

DAYTON, OHIO

Background

Dayton, Ohio has had a long history of citizen involvement in local government. In the 1970s, the City established a Priority Board system to institutionalize citizen participation. It was divided into 7 districts, each served by a Priority Board consisting of 20 to 35 citizens. Each citizen member is selected in an annual election from small sub-districts tied to political precinct boundaries or appointed by a neighborhood association. Each board has an established constitution specifying its size and methods of representation.

Dayton's neighborhoods differ markedly in their degree of civic organization. Some areas of the City have mature neighborhood associations capable of establishing a neighborhood development corporation while others are represented by several different block groups. Still others lack any form of community organization. Variations in Priority Boards recognize these differences and are designed to give every citizen an equal voice in government.

Priority Boards have different roles. From a citizen perspective, Priority Board staff offices are the initial point of contact for service requests and complaints. Each Board has a monthly Administrative Council meeting where district supervisors of each department of the City come to hear citizen complaints and requests for service. In addition, Priority Boards are involved in the annual prioritization of neighborhood service requests and

capital improvements. They review needs statements from each neighborhood, prioritize those statements and pass them onto the relevant sections of the City bureaucracy.

However, overtime, the ability of the Priority Boards to influence government policy and neighborhood life has been increasingly handicapped by many neighborhood-based data and questions regarding the legitimacy of the Priority Boards as spokesperson for the neighborhoods. The Sloan Foundation funded Dayton project, a cooperative effort between the Center for Business and Economic Research of the University of Dayton, the City of Dayton Priority Boards and with assistance from the City of Dayton Department of Planning and Community Development and the City of Dayton Division of Citizen Participation was conceived to address those issues.

The Dayton project has 2 sets of objectives. First, to facilitate the selection of Priority Board specific Quality of Life Indicators by the Priority Boards, ensure the initial production of those indicators and institutionalize their annual publication within the City of Dayton Planning department. And, second, the facilitation of a Priority Board reform process and the subsequent development of a set of Citizen Participation Indicators to assess the degree of citizen participation in the life of neighborhoods and Priority Boards. The Quality of Life Indicators served as goals and statistical backdrop for the strategic planning each board undertook as part of the City's "CityPlan 20/20 Vision" strategic plan. In doing so, the City developed a new comprehensive plan to include a vision statement through the year 2020.

The 3 and one-half year process has resulted in the publication of three editions of the Quality of Life Indicators and appears to be institutionalized within the Planning department of the City of Dayton.

The project focuses on the development, production and institutionalization of the Priority Board Quality of Life Indicators.

What were the start-up costs?

Start-up costs of over \$300,000 were funded with a 3-year grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

What is the citizen perception of local government?

Given the City's history of citizen participation in local government, it is prudent to say that despite the temporary setbacks of the Priority Boards, Dayton's citizens at large have a positive perception of local government or at least an optimism of how local government should serve its people.

But while Dayton has a fully developed citizen participation mechanism in the Priority Boards, recent turmoil in City administration, such as the departure of several City Managers within a short period of time, led to serious deterioration in the information systems and performance measurement systems within the City bureaucracy. This deterioration was tied to the departure of several key administrators and the gutting of the Office of Management and Budget during several reorganizations. As a consequence, it

had been difficult for Priority Boards to systematically assess the performance of particular departments. Instead of systematic policy and/or service evaluation, the citizen participation process expended inordinate time dealing with particular citizen irritants on a case-by-case basis.

Why was a particular service chosen?

Services were selected by the Priority Boards through a consultative process facilitated by the local assistance team. Each Priority Board established an Advisory Group to work with the project team. The Advisory Groups consisted of 5 to 7 citizens representing various community interests within the Priority Boards including heads of neighborhood associations and representatives of more typically disenfranchised areas. There had been some expectation that additional assistance would be required from the Family Service Association to support Advisory Group members from particular areas but that proved unnecessary given the caliber of participants.

What indicators were used as measures of performance or to determine outcomes?

CitiPlan 20/20 addressed citywide issues. Mission and goals which were developed in 6 areas selected by the City Commission as the basic framework are as follows:

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

- ? Downtown
- ? City Services

Each goal was broken down into subordinate indicators. These were similar across Priority Boards. However, each Priority Board has some goals and therefore indicators that are unique.

What process (es) was initiated?

- ? **How was the process (es) initiated?**
- ? **What resources were required to make the process a success?**

Each Advisory Group generated an initial list of some 40 to 50 Quality of Life issues. The issues were generated within a modified nominal group process focused on the Quality of Life in the Priority Board 10 years hence. Condensing the list involved a mail survey of Priority Board members, neighborhood associations and other neighborhood groups in each Priority Board. Survey respondents were asked to rank order both general categories of issues and independently specific issues. The Advisory Groups used the survey results for each Priority Board to further condense the list.

The condensed list of Quality of Life issues was presented during the summer of 1997 to each Priority Board for formal approval. The Advisory Groups continued to meet on a regular basis to remain apprised of the project's progress and to provide input to the project team's development of the Quality of Life indicators. The Advisory Groups took an active role in critiquing, changing and amending the Quality of Life indicators as data

was obtained and manipulated. In many cases, the direction of data collection was shifted as a result of intervention by the Advisory Groups.

While initial commitments had been gathered prior to the onset of the project, the project team spent December 1996 and January 1997 visiting each Priority Board explaining the purpose of the project and the potential uses of the Quality of Life indicators developed. With each Priority Board, a formal contract was signed committing the Center for Business and Economic Research and the Priority Board to a set of tasks.

The following resources were essential to the success of the Dayton project:

- ? Active participation from the City's Planning department
- ? Buy-in by the Priority Boards including several hours of citizen volunteer time
- ? Strong political ties by a portion of the project team
- ? Strong group process skills
- ? Strong quantitative data analysis and management skills

Who have been involved in initiating, developing and using performance measurement?

? How were they involved?

A committee of experts, practitioners and citizens was established by the City Plan Board for each of the issue areas. During the course of 1997, those committees met, solicited general comments from the citizenry and completed draft reports. A steering committee

composed of representatives of the City Plan Board and the Chairs of each committee resolved differences between the committee reports and made the final recommendation to the City Plan Board who in turn forwarded its final recommendation to the City Commission. The process continued with the City Commission as the final approval authority. Upon the adoption by the City Commission, each Priority Board initiated its strategic planning within the confines of the CitiPlan 20/20. The Sloan assistance team aided in that process.

The 7 Priority Board Chairs initiated Task Force 2000, a committee established to make recommendations on any proposed changes in the structure and operations of the Priority Board system. The Chairs would then make formal recommendation to the City Council for necessary changes. The local assistance team served as the support staff for this group.

Meetings were held approximately monthly over a 12-month period with public hearings. The Task Force wrestled with the most controversial issues that have strained the citizen participation system. Topics of particular importance included:

- ? Election process
- ? Who should be on the Boards
- ? The unequal distribution of population and dollar resources across the Boards
- ? Where the support staff for the Boards should be located in City government
- ? What the appropriate funding mechanism for the Boards should be

The final Task Force report was completed and submitted to the Priority Boards Chairs and the following changes were suggested:

- ? Rationalizing election procedure
- ? Initiating requirements that more than half of any Board must be elected
- ? Recommended that the Boards all have standard Land Use committee responsible for planning and zoning cases sent to the Priority Boards
- ? Recommended that the Boards be funded out of a special mill age
- ? Clarifying the role of the Priority Boards in hiring, firing and reviewing the performance of Priority Board staff hired by the City

The Planning department was more involved in the collection of the second and third edition data and were the formal owners of the data collection process within the City government. They sent letters to each department explaining why the data was needed. In most cases, these letters were written after consultation with the appropriate department head. Departments responded appropriately. Actual production of the indicator reports was conducted by the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Dayton, as the Planning department did not have the analytical capability. The Citizen Participation Manager (part of the Planning department), had set aside funds to contract on a biennial basis with the Center for Business and Economic Research to produce the document. The Planning department and Citizen Participation Division have formally placed production of the Priority Board Quality of Life indicator report as part of their

business plan. In addition, the strategic plans of each Priority Board now constitute the basis for the business plan of the City's Citizen Participation office. Priority Board Coordinators are responsible for assisting in moving forward the Strategic Plan of each Priority Board.

What obstacles were encountered throughout the process?

In the initial planning of the project, the intention had been to focus only on performance indicators that involved City departments. In discussions with the Priority Boards and in the initial Advisory Group meetings, it became clear that such a restriction would ignore the core of Quality of Life issues for most citizens in the community: what to do about the education system in which their children were involved. As a consequence, the project team chose not to restrict its attention to performance indicators tied to City departments.

The data search effort involved participation from the City's Planning department, the project team from the Center for Business and Economic Research and the Family Services Association. Family Services Association proved invaluable in the data search effort because of their familiarity with various City departments in the course of their neighborhood development work.

Late summer and fall of 1997 involved struggling to obtain permission and help in identifying the bureaucracies that would find the required data. City bureaucracies in

general actively cooperated but their ability to do so was hampered by the current fragmentation and poorness of the information system.

Initial contacts with the Dayton School system involved mid-level managers in direct control of the data on school attendance and proficiency test scores. Those managers concluded that they could only provide information on school attendance, not proficiency test scores. The impasse was resolved by an appeal to the elected President of the School Board and conversations with the Superintendent of Schools. While disorganization and personnel shortage within the school system slowed the acquisition of data, it was ironically, the easiest information to obtain, given the poorness of the information system within the City.

The original intention had been to suggest the appropriate Quality of Life indicators, link the Planning department to the appropriate department and aid Planning in the production of the Quality of Life indicators for each Priority Board. This turned out not to be feasible in either the first or second edition of the Priority Boards' Quality of Life indicators for at least 2 reasons:

- ? Each Priority Board's Quality of Life indicators involved multiple governments and entities, some of which have no connection with the City
- ? The level of expertise and human resources in data analysis required to manipulate the raw data and create useful quantitative indicators was beyond the resources of the Planning department

As a consequence, the Center for Business and Economic Research turned over to the Planning department the first and second editions of the booklet for each Priority Board for copy.

The Chairs of the Priority Boards on the Task Force chose not to alter the Priority Board boundaries or change the number of Boards. This resulted in citizens feeling that they, the Task Force, ducked the real issues that keep the Priority Boards from having a more powerful voice in the community. The Chairs felt that the existing Boards had established ways of operating that would simply be disrupted by boundary changes.

Finally, there are individual interests within the Priority Boards who have suggested to City Council that not all are in favor of all provisions and has given the Mayor an excuse to gut the proposed ordinance. The Priority Board Chairs have not been united in their support of the recommendations.

Has the community recognized any immediate benefits?

? **If so, what are these immediate benefits?**

? **What were determined to be the long-term benefits, if any?**

There are several immediate benefits associated with the Quality of Life indicator process. But, it is difficult to distinguish between the benefits of measuring versus the benefits of measuring and engaging in a strategic process to do something about what you are measuring.

The strategic planning process was described as a success. In several Boards, the relationship between the Quality of Life indicators and strategic planning discussions are straightforward. The Northeast Priority Board continues with a major initiative to close a set of junkyards that blemish their Priority Board. They have had some limited success and are actively pursuing their objectives by putting pressure on City government. They have discovered a little known City ordinance and are currently working with the city on a new model ordinance for junk yard regulation. . In the Southeast Priority Board, there is a strong initiative underway to provide some additional community support for the public schools. In the Northwest Priority Board, the Board has initiated a tutoring program designed to influence the after school and youth crime problems identified. In the FROC Priority Board, the Board has established its own campaign to clean up the street scape look of the area. Housing code enforcement had been identified as a critical indicator by all of the Priority Boards. All Priority Boards are now engaged in a citywide effort to strengthen the code enforcement laws. That effort should result in a new stricter ordinance.

The true long-term benefit of combining citizen group planning with measurement is the promise of strengthened citizen participation organizations. Many citizens had joined Priority Boards only to leave in frustration, as they believed them to be ineffectual in working on problems that were of concern to them. As the Boards move forwards within a context of strategic plan with concrete timetables and periodic measures that remind

them of how they are doing, the chances are better of retaining and recruiting additional citizens to the process.

What were the lessons learned?

In retrospect, development of the Quality of Life indicators should have been intimately linked to a concrete plan for moving forward on particular objectives. In essence, the indicators should have been linked to the actual work of the Priority Boards.

What one thing should be recommended to a community that is considering this process?

A community considering this process needs commitment from 3 groups. First, an initial commitment of cooperation by the City government. Second, a citizen group that has some authority in the community. And third, a university assistance team that has 2 very different skill sets. One set of skills involves the proper design and facilitation of public consultative processes. The other, involves very sophisticated data manipulation and geographic information system capabilities. It is rare to find these in the same organization and so the team must typically be composed of partners consciously chosen for those skill sets.

If given the opportunity to conduct a similar study, what one thing could be accomplished differently?

As aforementioned, a critical flaw in the initial process was not to link explicitly the Quality of Life indicators to the actual work of the Priority Boards. The team assumed

that the Priority would know what to do with the Quality of Life indicators once they received them. It became clear upon publication of the first edition that the Priority Boards were not sufficiently mature, or over mature, to utilize the information to push their agenda forward. The local assistance team used the strategic planning process to help the Priority Boards think about the relationship of the Quality of Life indicators to their agenda. One could imagine linking the development of quality of life indicators or performance measures directly to the strategic planning process a citizen group goes through to define its own action agenda.