

21st Century Community Focus:

Better Results by Linking Citizens, Government, and Performance Measurement

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Providing effective public services and improving our communities are challenges that cities and counties face as we move into the 21st century. These twin challenges are reflected in two important trends in local government management:

- An increasing need to measure performance and demonstrate results.
- A growing emphasis on community participation in policy making and problem solving.

Elected officials and public managers recognize that facilitating participation and focusing on outcomes or results increasingly will gain in importance in 21st-century governance. They also recognize that complex issues like crime and youth violence, neighborhood conditions, smart growth, and sustainable economic development will require more than government services alone to effect significant improvement.

Some communities have tied an emphasis on performance measurement with citizen participation to achieve the results that matter most to their citizens. And a national research team of the Minnesota-based Citizens League,

funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, has found that citizens and governments could be more effective in improving their communities by working together to identify important goals and to measure and manage performance.

This article summarizes what the team learned after reviewing more than 30 communities at the forefront of performance measurement and citizen involvement. Experience in these communities suggests strategies for other local government managers to use in leading their communities toward better results.

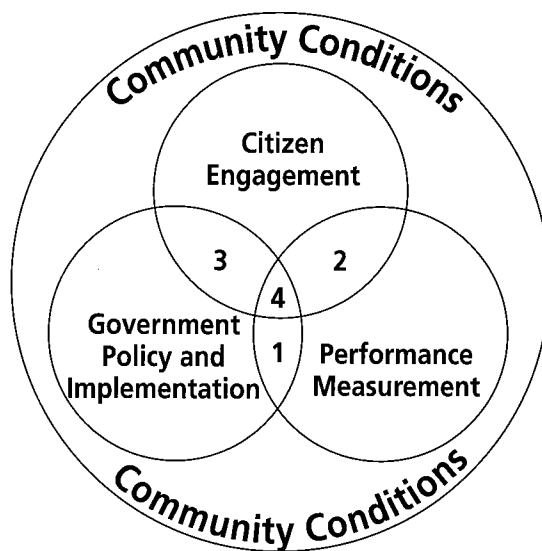
Effective Governance

Using the experiences of communities throughout the United States and other countries, the Citizens League team has developed a model to describe the relationships—and especially the linkages—among three core elements: performance measurement, citizen engagement, and government policy/implementation. Together, these elements can be leveraged to build effective community governance, a concept defined by the British Council on Governance as “the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority, and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and economic and social development. Governance is a broader notion than government. Governance involves interaction between these formal institutions and those of civil society.”

Both government and the citizenry play varied roles in affecting the larger environment of community conditions, and often both are crucial to achieving results. Community outcomes can be affected by a number of such important factors as how citizens are engaged and how they choose to act on issues, how performance is defined and measured, and how government develops and implements public policy. Figure 1 depicts the three main elements of this model and their linkages.

The three elements in the model may be defined in this way:

Figure 1. Model for Effective Governance



Citizen engagement refers to the involvement of citizens, using the term “citizens” in the broadest sense to include individuals, groups, nonprofit organizations, and even businesses (as corporate citizens).

Performance measurement means the development of indicators and collection of data to describe, report on, and analyze performance. Measurement can apply to government services or community conditions (e.g., physical or environmental conditions, public health and safety, or economic and social conditions) or to both.

Government policy and implementation refers to the development of public policy decisions about the issues government chooses to address, the strategies it employs, the resources it commits, and the actions it takes to carry out these decisions. This element encompasses the full cycle of planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating government operations.

Choices of Roles at the Local Level

Who takes the lead? There have been numerous examples both of government and of citizens taking the lead in setting goals, starting dialogue, stimulating

change, and measuring results. For example, *governments* may initiate community-based planning, as in Prince William County, Virginia, and Dayton, Ohio, or may create district-based citizen boards, as in Dayton and New York City. *Citizens and private organizations* may take the lead in catalyzing awareness by measuring performance and by shaping action, as in Seattle and Jacksonville, with government later joining the process. In California’s Silicon Valley, a joint government/private collaborative venture leads the way.

Government roles. Traditionally, local governments address community conditions by making policy decisions to expand, contract, or redesign municipal or county services, as constrained by local revenues and preferences as well as by state and federal requirements. However, governments also develop and implement policy by regulating, stimulating, or supporting private actions. Examples include modifying zoning to encourage sustainable development, organizing ways for citizens to volunteer in the community, and partnering with private organizations to invest in revitalizing depressed neighborhoods. These are but a few of the many ways in which government policy can leverage private resources to advance community outcomes.

