerns. The Iowa CIPA project currently covers police, fire and EMS, library, recreational center, street repairs, snow removal, public transportation, solid waste management, nuisance control, park and recreation services.

While each of the nine cities can decide its project progress, they generally adhere to the following model: In the first stage of the project, the citizen performance team identifies the “critical elements” of a selected public service. For example, for nuisance control, some of the critical elements are response time, effectiveness in resolving service requests and effectiveness in public reporting of departmental actions. For the police, the critical elements include response time, professionalism in interaction with citizens, competency and effectiveness in investigation, sufficiency of patrol and legal compliance of officers.

Based on the critical elements, the performance team develops measures and evaluates them. Among evaluation criteria, usefulness and understandability to the public are most important as the measures are developed for public reporting.



Lessons from Iowa

In the second stage of CIPA, city departments develop necessary instruments, such as citizen or user surveys, to collect performance data. At the same time, citizens help collect some performance data, report the project progress to the city council and develop strategies to engage the general public more in the project.

Finally, the performance measurement results are reported to the performance team, the city council and the general public. Public input is solicited to improve performance. City departments then integrate the results in strategic planning, performance-based budgeting and activity-based management of service operations.

The Iowa CIPA project is currently in its second stage. While it may be premature to conclude any long-term impact of the project, several lessons have been learned. First, CIPA helps officials focus on outcome measures and citizen concerns. This enhances public accountability and the result-orientation of public services. Second, CIPA shows the importance of public communication. For example, a department should not ignore notification of citizens about the progress or results of departmental actions after a service request is filed. Third, managers should prepare for comparative performance measurement as many citizens are interested in knowing how well their city performs relative to others in the neighboring area. Fourth, many performance measures should be reported at the neighborhood level to enhance their relevancy to citizens. Finally, public reporting of performance measurement is important. Cities should consider the usage of technologies, such as the Internet, to do this cost-effectively.

Many cities have been collecting performance data for decades. CIPA is simply a change in perspective by managers and elected officials by engaging citizens so that the public can influence the bases on which government services are evaluated.

Written by Paul Coates and Alfred Tat-Kei Ho. ASPA members Paul Coates and Alfred Ho co-lead the Iowa project. Coates is the director of the state and local governments extension program and an associate professor of the public policy & administration program of the political science department at Iowa State University. Ho is an assistant professor of the same program. Reprinted with permission from the PA TIMES, monthly newspaper of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org.

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The Straphangers' Campaign represents a bold attempt to influence the accountability, accessibility and performance of local government on behalf of its citizens.

Through the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), the Straphangers Campaign received a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to “launch a new in-depth effort to measure the quality of the transit service.” The goal was to accurately report on the condition of the City’s transit system and to draw media, public and governmental attention to the need to continue to invest in transit.

By the mid 1990s, ridership had plummeted to its lowest level since 1917. Many businesses cited poor transportation as the main reason for relocating from New York City. An editorial in the New York Times on October 5, 1995 seemed to summarize the sentiment at the time: “Then the near-ruin of local mass transit was taken as a metaphor for the decline and fall of the City itself. But New York did not fall, and thanks to a \$20 billion rebuilding plan, the subways got better. Now, it seems the battle must be fought all over again.”

In their application to the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the NYPRIG wrote, “It is to hold the Transit Authority accountable by a sophisticated range of measures – and to communicate that information to the public in lively and meaningful ways.”

The Straphangers Campaign has developed a measure of how riders rate their subway lines. The Straphangers Campaign has also collected data from transit officials and all data is presented in a clear and accessible format. A panel of thirty-eight transit experts also completed questionnaires by prioritizing certain aspects of the subway and bus service. This information was compiled for use in two sets of reports: one based on a review of official transit statistics and the other, based on NYPIRG’s own field studies.

The first report under this Sloan project was released in 1997, profiling New York City’s twenty major subway lines on six key official measures of service, including the amount of scheduled service, the chance of getting a seat during the most congested periods, the cleanliness of the cars and the adequacy of the announcements. Another twenty-one page report highlighted the state of the bus system. These two sets of reports represented the most comprehensive review by any non-governmental organization of the performance of a major public transportation system. They achieved two goals. First, they provided a solid baseline for comparing subway service in the future. And, second, they gave riders, communities and officials information they would need to press the transit authority for better service.

