

Maximizing the Potential of Citizen Survey Data in the City of Kansas City, Missouri

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In the field of local government performance measurement, it can be challenging to identify good outcome-oriented performance indicators for many service areas. Since the ultimate goal of many municipality and county-services is to serve residents, citizen surveys can play a crucial role in measuring service outcomes. However, even administering a survey does not guarantee that you are truly utilizing the data to assess performance. Over the past few years, the city of Kansas City, Missouri, has evolved its approach toward the citizen survey to extend relevance and maximize data usage; this journey is shared below.

Past: Setting a standard

Kansas City has a long history of surveying its residents, dating back nearly two decades. Undoubtedly, this strong tradition has made the city's current focus on the survey possible, since the city has consistently prioritized survey funding, revised its instrument and methodology, and built a strong relationship with its survey contractor (ETC Institute).

From the mid-2000s, the City Auditor's Office had overseen the survey administration and reported out on survey results. However, beginning in 2011, this responsibility was shifted to the City Manager's Office, in recognition of the development of a performance management program and the strong connection to citizen surveys. While the impetus for this change was a desire to efficiently align duties (and allow the Auditor's Office to focus more attention on their primary responsibility of undertaking audits), over time the decision to connect the citizen survey with the performance management program has led to the survey's current central role.

Present: Making it actionable and raising the bar

Despite the annual issuance of high-quality citizen survey reports, in recent years the city's elected officials and staff did not deeply engage with the survey results. The

CASE PROFILE

Kansas City, MO

Population:
463,202

Square Miles:
319

Median household income:
\$42,780

Form of government:
Council-manager

Citizens' Priorities for Streets/Infrastructure

Which TWO of the Street, Sidewalk, and Infrastructure Services listed do you think should receive the MOST EMPHASIS from the City over the next two years?

Maintenance Category	Importance	Satisfaction	Rank
Maintenance of city streets	48%	27%	1
Snow removal on residential streets during the past 12 months	24%	40%	2
Condition of sidewalks in the city	19%	24%	3
Maintenance of streets in YOUR neighborhood	17%	40%	4
Condition of sidewalks in YOUR neighborhood	15%	37%	5
Accessibility of city streets, sidewalks, and buildings for people with disabilities	16%	44%	6
Snow removal on major city streets during the past 12 months	15%	59%	7
Adequacy of city street lighting	10%	62%	8
Maintenance of street signs/traffic signals	8%	55%	9

Citizens are asked to select their highest priorities for improvement in addition to providing their satisfaction rating. The resulting "importance" can be evaluated with the inverse of the "satisfaction" to produce a ranked list of citizen priorities.

annual report was treated as a stand-alone item, and not integrated into other strategic planning efforts or discussion throughout the year. Additionally, among some staff there was a perception that the wording of certain survey questions was not reflective of city operations, rendering the data less relevant to them. The Office of Performance Management relied on its close working relationships with department staff to develop a collaborative survey instrument revision process, which ensured that the questions met staff's needs. Due to this process, several new sections were added to the survey in order to delve into city service areas that had previously had minimal representation on the survey, such as the airport, health department, and 311 call center. At the same time, performance management staff began integrating citizen survey data into weekly performance management meetings with the city manager and department staff. Because Kansas City's citizen survey is administered quarterly (with the results aggregated into an annual year-end report), there was an opportunity to share new data throughout the year. This citizen survey data was shown alongside other data, including service delivery and customer service measurements, and used to form hypotheses and suggest improvement opportunities. As department staff began to see that the survey data was omnipresent and also directly related to their departments' outputs, they began to embrace the survey data and the opportunity that it provided to tell their story and identify needs. For example, staff working on street maintenance issues could utilize the citizen survey data to demonstrate the high priority that residents place on street infrastructure. Likewise, parks and recreation staff could point to improvements in citizen survey data to show the results of their communications efforts.

Presenting the citizen survey data in this venue allowed everyone to see it in a different light – rather than a stand-alone yearly report, it was part of a performance management model that focused on modifying service delivery as well as communication in order to modify resident perception. Additionally, the use of the data in an internal-facing (nonpublic) meeting removed the component of public scrutiny and allowed for honest dialogue about the high and low points of the data.