Citizen roles. Citizens—especially if you include individuals, groups, and corporate citizens—can play many roles (as defined by Wray and Hauer in 1997). Citizens can be, for example:

- Government’s customers.
- Evaluators of public services.
- Coproducers of public services.
- Framers of neighborhood issues or community visions.
- Catalysts of community action.
- Residents who are simply disengaged from participation in public issues.

Citizens often play several roles at once, depending on the situation and on the importance that an issue holds for a person or group. Government must avoid the pitfall of defining citizen roles too narrowly. For instance, by viewing citizens as customers, governments can enhance service quality. Yet governments that view citizens *only* as customers will lose the tremendous leverage they could gain by engaging private individuals and organizations to act in concert with the locality to achieve community goals.

Linkages to Enhance Management and Build Effective Governance

Each of the three governance elements—citizen engagement, performance measurement, and government policy/implementation—is an important, accepted practice for bringing about effective government. These elements can be even more powerful, however, when they are aligned to achieve effective governance than when they are practiced separately.

In the view of the research team, the linkages among the elements offer the greatest opportunities to strengthen community governance. Communities at the forefront of measurement and engagement demonstrate many, richly varied examples of linkages in action. Ideally, a community will align all three elements (see Link 4, to come) in order

to leverage public and private resources and achieve measurable results that matter to citizens. Effectively linking any two elements, however, also can prove beneficial.

Link 1: Performance management by government. Many local governments attempt to link performance measurement to their processes for developing and implementing policy. For example, using performance measurement to enhance budgeting is strongly advocated by the Government Finance Officers of America. Three communities well known for their long commitment to using measurement to improve results are Sunnyvale, California; Phoenix, Arizona; and Charlotte, North Carolina, each with more than 25 years of performance measurement experience.

Charlotte began replacing its traditional management-by-objectives system in 1996 with a balanced scorecard approach to measurement. As described by Robert Kaplan in 1998, the scorecard is a method of translating strategy into action and measures five focus areas chosen by the council. Measurement now is linked to council priorities and gives the council a quick but comprehensive view of progress in strategic areas, making the measures more useful tools for effective policy making.

Link 2: Citizens engaged in measuring performance. Two of the best-known private, citizen-driven groups that have initiated performance measurement are Sustainable Seattle and the Jacksonville Community Council Incorporated (JCCI).

JCCI, a nonprofit organization, started a community indicators project in Jacksonville/Duval County, Florida, in 1985, including annual quality-of-life reports on indicators of education, the economy, the natural and social environments, public safety, health, and other issues. Citizens set the original strategic agenda, as citizen teams originally picked the indicators. Reports have been kept relevant over the years

through continuous citizen participation in obtaining and analyzing data, refining indicators, updating issues, and sustaining public dialogue to catalyze action on high-priority issues. The benefit of the indicators has been recognized by the city of Jacksonville (a consolidated government with Duval County): it has assumed a large portion of the costs of the indicators project in recent years.

Link 3: Citizens engaged in government policy and implementation. In the 1970s, many localities formed or recognized geographic, district-based citizen organizations and gave them formal government participation roles. These still exist in many U.S. communities, including New York City; Portland, Oregon; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Dayton, Ohio.

In Dayton, volunteer citizens serve on seven priority boards that participate in city affairs in numerous ways. For example, priority boards rank and channel neighborhood needs and improvement requests into the city’s budget process before the departments prepare their annual budget estimates. Each board has an administrative council of department staff members who work with citizens to coordinate service responses to neighborhood problems. Recently, Dayton used separate citizen working committees, including representatives from the seven priority boards, to develop a new city strategic plan.

Over the past three years, priority boards have worked with the University of Dayton, under a Sloan Foundation grant, to develop quality-of-life indicators. The boards’ success in using these indicators (their first major attempt, recently begun, involves developing strategic plans for each board’s district) could determine whether Dayton achieves “strategic alignment,” as described under the next heading.