The Straphangers Campaign’s work generated substantial media coverage. In particular, the comparative value assigned to each of the twenty subway lines evaluated enabled riders to make decisions about those lines that they frequented, i.e, what percentage of the full value of a token had been achieved. According to the 1998 report, riders just wanted to know how their lines performed. Do their trains break down more or less often than the average for New York City subways? Is there

Lessons from Transit in New York City

a better or worse chance of getting a seat? How clean are the subway cars? Do the trains come more or less often? Do the trains arrive irregularly or with few gaps in service? How good or bad are the announcements?

Recently, the Straphangers Campaign concluded the following about the subway system:

- Subway cars grew dirtier and announcements poorer. The findings on announcements and dirt mirror independent surveys by the Straphangers Campaign
- There was a slightly greater chance of getting a seat during rush hour. However, the report probably underestimated the impact of recent increases in ridership.
- Car breakdowns occurred less often. However, on a majority of lines, car breakdowns increased, although any improvement to the system was due to large improvements on several lines.
- There were great disparities in how subway lines performed as measured in response to questions posed by riders

Overall, the Straphangers Campaign has found that riders simply want short waits, regular and reliable service, a chance for a seat, a clean subway car and clear announcements.

Although the Straphangers Campaign encountered a number of obstacles, including limited access to transit officials, they stepped up efforts to bring “real time” information to the public. An interactive website has also been established.

Written by G.L.A. Harris and Marc Holzer. For more information, visit the Straphangers website at www.straphangers.org. Reprinted with permission from the PA TIMES, monthly newspaper of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org.

The graphic features a grid of 28 circular icons representing subway lines: 1/9, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, J/2, M, N, Q, Q, L, R, V, W, and a train icon. To the right of the grid is the text "Citizen-Driven Government Performance" and the NYPIRG's Straphangers Campaign logo. At the bottom is the URL www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~ncpp/curriculum.

Street Smoothness Project:

The Fund for the City of New York, a non-partisan and independent operating foundation established in 1968, strives to improve the performance of local government and the quality of life for citizens in New York City. Through its Center on Municipal Government Performance (CMGP), established in 1995 as the first grantee of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's National Assessment of Government Performance Program, the organization uses new technologies and traditional market research techniques to create quantifiable performance measurements based on the public's concerns and experiences. This effort provides reliable, non-partisan and objective information about the effectiveness of the city.

CMGP's initial objective was to focus on a few services of critical importance to citizens, not try to create and verify new indicators for the entire City of New York. In particular, the Fund undertook the street smoothness project for six reasons. First, everyone experiences the streets. Second, this study would provide data for the public and government to use in monitoring service changes. Third, the public's perspective is needed from the user's standpoint. Fourth, bumpy and uneven streets can precipitate accidents, as evidenced by the 411 settlements and judgments for roadway related claims totaling more than \$16 million, made by the city in the 1996 fiscal year alone. Fifth, smoother streets mean less fatigued drivers and consequently less accidents. Finally, smoother streets extend the life of vehicles, including those owned by the city.

As its first priority, the Fund listened to citizens of the city. A total of 15 focus groups, comprised of 151 people from twenty-nine different communities and drawn from the five boroughs of the city, were interviewed. The respondents represented a cross-section of racial and ethnic groups as well as of socioeconomic status, in order to reflect the diversity of the city's citizens. As users of the streets, the public was dissatisfied based largely on their own experiences and/or media hearsay. They judged the condition of the streets and the quality of maintenance by the presence of potholes and bumpy streets, and what resulted from those conditions such as vehicle damage and palpable discomfort. Citizens' responses to four questions served as indicators in developing the measures for performance. The questions posed to participating citizens were as follows:

How do citizens determine a service is being delivered well?

Where do citizens get information about the way that services are delivered?

Is there a difference between the way people rate a service and the way government rates that service?

Is there a difference between the way people rate a service and the way they talk about or experience it?

The Fund's Street Smoothness project was the first of its kind in the country. The Fund used a "Profilometer" to consistently give reliable road roughness measures at variable speeds under typical

Lessons from the Fund for the City of New York

road conditions. The device uses laser technology to scan the streets' surface, counting and measuring every dip and rise encountered as an indication of such problems as potholes, bumps, misaligned utility covers, uneven repairs and more. The data is then converted into a City Roughness Index.

