

The City Scan Project

CPEC

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Background

The Connecticut Policy and Economic Council is an independent, nonpartisan, and not-for-profit organization providing information and communication resources to citizens, community leaders, civic organizations, and local governments to set priorities and improve government performance. Like similar organizations around the country, CPEC has a long history of providing information and analysis to communities. Today, CPEC is going beyond that role to create new processes for neighborhood groups to push for a better return on public investments, and to bring the latest technology to bear on this challenge.

The City Scan Project of CPEC uses cutting edge technologies, including handheld computers, digital imaging, GPS equipment, and mapping software, to provide data with a strong visual component to neighborhood groups and municipal officials.

- ❖ In the first two and a half years of City Scan, these accomplishments were seen:
- ❖ Implemented and began to institutionalize City Scan in Hartford.
- ❖ Implemented and began to institutionalize citizen-based performance assessment (CBPA) and City Scan in Stamford.
- ❖ Implemented a program in Waterbury and several other towns

For their initial phase, City Scan focused on two very different cities: Hartford, a city with many difficulties and Stamford, a high-profile community. In both locales, CPEC used technology to create tools for citizens to hold city government accountable. Working in such different environments has provided insight into implementing service assessment efforts in different types of municipalities.

The centerpiece of the project is the “City Scan” itself, which uses Pocket PC technology and digital photography to create a visual database. These pilot projects provided models for CPEC to promote in other municipalities and provide examples for our statewide efforts. By creating citizen champions for this method of documenting the outcome of city services, we hope to build a cadre of supporters for more widespread citizen based performance measurement initiatives.

The City Scan project is broader than just the scanning of problems using handheld computers. CPEC’s long-term goal is to create a “toolbox” of processes, information, and data collection tools that citizens and citizen groups can use to create excellence in local government. For example, in Stamford, we provided support to city officials as they implemented an internal performance management system process. In Waterbury, we organized a citizen survey to gather information on customer satisfaction with city services. These types of citizen involvement are other tools that communities can learn from and utilize.

Hartford

Introduction

From our discussions with community leaders in Hartford, we know that independent performance assessment is important, and that they are eager to receive reliable, easy to understand information regarding the quality of service delivery and quality of life in their neighborhoods. However, given the many pressing concerns these community advocates must contend with to improve the quality of life in Hartford, performance assessment efforts must be designed to efficiently gather citizen input and performance data. We chose to start with Hartford as our testing ground for both technology and process in part because of the community’s desire for CBPA data. This desire for information is also driven by the fact that Hartford city government historically has not been very responsive to the needs of its residents. It was precisely this lack of cooperation that made Hartford appealing, however, as we tested how to implement citizen-based performance measurement in ‘hostile’ territory, that is, where there is no support for it on behalf of public officials.

Our objectives in our first two years in Hartford were to implement a City Scan in a Hartford neighborhood using Pocket PCs, help the neighborhood group to use this City Scan data to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood, and raise awareness of the value of having citizens survey street-level conditions. All of our objectives in Hartford were greatly exceeded. We not only developed a technology package – including hardware, software, and accessories – to conduct the scans, but we also conducted scans in five city parks and eight Hartford neighborhoods and began work with groups of citizens to use the data for local improvements.

Pilot Projects

City Parks Pilot

In the summer of 2000, we conducted two pilot tests, one in city parks and another in Hartford's Parkville neighborhood. The parks project was conducted by seven Hartford High School students and their teacher, with the assistance of CPEC staff, over a period of seven weeks. The group worked twenty hours each week during which they surveyed more than 950 acres of park property. On sunny days, the group collected data in Hartford's five largest parks on fifteen different measures (see Appendix A for a list of conditions). On rainy days, the team processed the data, creating reports and a web site showing the results. Dividing into two teams, each team member specialized on a particular piece of the City Scan technology (although everyone was cross trained for greater flexibility). This included an observer, who identified the condition to document and marked its location on a map of the park; a photographer, who took a digital photo of the condition; and a recorder, who captured relevant information about the condition into a database on the handheld computer. The two teams shared a videographer whose job was to capture the visual images that lent themselves more to video images than still photography. The final result of the parks pilot project was a web site of the 308 conditions (see www.city-scan.com), which was also distributed via CD, and five detailed reports showing each condition. This project tested the City Scan technology package, and was used to refine the customized data collection and reporting software.