Link 4: Strategic alignment: where is it happening? The Citizens League team has highlighted three places in the

Figure 2. Potential Benefits of Linkages

| Linkage | Situations in Which the Linkage Can Occur | Potential Benefits |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Performance management by government: the link between performance measurement and government policy/implementation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning (government-focused) • Planning services; setting service levels • Performance budgeting • Service efforts and accomplishments reporting; program evaluation • Managing for results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved focus and clarity about goals and intended results • Ability to manage and budget for results • Improved accountability • More effective and efficient services |
| <p>Citizens engaged in measuring performance: the link between citizen engagement and performance measurement</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to increase public attention and awareness • The work of groups that monitor and/or seek to change government performance • The work of groups that monitor and/or seek to change community conditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed strategy development and action by citizens • Improved potential for dialogue about performance/conditions • Improved ability to evaluate results |
| <p>Citizens engaged in government policy and implementation: the link between citizen engagement and government policy and implementation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning (community-focused) • Framing issues/options • Identifying citizen needs and preferences • Determining priorities for expenditures; setting service levels • Recommending and/or evaluating strategies and solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved focus and clarity about goals and intended results • Informed strategy development and action by government and citizens • More responsive services • Potential for increased public support • Potential for improved trust and confidence |
| <p>Strategic alignment: the integrated practice of citizen engagement, performance measurement, and government policy and implementation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any process arising from any of the situations described in 1, 2, or 3 in which citizens, government, and measurement play important roles • Cases of concerted action by government and citizens to address important issues and to measure and improve results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligned focus on achieving demonstrable results in issues that matter most to the community • All benefits described in 1, 2, and 3 |

United States that it believes have demonstrated “strategic alignment”: Prince William County, Virginia; the city of Portland and Multnomah County, Oregon; and the Silicon Valley region in California, as represented by Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network (JVSVN). The feature box entitled “Communities Illustrating Strategic Alignment” briefly describes these examples.

“Strategic alignment” in a community means the linking of all three elements already discussed: citizen engagement, performance measurement, and

government policy/implementation. The potential benefits of strategic alignment are considerable. Figure 2 lists situations in which linkages of all four types, including strategic alignment, may occur, itemizing the possible advantages of each type of link. By bringing measurement to the foreground through public engagement, the community focuses on issues and measures that really matter. Concerted action by government and citizens (including private organizations) makes for stronger solutions by leveraging public and pri-

vate resources. Performance measurement provides feedback on how well goals are being achieved and helps communities focus public and private resources on still better ways to achieve results.

Suggested components of a plan for increasing alignment in a community include:

- A vision, strategic plan, or strategic priorities accepted in the community and followed by government and others.

Communities Illustrating Strategic Alignment

Prince William County, Virginia, follows a systemic "governing for results" cycle that starts with citizen involvement in strategic planning. The county began its strategic planning process in the early 1990s, when it adopted a set of strategic goals, outcome indicators, and strategies to guide policy and resource allocation. By ordinance, the county must complete a major plan update every four years. It uses a variety of citizen involvement techniques to update the plan, including community outreach meetings, citizen surveys, citizen task forces, and public hearings to assist the governing body in developing its plan. Citizen priorities then "flow through" policy planning to implementation, as the county has built a cycle that links strategic planning, performance targeting, budgeting, and learning from measured results.

Alignment Practices

In the city of Portland and Multnomah County, Oregon, "alignment practices" include a range of community outcome and service measurement efforts, numerous city and county citizen committees, and cross-jurisdictional and cross-sector collaborations. Portland's 95 neighborhood associations are organized into seven district coalitions that provide opportunities for citizens to raise issues for city attention and to participate in service coproduction. County citizen budget advisory committees (CBACs) review county departmental budget proposals and have cited departments' "key results measures" and funding requests that contribute to county benchmarks in their reports to the county board.

The Portland-Multnomah Benchmarks, which track quality of life plus environmental, social, and economic indicators, are overseen by a "progress board" of city and county officials and

prominent citizens and staffed by the city auditor's office, which also prepares City Service Efforts and Accomplishment Reports. In a collaboration of the chamber of commerce, the county, the city, and the Portland School District, eight "caring communities" have been formed around high school districts to involve citizens in identifying needs and priorities and developing community-specific solutions.

The **Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network (JVSVN)** is a collaboration of corporations, local governments, and educational and community institutions in a northern California region of more than 2 million people, covering all of Santa Clara County and parts of San Mateo, Santa Cruz, and Alameda counties. JVSVN involves citizens through focus groups and working committees and publishes the Index of Silicon Valley, which contains long-term economic and quality-of-life indicators of regional sustainability necessary for the people to live healthfully and for businesses to compete globally.

JVSVN also helps develop and tracks progress on collaborative action-initiatives to improve the region. These include regulatory streamlining projects that help local governments reduce permitting time and costs and make requirements uniform throughout the region, to simplify compliance and thus aid business expansion. In the region's 21st-Century Education Initiative, collaborative teams have been formed with 10 to 15 percent of the region's public schools. Each team includes parents, teachers, and administrators from a school district, as well as outside resource persons and experts. Other initiatives are an environmental partnership, a Healthy Community/Healthy Economy initiative, and economic development projects.