The Street Smoothness project has led to a number of immediate and long-term benefits. This includes: introduction of a new performance measure considered critical by the public; assessment of street conditions by shifting from the exclusive perspective of government engineers to that of the public as everyday users; non-judgmental and purely objective measurement of street profiles; and the government and public can now secure easy-to-understand information about the rideability of city streets.

Furthermore, what is new and different about this study is that it identified what the public considers to be the indicators of good road conditions and maintenance for city streets: smoothness and lack of severe jolts. It also demonstrates that it is feasible to measure the smoothness of city streets. This study will then serve as a baseline for future research and will be equally helpful to other cities wanting to assess their performance on street maintenance. If this method is adopted elsewhere, it will be possible to conduct intercity comparisons which would prove valuable to all municipal transportation officials and to the public in forming realistic expectations of government performance.

Written by G.L.A. Harris and Marc Holzer. Reprinted with permission from the PA TIMES, monthly newspaper of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org.



The Connecticut Policy and Economic Council (CPEC) is an independent, nonpartisan and not-for-profit organization. It provides information and communication resources to help citizens, community leaders, civic organizations and local governments set priorities and improve government performance. CPEC's initiatives increase the capacity of citizens to be involved in public decision-making. Originally founded in 1942 as a center for public policy research and analysis, CPEC is now engaged in fostering local school and government excellence and accountability.

The City Scan project deploys the latest technology—handheld computers, database applications, mapping software, digital imaging and web development—for community priority-setting and accountability. The Hartford-based project has been extended to other cities and now includes:

- Citizen surveys
- Community-specific Parents Guide to Local Schools
- Information for involved parents and community leaders, which includes the CPEC web site, best practices reports, issue briefs and data-at-a-glance pamphlets
- Community goal setting, a facilitation process for school improvement

Funded in part by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund and with support and assistance from the Microsoft Corporation, City Scan puts state-of-the-art technology in the hands of ordinary citizens and is considered a national model for citizen-based assessments of the performance of city government. The project is likely to set the standard for similar projects across the country.

CPEC initiated City Scan to improve communication between the residents of Hartford (especially those in the low income bracket) and City Hall. The organization wanted to provide a way for Hartford residents to identify and prioritize problems such as potholes, or drug paraphernalia in parks, in order to pressure the City to take action. No single service was the focus. Rather, 35 street-level, visible conditions such as graffiti, abandoned houses, conditions of playing fields in public parks and others were of priority concern.

A major premise for the project was to provide tools for neighborhood groups and others to use as accountability measures for local officials.

Neighborhood associations determined which measures they wanted to focus upon. Conditions had to be visible to the naked eye from the street, sidewalk or within public parks. Based on the Onsite Mobile Inspection created by the River Run Software Group, City Scan provides an efficient, cost-effective means for activists to take an inventory of grassroots problems, thereby enabling government to act quickly and improve community life.

Armed with handheld computers, custom-designed software and digital cameras, a group of Hartford high school students conducted a sophisticated, high-tech summer survey of Hartford's parks. They documented conditions and provided the City with a first-of-its-kind resource for municipal government.

Lessons from Hartford, Connecticut

Obstacles encountered throughout the project have included the following:

- Local governments were disinterested in participating, which was known from the beginning.
- Community leaders had limited time to collect data and meet with neighborhood groups.

Short-term and long-term benefits stemming from the City Scan project are as follows:

- The high school students who received training and served as data collectors now view their neighborhoods differently.
- Neighborhood groups have better data documenting local conditions to be used for accountability, as well as internally for priority setting.
- Other non-profit groups have been co-opted to assume the responsibility for some of the conditions, i.e., graffiti clean-up is now done by the Hartford Proud and Beautiful group.
- Working relationships have been forged between hardware and software vendors and the Hartford Public High School Technology Academy.

One lesson learned is that prior to creating the prototype software, it is important to invest more time in devising database architecture. A second lesson learned is that given local government's disinterest in participating in such projects, citizens must work around them. They can utilize the resources of the community by conducting the data collection with the community instead of with local government and then sharing the information with anyone who is interested, i.e., park maintenance supervisors and appointed commissions. Then, they can transmit tabulated information to officials with whom they are unable to meet. A third lesson learned, as implemented in this project, is to employ the resources of local academic institutions as partners by involving students in data collection. Finally, it is recommended that citizen groups build local-level champions who can get the project on their regular meeting agendas.

