

**THE NCS**<sup>TM</sup>  
The National Citizen Survey<sup>TM</sup>

# Local Government Playbook of Strategies to Improve Communities



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# Introduction

Think of this guide as a helium balloon that will help lighten the burden of determining how to put your survey results to work for your community. Most community leaders are buried in information, because running local government requires knowing a lot about your own organization, the organizations of other entities that can inhibit or facilitate your success and your residents' perspectives about what is and ought to be happening. The National Citizen Survey you recently conducted has provided you with reliable reconnaissance about your residents' opinions and activities that you can get from no administrative records or discussions with managers or elected officials. Although the information in your survey is uniquely valuable, knowing what to make of it – as in, what to do with it – benefits from some assistance.

## First, Take a Deep Breath

Pressure mounts to use data wisely. People are saying that data are money. Everyone is talking about how data help managers make the right decisions – to reduce crime, improve the housing stock, expand the tax base, sell bonds. It is true that being data driven does increase the likelihood that your decisions will be better for the community, but we recommend that as managers or elected officials are exposed to valid information about resident perspectives about the local quality of life, governance and reports of residents' engagement in the community, it is best to take off your leader hat and just listen to what the report says. Forget how data driven you must be and appreciate the survey results like you might your favorite music. Take the time to feel your own reaction to what you hear. Rather than pretend that management decisions are made strictly by the numbers and that emotion plays no part in the power of data, the first question a leader should ask of his survey data is not “do they make sense?” but “do they feel right?”

Once you've noticed which survey results resonate most with you, then examine them. Do they square with other data you have? Do they confirm what you and others have observed? Finally, as you think about what the survey results mean to you, remember that you are not alone. There are some, probably many, staff who have more direct experience with the areas reported on in the survey. Convene them to participate in the debrief, which may include the one you have with the researchers at National Research Center, Inc. if you have conducted The National Citizen Survey. In that debrief, you will

get a sense of how NRC recommends you move forward to put your results to use.

## Where the Action Is

Putting your results to work is precisely why you conducted the survey, so taking the time to absorb the results is the beginning, not the end of the survey process. This Playbook of Strategies provides you with recommendations about how to move forward with your survey results. To help you get started with navigating toward building successful outcomes in your community The Playbook includes vignettes of how other jurisdictions used their survey results to improve their communities. The local governments highlighted in this playbook include:

- Cartersville, Georgia
- Winter Garden, Florida
- Paducah, Kentucky
- Noblesville, Indiana
- Park City, Utah
- Boulder, Colorado
- Hamilton, Ohio
- Puget Sound Clean Air Agency (King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish Counties, Washington)
- Ankeny, Iowa
- Fort Collins, Colorado
- Greeley, Colorado
- Pocatello, Idaho
- Livermore, California
- Peoria, Arizona
- Longmont, Colorado
- Westminster, Colorado
- Littleton, Colorado

# Creating Livable Communities

## The Many Faces of “Livability”

Most leaders charged with running local governments seek to create “livable communities.” However, the phrase has been used to cover so much territory that it no longer is clear what anyone really means by it. For the literal minded, a livable place is, redundantly, where people reside and, if a place were not livable, it would be empty, save for passers-by – including those who arrive temporarily for commerce. However, by livable, most people mean something symbolic. The phrase “livable community” evokes a place that is not simply habitable but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

Awards are given for the most livable places in America and the winners are chosen, often by magazines, based on many quality of life criteria like safety, affordability and beauty. Because livability means so many things to different people, researchers and community organizations have explored just about every window into the meaning of the term. For some, livability has to do with the built environment – a place that hews to land conservation, avoids sprawl and funnels activity into pedestrian-friendly space with low rise buildings and attractive greenery (Kunstler, 1993). Proper land use in a livable place results in the “spirit of community,” (Fischer, 2000) where neighbors trust and rely on each other and turn to each other for help. One organization reminds us that livability should not be the aspiration of only well off communities: “livability extends to economic dynamism and career opportunities as well as recreational, aesthetic, cross-generational and cultural activities.” (Community Research Connections in <http://crcresearch.org/case-studies/case-studies-sustainable-infrastructure/land-use-planning/what-makes-a-city-liveable>).

A livable community not only attracts people because its infrastructure represents good planning principles, it may also provide expansive opportunities like those of great cities. One simple characteristic of a great city that intersects with livable communities is the creation of a place where people want to spend time outside (<http://ecolocalizer.com/2009/07/08/what-is-a->

[good-city/](#)). A more elaborate set of amenities comes from the mid-twentieth century, when Lewis Mumford described this way what exceptional cities provide: “The chief function of the city is to convert power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological reproduction into social creativity.” This is a tall order but one that some believe would contribute to a city becoming “livable.”