The City Scan model works with existing groups of citizens to decide which data should be collected, conduct the scan and collect the data, and then use the results to advocate for improvements. In an effort to improve upon this model, we have implemented it in different ways in different settings. For the parks project, CPEC staff met with the five different "Friends of the Park" groups to determine which data would be most useful to collect. These groups were seen as the customer for the information. At the end of the summer, the data that was collected by the seven students were shared with these groups, and as a result, we were encouraged to present the data to the City's Parks Commission, an appointed board that includes representatives from all the "Friends of" committees and some city officials. We made this presentation in October 2000. In the meantime, CPEC staff mailed the reports to all elected city officials and the head of the Public Works Department, who is responsible for park facilities. Despite repeated attempts, we were unable to secure a meeting with any of them. In the spring of 2001, however, we received by mail a response from the Public Works Department on every item documented in the five parks reports. We then met with the Department head to discuss these results and ways in which we could work together more closely on future initiatives.

In preparation for the second summer, each "Friends of the Park" group was contacted, although only one (the only one with a paid staff person) expressed interest in conducting a re-scan using members of the "Friends" group to do the data collection. While this group was interested, they did not have the capacity to participate in a re-scan at this time. For our own purposes, we did conduct a brief rescan of several park conditions during the summer of 2001 to measure the project's effectiveness after a year had passed. The results show that while some changes were made, the Department of Public Works did

not complete all of the promised improvements. For half of the instances of graffiti, even when issues were addressed, new graffiti replaced the old over the year. Based on the experience with this initiative, CPEC staff went on to build a stronger relationship with Public Works in late 2001 and 2002.

Parkville Neighborhood Pilot

The second pilot test was conducted in the Parkville neighborhood of Hartford in conjunction with their Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) Committee. It focused on the process of citizen involvement in City Scan, from the initial steps of defining data needs through the data collection and use of the resulting data to advocate for change. The Parkville project used adult volunteers as data collectors, allowing them to collect the data in pairs on their own time in the evening and weekends after some initial group training. The scan was conducted by six pairs of “scanners” and looked at 22 measures during late summer and early fall of 2000. Working with adult community volunteers and City officials was difficult for some time, but our efforts and perseverance bore fruit in the spring of 2001, when we were able to broker a meeting between the citizens group and three key city officials – the Director of Public Works, Director of Licensing and Inspections, and the Public Liaison for these two departments. The result of this meeting was a negotiated agreement that created a process of priority setting by the citizens and local government. Specifically, the citizens would choose their top five priorities regarding the securing and cleanup of abandoned buildings each month, and the Department of Licensing and Inspection agreed to follow up on all of these properties each month following a specific timeline and communications channels.

Community leaders involved in this process have been among our most enthusiastic supporters. Especially when considering the initial hostility of Hartford city officials, we are especially pleased with the new spirit of cooperation that City Scan has fostered in this neighborhood.

Expanded activity in Hartford

With additional moneys secured from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and YO!Hartford, (the latter funded by the federal Department of Labor Youth Opportunity Program), City Scan expanded to seven Hartford neighborhoods in addition to Parkville in late 2000. This effort, while a geographic expansion, was to focus only on the top three issues of interest to neighborhood residents. Starting in the fall of 2000, CPEC staff met with citizen groups in these seven neighborhoods to prioritize the issues. The groups agreed that abandoned property, litter and graffiti were the top three priorities for City Scan in Hartford. The results of an initial scan were presented to the NRZ groups in the spring of 2001, and more thorough, follow-up scans were conducted during the summer with data presented to citizen groups and city officials throughout the fall.

To demonstrate immediate success to the citizen groups, and to move quickly before the winter weather set in, CPEC focused its initial efforts on a single issue. The “Graffiti Blitz” in the Fall 2000 created tangible results and generated excitement among citizens, as it focused intensely on documenting graffiti in one area of the city. After receiving City Scan data documenting the location of 90 sites, Hartford Proud & Beautiful (a

private-public partnership) hired local contractors to clean up the graffiti. This created a noticeable difference, especially in the Park Street area.

TOP Grant Expansion

In the Fall of 2001, CPEC was awarded a prestigious Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) grant to expand City Scan. Funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce, this grant allowed for the expansion of City Scan staff to six full-time administrative and program professionals. With this increased capacity, City Scan has expanded into all neighborhoods of Hartford, established stronger ties and procedures with City agencies, and begun in-depth work with community residents.