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Partnerships Key to Achieving Results:

In 1999, the Worcester, Massachusetts, Municipal Research Bureau received a three-year planning grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to:

- Connect government goals to community results
- Produce a comprehensive municipal data inventory
- Utilize benchmarking data to help the City achieve its goals

Maximizing community involvement was the first step in the planning efforts. Early in the grant period, three advisory groups were assembled to support community leaders and neighborhood representatives who had contributed to the development of preliminary performance measures, all of which were based upon the City's strategic plan. These representatives from Worcester's neighborhood associations and community development corporations played a key role in helping to refine the performance measures, developed accurate maps of Worcester's neighborhoods and participated in public forums which focused upon developing strategies for revitalizing Worcester's neighborhoods.

The Research Bureau then turned its attention to a systematic review of the performance measures literature, and visited and consulted with individuals who have been engaged in other Sloan Foundation citizen-driven performance projects. During these visits, the Research Bureau learned about each project and received feedback and suggestions regarding their performance measures.

Partnerships have also been developed with community leaders in Hartford, CT; Providence, RI; and Springfield, MA, cities similar in population to Worcester. The goal was to encourage their continued participation in these projects so that all four cities could compare their performance on issues of common concern.

Other partnerships were established with the United Way of Central Massachusetts and the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, which have been participating in a complimentary effort designed to measure community health in Central Massachusetts. In exchange for some financial support, the Research Bureau agreed to collect social, economic and public health data for Worcester and approximately 30 nearby towns. The indicators will include each community's income and occupational makeup, type and availability of housing, rate of infant mortality, teen pregnancy and prevalence of infectious diseases. These foundations will now have information to make informed decisions regarding community needs and to determine which projects to support. Besides adding a regional dimension to the project, the Research Bureau can now compare Worcester's performance to that of its neighbors. This will provide additional funding and help ensure that the project continues well beyond the three-year grant period.

In order to measure municipal performance at both the citywide and neighborhood levels, the Research Bureau worked extensively with officials from the City's Office of Planning and Community Development and the Worcester Police Department, as well as neighborhood advisory groups to develop maps defining the City's neighborhoods.

Indicators were designed to assess progress towards achieving the five goals contained within the City's strategic plan (developed in 1994 by citizens appointed by the city manager):

The Economic Development goal identifies growth in the City's tax base and job creation as its two primary objectives. Measures are:

- Growth of commercial and residential tax base
- Municipal Tax Rate
- User-Friendliness of Business Permitting Process
- Downtown Commercial Property Vacancy Rate
- Job Growth
- Amount of Private Investment
- Abandoned and Distressed Property

Lessons from Worcester, Massachusetts

Performance indicators for the Public Safety goal:

- Crime Rate and Clearance Rate by Type of Crime
- Police Community Relations
- Allegations of Police Misconduct

Emergency Services Response Times Municipal Services indicators are:

- Citizen Satisfaction with the delivery of services
- Snow Clearance Effectiveness
- Citizen Involvement
- Library Usage
- Physical Condition of Neighborhoods
- Effectiveness and Cost Efficiency of Municipal Services

The indicators for the Education goal are:

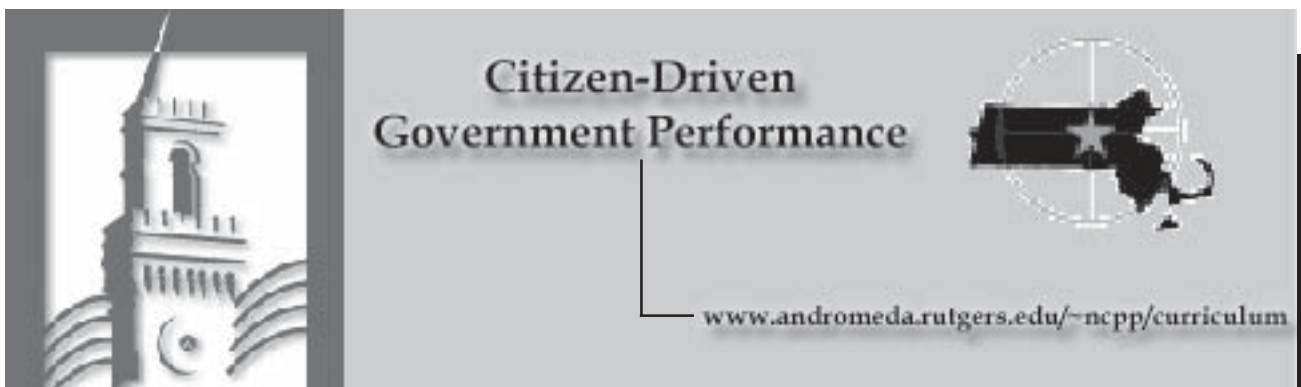
- Level of Parent Involvement in Public Schools
- Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Scores
- Attendance and Dropout Rates
- Post-Graduate Placement
- Local Employer Satisfaction with Worcester Public Schools
- Student Mobility