In all three of these regions, *strategic alignment has resulted in better fo-*

cus of community resources. For example, the budgets of both Prince William County and Multnomah County have included multimillion-dollar resource shifts to achieve high-priority community goals. However, public budgets tell just part of the story. Private individuals and groups leverage public resources when they coproduce services. Portland's district coalitions organize cooperation with community policing and spur a large amount of volunteerism and local sponsorship to improve neighborhoods, varying from tree plantings and "adopt-a-park" efforts to traffic calming, to "eco-teams" working on environmental sustainability. In addition, cross-sector collaborations leverage large-scale public and private resources on specific projects. JVSVN has supported 11 collaborative-action initiatives, with project budgets ranging from about \$100,000 to more than \$1 million per year, including provision of funds and expertise by Silicon Valley corporations.

Satisfaction Increased

Tracking of high-priority outcomes keeps these communities focused on important improvements and helps them demonstrate their success. JVSVN requires each action initiative to specify measures of tangible results expected and to name benchmarks for tracking progress. For example, several school improvement teams have demonstrated measurable success in improving student achievement. Some of Prince William County's broadest success measures have come from its citizen survey, conducted annually since 1993. Citizen satisfaction about most high-priority goals has increased, and overall satisfaction with "value for tax dollars" has risen from 65.5 percent in 1993 to 80.6 percent in 1998, according to the Center for Survey Research.

- Citizen engagement in multiple roles, including the use of “authentic” involvement practices that provide real opportunities for citizen influence and that move the public discourse from informing citizens to engaging them. (See Frank Benest’s *Marketing Your Budget* and “The Question of Participation” by C. S. King and others, as listed under “References” at the end of this article.)
- Cross-sector and cross-organizational collaborations.
- Provision of adequate resources to sustain measurement and involvement.
- Efforts to develop and reinforce values that support citizen engagement in performance.
- Locally adopted legislation to sustain the process.

Implications for Managers: Where to Begin?

Among public managers, there has been a continuing dialogue about the manager’s changing role. Many suggest that managers need to assume a facilitating role to help elected leaders develop a consensus on goals, enable effective community participation, forge partnerships, and manage the processes that enhance problem solving. This description of the manager’s work fits well with the effective governance model portrayed in this article, with the manager taking the lead in helping the governing body, the organization, and the community in building the capacity and competence to conduct all three areas of the work.

The more traditional role of public managers, however, remains undiminished in importance. Expectations that managers will ensure high-quality, cost-effective public services have driven the increased interest in performance measurement, as reflected in the growth of ICMA’s Center for Performance Measurement to embrace more than 100 communities.

With so many competing expectations, where should managers begin?

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The model presented here suggests several key questions that managers can use to seek opportunities to improve the linkages among citizen engagement, performance measurement, and govern-

ment policy/implementation.

First, managers should examine their communities’ strengths and weaknesses within each element. For example, do all community interests have reasonable op-

opportunities to be represented in authentic public dialogue? Do citizens have chances to play multiple roles in their relationships with government? How well does each government department translate policy into action? Are useful performance measures of public services and community outcomes reported? How well does local government address issues and measure outcomes that cross departmental or jurisdictional lines?

Next, managers can ask themselves questions that will help them find opportunities to strengthen each link in the model.

- For Link 1: What are we doing to use performance measures in policy development and implementation? How well do we “manage for results”? Do we know whether our services are effective and efficient?
- For Link 2: Are all of our measures de-

termined by government, or do citizens identify critical issues, ways to measure performance on them, and definitions of success? Does the community have measures that matter to citizens?

- For Link 3: Do citizens have real opportunities to influence public policy decisions, including those that affect resource allocation? Are government plans and budgets driven by citizen desires and values? Do citizens have chances to help implement improvements through coproduction and collaborative projects?
- For Link 4: If citizens influence public policy goals and implementation, do they get measurable performance feedback on the achievement of community goals? How much do public and private resources leverage each other in the pursuit of community goals, and how well is the work toward the intended results measured?

Leadership to develop more effective communities can begin with the asking of these important and difficult questions. Working hard on local answers can help managers find the right set of opportunities to move their communities toward a strategic alignment of citizen engagement, public policy and implementation, and performance measurement. By working with elected officials and citizens, managers can pursue opportunities that will help their communities achieve better results. **□**

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