Following the learning acquired in the Parkville pilot, City Scan now works with each of Hartford's seventeen Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) Committees. These neighborhood groups and their "parent" organization, Hartford 2000, have become the focus of City Scan work in 2002. CPEC also negotiated memoranda of understanding with three other partners for the project: Citizens' Research and Education Network, Hartford Public Library, and the City of Hartford's Department of Human Services.

CPEC and its partners have identified seven outcomes that the project will seek to achieve:

- 1) Reduce the number and severity of the city problems identified during the summer of 2002 by 5% by the third year (2004) as measured by the records in the database.
- 2) Improve the effectiveness of communications between NRZ members and city officials.
- 3) Increase NRZ capacity by training members in data collection and analysis tools.
- 4) Provide useful technical skills and experience to Youth Survey Team Members.
- 5) Improve the quality of life in Hartford as measured by before and after surveys of residents.
- 6) Increase individuals' involvement in local government process by soliciting residents' opinions about city services.
- 7) Improve the quality of local decision-making by providing data and tracking tools.

The summer of 2002 had 52 youth workers and nine adult supervisors scanning virtually all of the City of Hartford. These summer staff were paid through a grant from the Capital Region Workforce Development Board. A positive relationship with City government is in place, with a supportive mayor, city manager, and the Department of Licenses and Inspections and the Public Works Department. As of August, 2002, Hartford City Scan has one project coordinator on staff, Cherie Mittenthal, and will hire two other professionals within the next month.

Stamford

Unlike Hartford, Stamford is a thriving, growing urban center with many resources to call upon for civic improvement. It is a high-profile community, and often serves as a model for other cities, both state and nation-wide. The aspect of Stamford's city government that most directly affects this project is its support for performance measurement and

focus on citizens as customers. The full cooperation of the city government has been a tremendous help to our efforts there.

Our objectives in our first two years in Stamford were to conduct focus groups and develop a survey that would identify high-priority service areas for citizens; work with a municipal government performance measurement expert to develop citizen-based measures to address these priority areas; and implement City Scan activities in a Stamford neighborhood. To a large degree, CPEC has met these objectives, although not with the added exuberance that has occurred in Hartford.

With the advice of municipal officials and community leaders, CPEC developed an extensive citizen survey to determine their priorities for and satisfaction with city government services and hired a telephone data collection firm to conduct the telephone survey of 600 randomly selected Stamford residents in November 2000. The data from this survey was supplemented by two focus group sessions held by CPEC staff in the spring of 2001, and a final report was issued during the summer of 2001. In the fall of 2001, an outside consultant in performance measurement was engaged to develop goals, objectives, and measures for each program within each department in efforts to develop the city's CBPA.

During the summer of 2001, CPEC hired five high school students and a teacher from Stamford's Academy for Information Technology to conduct scans of two Stamford neighborhoods. In the spring of 2002, CPEC hired a staff coordinator to work with Stamford and other communities in Fairfield County, Laurel Anderson. Involving youth volunteers from CTE, Inc., the Community Action Agency for the Greater Stamford Area. The youth were between the ages of 10 and 13 and were participants in either the after-school or the summer programs. The project will seek to work with a broader range of community groups throughout Stamford in the fall of 2002, and will also try to develop an additional youth program with the Yerwood Center on the West Side of Stamford.

Norwalk

In a different model from Hartford, a relationship was developed with the Norwalk mayor's office and through them with community groups. Scans were performed in the summer of 2002 with volunteers from both the South Norwalk Inner City Cleanup (SONICC) and local neighborhood organizations. The city administration worked with City Scan staff to develop a process for handling the scan reports, and has requested modifications to the scan conditions list to better assign repairs by department. The city is using the scan reports as both work orders for city departments and for review points by a citywide neighborhood preservation task force composed of community organization leaders and city department heads. In addition, City Scan worked with youth at a Community Service Academy/DARE camp run by the Human Service Council. The scan project was in cooperation with Save the Sound and was performed at the Veterans Park grounds and shore areas by thirty middle school youth.

Waterbury

With successful efforts underway in Hartford and Stamford, and with several unique and smaller scans or other “toolbox” efforts in other communities under our belt, CPEC decided to enter another major city in Connecticut. Waterbury is a medium-sized city, with myriad problems and circumstances that have led many citizens to be fully discouraged with municipal government. CPEC was invited by the state oversight board to help that City incorporate citizen input as it reforms the way it delivers services. We have been involved with the City since the spring of 2002.