At the same time, as these efforts were building trust and interest in the citizen survey data within the city, performance management staff wanted to translate this perspective of the survey to the outside world, including residents, the media, and other public and private stakeholders. The survey results continued to be aggregated on a yearly basis and presented to elected officials and the public, but performance management staff also extended this presentation to other civic groups to help demonstrate the relevance and importance of the survey data to the community. In 2013, in partnership with communications staff, a media



City employees formed a “+5” in recognition of gains that the city made with citizen satisfaction. Photo taken from the roof of City Hall. (July 2013)

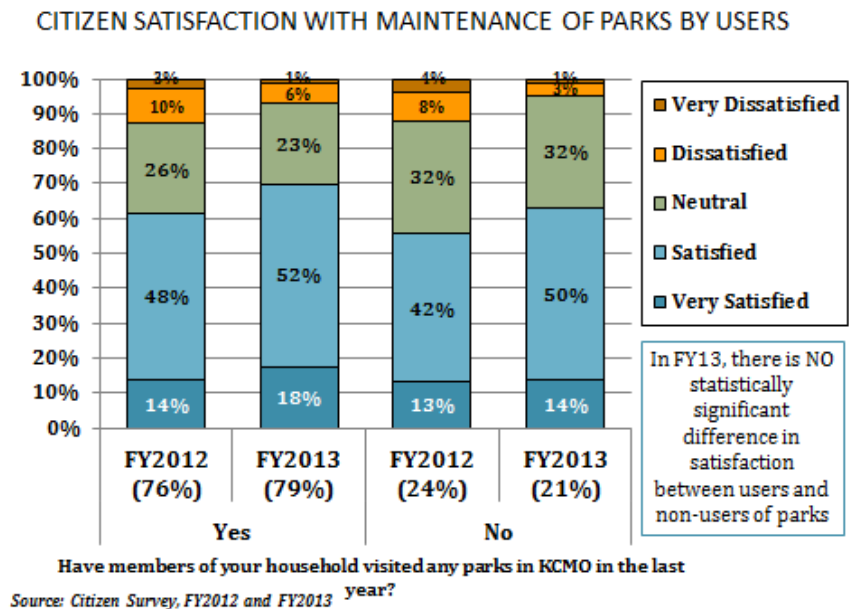
campaign was planned titled “High Five” to celebrate the 5 percent improvement in satisfaction with Kansas City as an “excellent” or “good” place to live. The “High Five” campaign involved a media event in which employees posed on the lawn in the shape of a “+5,” as viewed from the city hall roof by the mayor and city manager; it was accompanied by a micro-website and an email blast to employees thanking them for their work in accomplishing this goal. This effort raised the visibility of the citizen survey data and also extended its relevance to employee appreciation.

Future: Extending its use

Although Kansas City has made some fundamental changes in its use of and approach toward its citizen survey over the last few years, there is an ongoing desire to dig even deeper into this rich data source and make the most of it. As discussed above, in weekly performance management meetings the citizen survey data is often considered in tandem with other operational data. Performance management staff plans to take that a step further by actually layering the survey data with other data sets and applying statistical analysis to assess what impacts resident perception and priorities. In order to achieve this goal, the Office of Performance Management is working to develop partnerships with academic researchers who are interested in these questions on a larger scale, and would be willing to assist in the analysis.

These proposed partnerships additionally meet the city’s goal of extending the use and knowledge of its citizen survey data into the broader community. To continue to maximize the survey’s relevance, there is an ongoing focus on collaborative survey revisions to ensure the survey is producing data that is relevant to the city government and the civic community.

Citizen surveys generally help to expand the perspectives of local governments to include those outside of city hall. For Kansas City, it is fair to say that the citizen survey has opened up a world of possibilities for the future.



Kansas City uses “experiential” questions to assess differences in satisfaction between users and non-users of a service. This chart shows that non-users are now equally as satisfied with the parks service as users, indicating communication efforts to shape perception were successful.