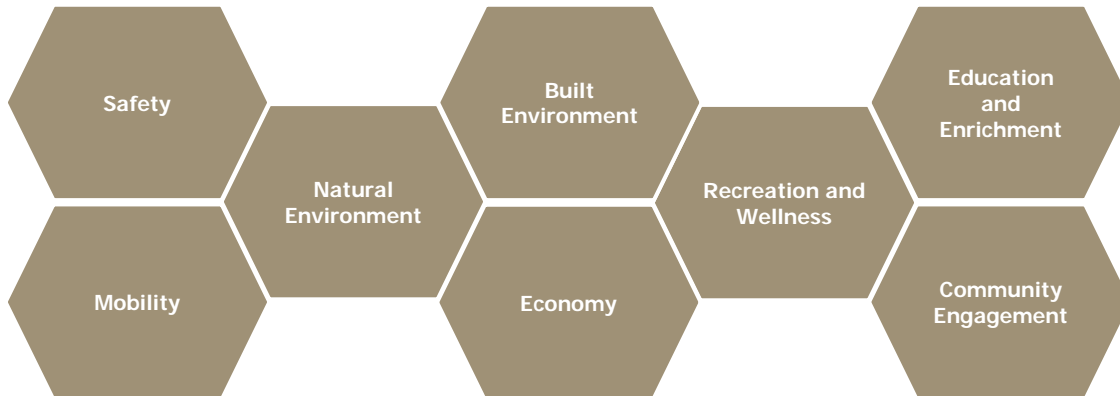
Below is a word cloud of definitions of livability that came from 18 articles reviewed by the National Association of Regional Networks (NARC).<sup>1</sup> It demonstrates the salience of Transportation and Community Quality as well as the diversity of other terms used to describe “livability.”

Figure 1: Livability Word Cloud



<sup>1</sup> Livability Word Cloud Including Scholarly and Practitioner Definitions (www.wordle.net) in LIVABILITY LITERATURE REVIEW: A SYNTHESIS OF CURRENT PRACTICE. National Association of Regional Councils and U.S. Department of Transportation 2012, Washington, D.C.

Figure 2: The Eight Facets of Livable Communities



### Cross-cutting Management for Livability

While more and more local governments seek to create livable communities, the management tool they most often rely on is an engine comprising individual departments, each charged with providing targeted services, like police, library, parks, economic development, streets and many more. As much as the directors of these departments sit together at the executive table, they also confront unique service delivery issues that force a focused rather than peripheral view of their territory, so interconnection of work effort is hard to achieve. The difficulty of integrating the plans and actions of individual departments is the reason that local government (in fact any level of government and any large business) struggles to become a finely tuned, efficient and high powered machine. Nevertheless, the delivery of a livable community requires a honed engine with strong connection among all departments because the characteristics that make communities livable are not the territory of individual units (or even the government alone, as noted above).

Solutions to local challenges will come most easily from an integrated drive to improve. For example, a high crime rate in a jurisdiction is unlikely to be solved only by police or court action. Crime may be the result of conditions related to jobs, schools, street lighting, community connectedness, public trust, location of parks and more. Likewise, pedestrian friendly streets can be developed best with a partnership of planning, parks, utilities, police, fire, efforts to encourage community

engagement and participation of the private sector and faith-based organizations.

### The NCS Helps Manage “Livability”

The National Citizen Survey™ has been designed to gather resident perspectives about community livability and to report to elected officials, local managers and community stakeholders those areas of livability that are doing well and those that merit improvement. The results of The NCS are reported in eight facets of community livability – natural environment, economy, built environment, recreation and wellness, safety, education and enrichment, mobility and community engagement. For each facet, residents report their perspectives about three aspects of livability – what we call the pillars of community life – the quality of community, quality of services and related resident activities.

With The NCS, the vague definitions of livability disappear because the report offers quantified metrics that indicate how livable the community is overall and within each domain. These measures will help leaders identify areas of strength and need and evaluate progress toward improvement. The emphasis on livability makes for a strategic approach to community quality and arms local leaders with critical information they need to help move the community where residents want it to be.

## The Es of Action

NRC researchers have identified six kinds of action that can be considered as response to your citizen survey results. These categories of action have been gleaned from studying how jurisdictions have used their resident opinions to improve their communities and they are shown in the graphic, below. Don't feel obliged to identify interventions in each of the six categories, but appreciate them as suggested areas where important movement in community quality can be, and has been, made.



**Envision:** Results of The National Citizen Survey often are used by communities as part of goal setting and strategic or comprehensive planning. By understanding what residents think are the characteristics of the community that are most important to protect or improve, by knowing what is working and what remain challenges, local leaders can be guided toward planning for a community that builds on its strengths and improves in the areas that matter the most.

**Earmark:** Jurisdictions use The National Citizen Survey results most often to allocate or redistribute resources based on the aspects of community that residents find wanting. When mobility is important but not easily available or delivered with obstacles to accessibility, it may be wise to invest more in transit, roads, bicycling or walking paths. If ratings of the community's recreation and wellness are not strong or resident participation in civic volunteer opportunities are weak, wise reallocation of limited resources to enhance those facets of community will help move you forward.

**Educate:** Getting the word out about community amenities, services and opportunities to let residents and leaders of other organizations understand what you do well and what they may not understand about your community is one of the most common uses of survey findings. Whether marketing existing

programs or communicating a new community brand, education about what seems to be misunderstood or what may remain little known is a great way to use The NCS results.

**Engage:** Engagement can come in two essential forms – engagement with individuals or partnership with groups. In both cases, the results of your survey are relevant to the community overall and are not simply a comment on local government. Livable communities grow from the connection of businesses, non-profits, the government and residents working together. Engagement with individuals may mean little more than inviting residents to comment and work on The NCS findings; partnership with organizations can even start with your own employees and then spread to work with other levels of government, hospitals, schools and the Chamber of Commerce. When civic life is understood to be everyone's purview, the questions that arise from The NCS aren't only, "how can government improve?" They include, "how can we all contribute to making things better?"

**Enact:** Across the country, hundreds of millions of dollars have been raised or saved based on findings of The National Citizen Survey. These successes are created by findings that indicate support for possible bond raising ballot questions or that identify a need for new services, like recycling or transit, that could save time and money or simply improve the quality of life. Enacting new policies or establishing new programs often are the actions that follow attention to what residents report on their citizen survey.

**Evaluate:** The act of using The NCS is itself an evaluation of community, but beyond that single use of the survey, repeated use permits leaders to determine if the programs, policies or personnel changes they enact have had their intended effects. Other kinds of evaluation can come from The NCS. Often clients want to understand more about a finding of a survey, so they seek information from a more in-depth survey on fewer topics or by listening to groups of stakeholders through guided discussions. Performance measurement – comparing this administration's results to earlier administrations of the survey in your own jurisdiction or to benchmark jurisdictions - is a kind of evaluation that is linked to survey results when resident responses are tracked along with other performance data about service activities and costs.

Not every action must reflect each of the Es listed above. Your use of the Es of Action can be effective relying only on one theme. Nevertheless, this

example from Cartersville, GA embodies parts of each of the action themes.

A Case Study in Resident-friendly Recycling

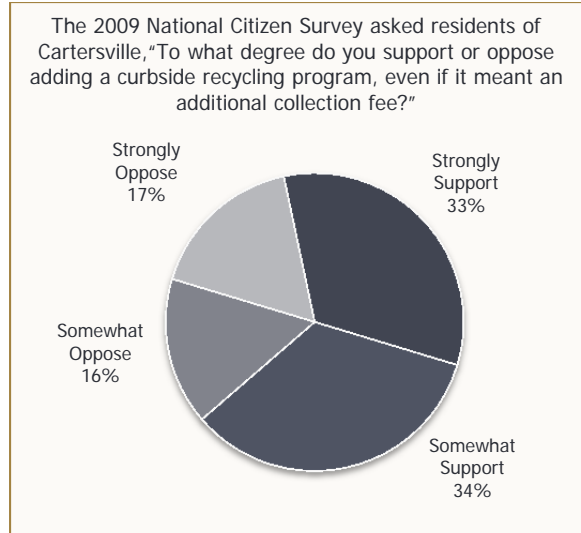
## Cartersville, Georgia

The City of Cartersville, GA had a robust program in place for garbage collection and disposal. Since the mid-1970s, standard services such as curbside pick-up, large item pick-up, and dumpster services had been augmented by extras like bulk leaf vacuuming and grass clipping removal. The City had conducted a pilot recycling program in the late 1990s, but low participation and high costs made further implementation prohibitive. Although there was a rising sense that the city should provide recycling services, staff were concerned that recycling would require a rate increase that could upset customers and cause further difficulty. In 2009, Cartersville added a question about recycling to its fourth administration of The National Citizen Survey. The survey revealed that 67% of residents were supportive of including recycling in the city's waste disposal program, even if that change required an additional cost. Based on results from The National Citizen Survey, Cartersville decided the time was right to implement a recycling program, and set a goal to have the program in place by the beginning of 2012. Before implementing the new recycling program, Cartersville went through a multi-step planning and implementation process to ensure its success.

**Envision:** The City first identified seven major questions that would need to be resolved: How will recyclable materials be received? What type of containers do you want to use? What type of vehicle will it take? Can our regular collection routes be utilized? How much manpower will it take? How much will this program cost, and how will we pay for it?

The Public Works department met with its processing partner, Bartow County Solid Waste, to answer the first question. It was determined that a dual stream collection system – with one stream for paper and a separate stream for containers – could be easily integrated into the current structure and would also be sustainable for the foreseeable future.

The City also looked at its current five-day pick-up schedule and determined that a biweekly pick-up schedule would enable the City to implement recycling pick-up with minimal additional staff.



**Earmark:** Cartersville's Solid Waste Fund operates as an enterprise fund, and is therefore solely dependent on funds collected within that department to operate. Public Works increased fees by a reasonable \$2 per month to generate the funds needed to implement the program.

Next, the City needed to determine what type of collection containers should be used. Instead of choosing the standard 18-gallon open tubs, Cartersville opted for a container that would be easier for residents and collection staff to handle. The City decided on a smaller version of their garbage collection containers in two colors – dark blue for containers and light gray for paper. Because recycling was scheduled for collection every other week, the bins selected were large enough to hold two weeks' worth of recycling for the average household. A complementary recycling vehicle was selected for its ability to dump these units into a divided body for paper and containers.

**Educate:** The public was informed that recycling would be available to all residents on an opt-in basis, and they were encouraged to sign up to receive the collection bins. Information about the new program was distributed in the City's newsletter and sent to residents along with their garbage bills.

To facilitate ease of use, a sticker displaying the full year's collection schedule was displayed on the top of each container. This way, residents would only have to glance at the top of their trash bins to determine their next date for pick-up.

**Engage:** To add value for the monthly increase, the City developed and publicized a program called "Reside with Pride." The program includes specific times each year in which solid waste customers can

leave items from their home or yard curbside for pick-up free of charge – eliminating waste that might have accumulated over several weeks or months.

**Evaluate:** In February 2012, Cartersville successfully launched its first recycling program. Residents signing up to receive the service exceeded the City’s original estimate of 2,000 households.

	2013	2011
Approval rating	83%	50%
Comparison to Benchmark	Above	Much below

As a follow-up, the City included additional questions about the program in its 2013 administration of The National Citizen Survey. Quality of recycling services went from “much below” both the national and southeast United States benchmarks to “above” the benchmark in each area. Sixty-three percent of Cartersville residents indicated that they had recycled at least once in the past twelve months.



In the following chapters, each of the six Es is further defined and is accompanied by case studies of local governments that have used survey results from their residents to help strengthen their communities. These studies are intended to inform and inspire other local governments not only to understand but to act on survey data.





## Envision

Every organization plans. Some plans happen on the fly when meetings seem to be veering off track but in most local governments, managers are trained to plan. Most plan to plan, by scheduling and distributing relevant materials in advance of meetings to create plans. Strategic, master, comprehensive or long range plans most often are created out of discussions with elected boards, councils or commissions. In an analysis of strategic plan success, it was found that more than 70% of plans fail. The research also found that a critical key to success in strategic planning was understanding stakeholder opinions:

*Without an objective and unbiased understanding of “what’s going on here,” you’re not likely to come up with strategies that will be very effective. Take a hard look at what’s happening externally and internally and pay special attention to the needs of your stakeholders. As John Dewey once said, “A problem well defined is a problem half solved.”<sup>2</sup>*

These plans always benefit from starting with credible information about the status of the community and issues that resonate with residents. We often liken the use of citizen survey results in the planning context as building a platform on which all stakeholders can stand and look at the same horizon. This way, there will be much less opportunity for individuals to claim they speak for the entire community when they offer the perspectives of a vocal minority or merely claim to know what all taxpayers are thinking.

Although strategic planning can vary significantly in terms of time and resources, there are a number of characteristics that help create more successful strategic plans in local governments.

### Characteristics of Successful Strategic Plans

- Set an appropriate scope, timeframe and resource allotment
- Play to organizational strengths
- Align with your organizational culture
- Has actionable, tangible steps
- List expected outputs and outcomes
- Assign responsibility

<sup>2</sup> Leo Bottary. Top 10 Attributes Of Successful Strategic Plans <https://www.openforum.com/articles/top-10-attributes-of-successful-strategic-plans/>

- Are revisited (progress against goals are regularly monitored and considered).<sup>34</sup>

Two case studies highlight the use of survey data in strategic planning. Winter Garden, Florida used The NCS data, first to help develop its strategic plan, and now continues to use survey data as performance measures when revisiting the strategic plan.

### Case Studies in Strategic Planning

## Winter Garden, FL

In Winter Garden, Florida, elected commission and senior staff identified the need to create a budget that reflects the values of the community. Winter Garden, with a previous tagline, “a charming little city with a juicy past” (referring to its history in the orange industry), has a historic downtown with bike and pedestrian connections to surrounding towns via its 22 mile West Orange Trail. A city west of Orlando, this gem of a small community relies on resident perspectives to assure that the community is steering in the right direction.

The experiences and preferences of stakeholder groups were collected through a survey of residents, focus groups, a town hall meeting and interviews. With a mission of becoming the best small city in Florida, staff then augmented findings with other sources of data and observations.



Results were synthesized to describe the community’s vision, values and goals. Research results and the strategic plan help guide the City in decision-making, budget allocation performance measurement.

<sup>3</sup> Colorado Trust OCA

<sup>4</sup> Leo Bottary. Top 10 Attributes Of Successful Strategic Plans. August 2011. <https://www.openforum.com/articles/top-10-attributes-of-successful-strategic-plans/>



Winter Garden monitors its strategic plan using performance data from The NCS. Throughout its annual budget document, Winter Garden publishes, along with operational indicators, customer service indicators from The NCS and other sources. Since the city conducts The NCS every other year, targets are set for years when the survey is to be repeated.

Key Performance Indicators: Customer Service Indicators	FY 09/10 Actual	FY 10/11 Actual
Safety from Property Crime Survey Index	51%	71%
Crime Prevention Survey Index	60%	83%
Average Safety in Your Neighborhood Survey Index	80%	89%
Safety in Downtown Winter Garden After Dark Survey Index	68%	82%

## Paducah, Kentucky

Paducah is in far western Kentucky, bordering Illinois. I-24 swoops through the city of 25,000. Paducah is a river city located at the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers. Besides housing West Kentucky Community and Technical College and Murray State University's Paducah Campus, Paducah is home to two hospitals, a bustling shopping area, and numerous art galleries and cultural venues including the Luther F. Carson Four Rivers Performing Arts Center and the National Quilt Museum of the United States.

Paducah also is an employment hub for the region with jobs in health care and the river industry. West of the city is the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, a facility that began enriching uranium in 1952 and one of the area's largest employers. Just before our planning session with Paducah leaders, USEC, which leases the plant from the Department of Energy, announced plans to cut jobs. The plant currently is in a transition phase with the DOE negotiating with

Global Laser Enrichment for the enrichment and sale of depleted uranium tails at the plant.

NRC conducted a full day workshop with Paducah's top staff and City commission to identify key survey findings. Notably, the local press attended this meeting and the journalist on assignment was invited to participate in the discussions. In the community visioning, participants were asked to



specify what was unique about Paducah as well as what they wanted for Paducah in the coming years. Survey results clearly showed that residents were not enthusiastic about the economic condition of the City. The imminent cut back in jobs at USEC did not help matters. In the discussion about the future, leaders identified this vision: A downtown hotel, high-paying quality jobs, economic development, population growth, sustained economy, more businesses/employer infill and more shopping. In small groups, jobs and economic development were seen to be top priorities.

But The NCS also identified public trust as an area that concerned residents, and that concern resonated with leaders. Therefore, from their small group discussions, leaders identified public image and community pride as areas for attention in addition to the local economy. These conclusions led to a set of action plans. To bolster community pride and reputation, the city would develop a marketing and community engagement strategy and increase its focus on neighborhood revitalization.

Economic development was to include developing a matrix to identify the types of businesses to incent depending on anticipated return on investment, creating a more development-ready infrastructure, and educating the public on building inspection policies to help encourage new development and the expansion of existing industries.

Paducah leaders will track the action plans and readjust as needed before The NCS is conducted again in two years.

## Engage

Modern government might be better viewed as a social network rather than “the cockpit from which society is governed.” The more modes of opportunity that allow direct citizen engagement, the more accurately government represents public consensus about decisions and priorities.<sup>5</sup>

Dynamic partnerships can dramatically increase the effectiveness and buy-in for government programs. Your largest partner in governing is your residents. Partnerships also involve the private sector, community-based organizations and other government organizations. Partnerships allow actors to learn from each other’s experiences with the effect of increasing efficiency and ultimately improving the breadth and quality of a community. By collaborating with others, government can garner a broader range of resources.

### Partnering with Your Residents

Residents are the heart of any community. By contributing their time, energy and talents, resident volunteers pump the life blood of thriving towns and cities. Residents who donate their time serve in many roles – neighborhood organizers, park volunteers, senior center ride providers, and more. However, although all communities have a wide range of sources for volunteers, volunteers often are an untapped resource, in many instances simply because residents are not asked to contribute. Volunteers can benefit government outside of direct service also. Volunteers create community ownership and generate public support for government by sharing their positive experiences with others in their community. Studies have found that levels of public trust are higher in communities with higher levels of civic engagement.<sup>6</sup>

Maximizing the benefits of volunteers takes commitment, planning, time, and organization. Governments should spend time considering whether and why they want to work with volunteers and develop a philosophy for the overall engagement of volunteers. Volunteers should never be considered “free help” but rather extensions of paid staff engaged in the fulfillment of a government’s mission. Although there are no guarantees that all volunteers will be beneficial for an organization,

these best practices should increase the likelihood of success. Particularly important are initial and periodic assessments of whether and how volunteers should be used.

More intensive collaboration may involve using a “Train-the-Trainer” model whereby local government staff train residents to go out into the community and share information and skills with other residents. Resident behaviors are strongly correlated with sustainability, community safety and emergency preparedness, health and wellness, community inclusivity and more. Pro-social attitudes and behaviors can be significantly strengthened through community outreach, training and organizing.

The development of local non-government leadership also has been a strategy used in many community health initiatives. Identifying and promoting a local “champion” lends a strong hand in helping residents adopt behaviors to strengthen communities.

### Strategies for Successful Use of Volunteer Resources

- Conduct a periodic organizational assessment to determine whether and in what ways volunteers should be used and the organizational capacity for effective use of volunteers
- Develop plans around the appropriate skills, expertise, uses and roles of volunteers
- Identify effective recruiting strategies to attract capable people
- Have policies and procedures for volunteers, including risk management procedures, rules and regulations, and expected time commitment
- Screen and interview applicants for volunteer positions
- Place volunteers where they will be most effective in terms of the organization’s needs and the volunteer’s skills and available time
- Orient and train volunteers, not only on specific tasks, but on the organization’s mission, vision and goals.
- Provide meaningful volunteer jobs and roles in the organization
- Have a designated manager to supervise volunteers
- Empower volunteers by encouraging them to take initiative and ask questions
- Periodically assess volunteer performance and staff support for volunteers
- Track volunteer hours
- Regularly show appreciation and recognition of volunteers

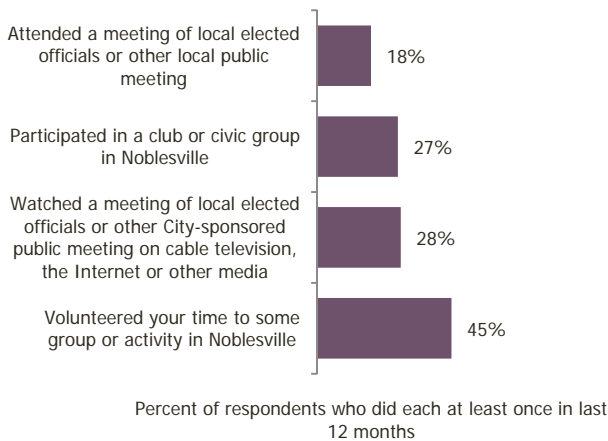
<sup>5</sup> What I Learned: An Insider’s Guide to Improving Local Government Modest proposals for fixing local government in America by James G. Kostaras AIA, AICP / Summer 2011: Government (Volume 14 n2)  
<sup>6</sup> ASPA Task Force on Civic Education in the 21st Century and Putnam, R.B. Bowling Alone, America’s Declining Social Capital. Journal of Democracy.

A Case Study in Civic Engagement

## Noblesville, Indiana

Civic engagement has been a passion of the mayor of this fast growing Indiana city since he took office on January 1, 2004. Mayor John Ditslear wasn't yet mayor when the Community Vision for Excellence initiative started in 1993. Its mission was to measure progress on a variety of indicators so that Noblesville would continue to be a great community for residents and visitors. The goals of Vision Noblesville (as it is now called) include helping all residents find meaningful employment, a healthy lifestyle, life-long learning opportunities, social services assistance when needed and available volunteer options.

Noblesville's 2010 National Citizen Survey was instrumental in alerting Mayor Ditslear of the need to enhance community volunteerism. According to the survey findings that year, participation in clubs or civic groups was not as strong as it was in other communities. The same was true for attending or watching public meetings and the number of Noblesville residents that volunteered was not remarkably high.



Being able to analyze the Citizen Survey data about this issue helped the mayor plan solutions. "We learned from the 2010 citizen survey that residents wanted more volunteer opportunities," said Mayor Ditslear.

To create a solution, he began a one year part-time pilot program that focused on increasing opportunities for and participation in volunteerism. This resulted in the creation of a volunteer program

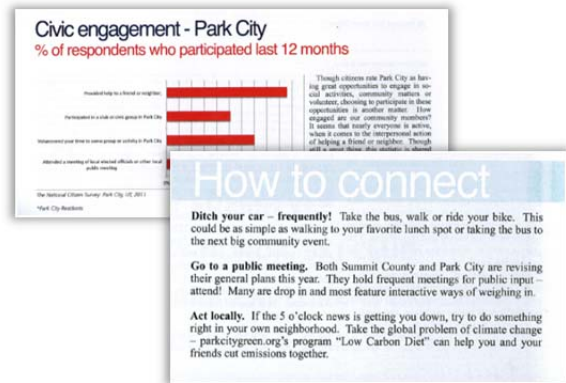
for community special events which has been very successful and continues to grow. This was followed by hiring a full-time manager of Vision Noblesville. Vision Noblesville has brought together a wide variety of community members to review long-term issues for the city and determine the best way to address these issues. Data are intentionally combined with community stories to help craft solutions which engage all sectors – government, business, education, and nonprofits. Currently, Vision Noblesville has 16 teams whose participants represent 72 different community organizations and businesses. These teams are working on issues ranging from enhancing the arts and creating more environmentally sustainable practices to improving the local workforce and services provided to families in need. All Vision Noblesville team members volunteer their time and expertise.

In the coming years, new Citizen Survey results along with other data will help the committees measure their success in achieving each of their established goals, including the goal of increasing volunteerism and civic engagement.

Case Studies in linking Civic Engagement for Fund Raising with Measurement

## Park City, Utah and Boulder, Colorado

Foundations can't just snap their fingers and expect money to rain from the sky. Often, potential donors want information to help them understand where limited funds ought to be contributed. Kind of like a stock prospectus, only prettier, the Boulder County Trends Report, a publication of The Community Foundation for Boulder County, and the Park City Mile Post – modeled after the Boulder report –



published by The Park Record in cooperation with The Park City Foundation, offer an array of indicators about community from administrative sources and survey research. The Boulder County Trend Report touts “150 ways to gauge the state of our community and be inspired.” Each publication focuses on annual highlights. The Park City Mile Post is focused on three areas: growth and development, connectivity and the economy. In the Connectivity section of the report, social connections and civic engagement are covered.

The Boulder County Trends report highlighted the economy, education, the environment and the Latino community at the same time that it also offered up to date indicators of community engagement<sup>7</sup>.

Percent of Boulder County Residents Who Say We're Very Open or Open to the Following Groups	
Families with young children	81%
Young adults without children	68%
Gay and Lesbian people	51%
Senior citizens	58%
Recent college grads	51%
Racial and ethnic minorities	45%
Immigrants from other countries	43%

In their data reports, both Park City and The Community Foundation of Boulder County offer examples of how residents and businesses can support the community not only through monetary donations but through donations of time like reading to children in school, becoming a tutor, volunteering for an after school program, making sure your business supports parents with children in school, using alternative modes of travel, becoming more active and more.

## Partnering with Other Organizations

Your creativity in finding strong and even uncommon partners that are outside the sector in which you operate can be an enormous asset for local government. An unlikely nonprofit partner may hold the solution to a problem you have faced for a long time. Partners from the private sector may be especially powerful allies. You cannot succeed doing everything on your own, hidden from the goodwill of potential partners.

Engaging in meaningful partnerships takes motivation and a plan, and not all partnerships and

<sup>7</sup> In, “Our civic participation and giving” (p. 85, Boulder County Trends 2013, Community Foundation of Boulder County)

collaborations are successful. Research has found that successful partnerships have certain practices in common. Consider how you can implement some of these strategies, or add to the ones you already are using, as you strengthen your network of partner organizations and volunteers.

## Strategies to Promote Successful Partnerships

- Identify service needs and organizational gaps that could be filled by partners
- Strategically identify partnerships that will be most beneficial to your organization
- Create a partnership plan that describes the purposes and activities that will link the partners over the coming 12 to 24 months
- Partner with diverse types of organizations, both for-profit businesses and nonprofits, private and public
- Provide meaningful roles and engaging activities for partners
- Work with partners to leverage community resources in order to achieve goals
- Communicate regularly with partners – sharing information on each others’ activities, successes, and challenges, as well as community needs and resources
- Co-sponsor activities with partners
- Participate in grant writing activities together
- Periodically publish evaluation findings in communications aimed at a wide variety of stakeholders, including partners
- Create community events with partners not only to familiarize the public with each program but also to show the links between program partners

Hamilton, Ohio is featured to demonstrate the importance of public-private partnerships.

A Public-Private Partnership to Energize the Urban Core

## Hamilton, Ohio

Even as the great recession was receding, Hamilton, Ohio, like many cities and towns across the U.S. continued to suffer economically. Ratings from The National Citizen Survey described a community that felt job growth was too slow, shopping opportunities were not good and Hamilton was not a great place to work. On top of that, ratings for economic development were subpar.

The specific and weak ratings of these economy-related community characteristics and services were enlightening even as the general sentiments were not news to city leaders. Knowing the economic challenges they faced, Hamilton leaders had put in place a rigorous public-private partnership program to grow the economic base of the community – even before the national economic meltdown in 2008.

The Hamilton Community Foundation, with cooperation of the city, sold the Hamiltonian Hotel to Concord Hospitality Enterprises, developer of Marriott Hotels. With favorable financial arrangements, the redevelopment of the old hotel into a Courtyard by Marriott created great opportunities for riverfront redevelopment – a boon to community quality as well as to the Hamilton budget. There is now an ambitious strategic plan for “Energizing Hamilton’s Urban Core”

(<https://www.hamilton-city.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=4707>) that includes housing for workers, commercial and industrial development, upgraded infrastructure and enhanced entertainment opportunities. This extensive redevelopment effort should affect resident perceptions about the economic vitality of Hamilton and the next iteration of the citizen survey will demonstrate if this aspiration is being met.

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## Partnerships for Sustainability

Partnerships found to be most effective often involve multiple partners from multiple sectors. Areas commonly addressed through collaboration of private, public and non-profit groups focus on sustainability and food security. Advocates working on community food security have been one of the most innovative groups in terms of forming partnerships to address community needs. For more information on these partnerships, please see the following web pages.

- American Planning Association: Helping local, regional, and state governments address food system challenges  
<http://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/briefingpapers/foodcouncils.htm>
- Nuener Kailee, Kelly Sylvia and Samina Raja. Planning to Eat? Innovative Government Plans and Policies to Build Healthy Food Systems in the United States. September 2011.  
[http://cccfoodpolicy.org/sites/default/files/resources/planning\\_to\\_eat\\_sunybuffalo.pdf](http://cccfoodpolicy.org/sites/default/files/resources/planning_to_eat_sunybuffalo.pdf)

Partnerships with other government organizations also are becoming a necessity of modern government. Issues related to sustainability, mobility and economic development often are addressed best through a regional model.

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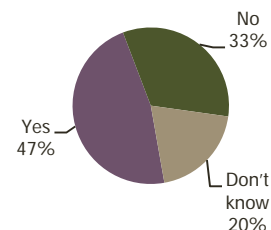
A Case Study in Intergovernmental Cooperation

## Puget Sound Clean Air Agency

Wood burning devices (fireplaces and wood stoves) rank as one of the top air pollution offenders in the Puget Sound area of Washington. Although these devices create light, warmth and atmosphere, they are harmful to the environment and the health of area residents. Pollution levels from these sources were higher than the goals established by the Clean Air Agency’s Board of Directors.

The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency’s mission is to protect the health of residents who reside in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish Counties and to improve air quality by adopting and enforcing air quality regulations, sponsoring voluntary initiatives to improve air quality, and educating people and businesses about clean-air choices. The four-county Puget Sound region spans an area of 6,300 square miles and is home to approximately 3.4 million people. The Board understood that collaboration with educational, governmental, non-profit and corporate entities was key to facilitating awareness and behavior change among residents.

Do you think a gas or propane stove, fireplace insert, or fireplace could meet your needs as well as your wood stove, wood-burning insert, or wood-burning fireplace?



To understand if there would be resistance to modifying wood burning sources, the Board commissioned a survey to gather information about the use of wood-burning devices in households in the Puget Sound region. Information from this survey was combined with scientific data to create an emissions inventory and determine policies for the region.

## Educate

Education and outreach are essential elements for strengthening and extending the work of local governments. They can take many forms, including marketing and public relations; community education and advocacy; collaborations, alliances, and partnerships; networking and more. Outreach is the mechanism for building a base of support. Increased networking and greater outreach mean access to more people. Without effective outreach efforts, organizations may limit their access to resources and fail to establish a positive image or reputation within the community.<sup>8</sup> Public outreach is more than just broadcasting to residents. Good outreach should target diverse audiences:

- Community-based organizations such as schools, faith communities and community associations
- Business associations for possible partnerships, volunteers, donations and media access
- Volunteer groups
- Local media

### Public Outreach and Education

Public outreach can be more than getting the word out. It can educate your audiences about broader issues like the need for water conservation or decreased use of motorized vehicles in your community.

The advances of technology have increased government's ability significantly to communicate with residents in cost-efficient, time sensitive manners. Most local governments now have web pages useful for educating residents and visitors. Some web pages also allow interaction such as ability to pay bills, ask questions, and communicate with other public officials and residents about community issues. Many cities provide 311 platforms where residents can report problems in their neighborhoods. Some local governments have established their own Facebook pages and communicate with citizens regularly using Twitter and YouTube (see Ankeny case study). Online Town Meetings also are becoming more commonplace (see Fort Collins case study).

For more information on social media use in local governing, see ICMA's Social Media Playbook

<sup>8</sup> Building Capacity in Nonprofit Organizations. Edited by Carol J. De Vita and Cory Fleming. Copyright © April 2001. The Urban Institute. [http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/building\\_capacity.pdf](http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/building_capacity.pdf).

[http://icma.org/en/Page/100423/Social\\_Media\\_Local\\_Government\\_Playbook](http://icma.org/en/Page/100423/Social_Media_Local_Government_Playbook).

For examples of using technology for civic engagement, see:

<http://knightfoundation.org/features/civictech/>

### Key Strategies in Public Outreach<sup>9</sup>

- Have a strategic communication plan in place
- Develop one or more core messages
- Identify appropriate audiences
- Identify and train staff members to talk with media and the general public
- Target key media for regular outreach
- Have some combination of web, printed, and video materials to inform the media and the public
- Develop events that will showcase your community and its goals to the media and the public
- Work with stakeholders and partners on joint education and outreach efforts

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A Case Study in the use of Social Media

## Ankeny, Iowa

The City of Ankeny, Iowa is one of the fastest-growing communities in the state of Iowa. Results from all administrations of The National Citizen Survey going back ten years describe a community that is consistently revered by its fifty some thousand residents. Residents give the city ratings that exceed those of other communities for quality of life, quality of service delivery, housing costs, land use planning, safety and just about every other important community characteristic. In Ankeny, more residents are visiting the city website and more here than elsewhere across the U.S. believe that public information services are top notch. One of the few characteristics of the community that was not considered exemplary compared to ratings from residents in other places was "value of services for the taxes paid to Ankeny." As much as it was a strong rating, unlike other ratings, this one was not above those given in comparison communities. