

## **Iowa, Citizen Initiated Performance Assessment**

### **Case in Brief**

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 made 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.

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.

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