The following indicators focus on problems in the community reflecting the need for Youth Services:

- Presence of “At Risk Youth”
- Teen Pregnancy Rate
- Infant Mortality Rate
- Extent of Juvenile Crime

Concurrently with the development and refinement of performance measures, the Research Bureau engaged in identifying and developing data collection strategies and methods designed to generate reliable performance measurement data. Many of these performance indicators were readily available from federal, state, and municipal agencies. In addition, the Research Bureau works with each municipal department to develop mechanisms to ensure that self-reported data is accurate and collected in the same manner each year.

Written by Laura Steele and Marc Holzer. Reprinted with permission from the PA TIMES, monthly newspaper of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org.



Any parent will tell you that evaluating public schools is tricky.

Everyone knows that tests scores don't tell the whole story, but statistics are usually the only information made public about a school.

Insideschools.org, an online guide to New York City public schools sponsored by Advocates for Children of New York, was created with a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to help parents assess the performance of their schools. The site allows parents to find a school, learn about their legal rights, ask for advice or send complaints directly to a school. In its "find a school" section, Inside schools offers profiles of 1,200

New York City public schools with test scores, graduation rates, enrollment, attendance, and ethnic breakdown. Well beyond simple statistics, it also has "reviews" or descriptions of schools based on our school visits and interviews with hundreds of parents. Our eight reporters have visited 500 schools and plan to visit all 1,200 in the coming years.

We also invite parents to bring their comments to the "post a comment" section of the site. This feature serves as a sort of electronic town hall meeting where citizens— parents, students, teachers and community members— come together to share information about their experience in a particular school, its curriculum, or its leadership.

"Measuring success in public schools is more complex than measuring the success of other city agencies," said project director Clara Hemphill, a former Newsday reporter and author of New York City's Best Public Elementary Schools. "If trains run on time and if crime goes down, everyone agrees the MTA and the police are doing their job well in those areas. But the mandate of public education is harder to quantify: schools are meant to assimilate immigrants, to prepare children to be citizens in a democracy, and to ready students for a changing workplace— tasks that are impossible to measure according to a single number such as a school's performance on standardized tests."

When we evaluate a school for the site, we look for a school's general tone and its undertones, its stand-out teachers or lackluster programs. By highlighting a good program in a troubled school or noting a stumbling block in an otherwise stellar school, the site helps parents make informed decisions for their children, and helps keep schools accountable for the teaching and learning that takes place inside their walls.

The site also provides a forum of debate for how schools should be judged— with commentaries from parents and teachers on how their schools help children of different races get along, or teach children with disabilities, or guide new immigrants. We act as the watchdog to the school system, analyzing the performance indicators compiled by the city and state and identifying weaknesses in their assessment— with a news story on problems in the scoring of the state reading test for 4th graders, for example, or the faulty reporting by the city of the alternative high schools' performance on Regents' exams.

Lessons from New York City

We want citizens to know what is going on inside each and every New York City public school: to shed light on schools that are failing, and highlight those that are succeeding. By gathering information from our school visits and conversations with parents, and synthesizing it with outside indicators such as test scores, Inside schools has created a resource for public school parents unmatched in New York City, or nationally. By offering such a wealth of information, and monitoring the school system with a careful eye, Inside schools is helping to hold schools accountable their students, and federal, state, and city governments accountable for their schools.

Written by Deborah Apsel. She is a reporter for Insideschools.org Reprinted with permission from the PA TIMES, monthly newspaper of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), www.aspanet.org.



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