One of the first activities of City Scan in Waterbury was coordinating a city-wide telephone survey in English and Spanish to form a baseline of resident perceptions regarding the city and their satisfaction with municipal services. This information will serve as a tool for the City to determine in what areas customers are satisfied and in what areas services could be strengthened and resident communication improved. We will conduct a follow-up survey in 2003 to measure changes in resident perceptions to provide more detailed information on the City’s efforts to be responsive to citizen needs over the previous year and will need to be longer than first survey. Additionally, CPEC will be conducting focus groups and resident intercept surveys outside Waterbury shopping centers to provide more data.

City Scan staff member Sean Ghio has worked primarily with the Waterbury Neighborhood Council to identify neighborhoods to involve in the project. These neighborhood groups then identified concerns that could be documented in scans, and worked with Sean to organize them.

Multiple scans, involving a variety of volunteers, have now been conducted in each of three Waterbury neighborhoods. Scan results are first sent to the appropriate neighborhood group, then to the Neighborhood Council and the City. The process of creating change in how the City responds to this kind of information has been slow, as the Waterbury government is gradually creating new systems to handle citizen input.

Working with youth

Youth employees and volunteers learn technology skills while helping out their community through City Scan. By creating a youth development aspect to the project, we have also created additional avenues for funding these initiatives in the future. Using youth as data collectors also addresses one of the largest difficulties we encountered in the neighborhood pilot project: that of finding adult volunteers with adequate time to conduct scans in a timely manner. Efforts are under way to develop curricula for use in schools or other settings to incorporate City Scan in civics education.

City Scan technology

City Scan is a combination of technologies that provide dynamic visual databases to effect positive change in city neighborhoods. City Scan uses handheld computers, either Windows CE or Palm OS, and customized software to create a database of neighborhood conditions. A photograph is taken of each condition with a digital camera. A desktop

computer is used to synchronize data from the handheld computers and link the photos to a particular data record, creating a visual database. The condition locations can be displayed by map through the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) and Global Positioning System (GPS) technology.

CPEC most often uses Compaq IPAQ handheld computers and Sony Mavica digital cameras for on-the-street data collection. Software used includes Microsoft Access 2000 and ActiveSync, as well as data collection software developed by CPEC specifically for City Scan.

Statewide and other initiatives

The entire two-year grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation was initially created as the first phase of a larger plan for creating a program of citizen-based performance assessment of municipal governments throughout the state of Connecticut. CPEC's overall concept is to create successful CBPA projects of different kinds in several communities around the state, energizing citizen participation and engaging government officials. Once non-government champions exist across the state and elected officials are shown the political value of CBPA, the next step will be to seek state support and possibly state mandates through the State Office of Policy and Management (OPM).

In order to broaden City Scan, CPEC staff have laid the groundwork of building relationships with municipal officials and citizen groups across the state to move the statewide project forward. These efforts have included conducting a single-issue scan of a New Britain neighborhood, advising New London city officials of how to conduct a citizen survey, working with community leaders in Bristol to develop a goal-setting process, briefing Connecticut's Office of Policy and Management on related issues, and presentations to senior staff in selected communities and the Connecticut chapter of the Government Finance Officers Association.

It has become evident that our initial expectations for implementing CBPA widely throughout the state were somewhat unrealistic. Changing the political culture to successfully implement CBPA takes substantial time. CPEC has established enough relationships to move ahead with a more limited expansion across the state, but not one that includes all 169 towns at this time. When CPEC received the two-year grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, it was intended that the City Scan project would begin as a small, localized effort and later be expanded to a program of citizen-based performance assessment for municipal governments throughout the state of Connecticut. During this initial period, CPEC has been heavily involved in efforts that complement the work described above by testing crucial technology and processes, and by creating relationships and publicity that will enhance the success of the overall project. Due to the extraordinary media response, awareness of City Scan and its initiatives are known across the country. Stories about the project have been in local and national and international publications.

There are many elements that are necessary for citizen-based performance measurement to thrive throughout Connecticut. The goal of our statewide efforts is to help create and

sustain the political momentum needed so that citizen-based performance assessment flourishes in many communities around the state. We have been entrepreneurial in our approach to City Scan by continuing to test new approaches. We have been thoughtful and deliberate in our selection of projects in other areas of the state, choosing those that allow us to test new processes or technology. Because of the many valuable lessons we have learned through these efforts, we look forward to continuing to expand our knowledge of how to plan, implement, and evaluate this type of citizen-based performance measurement.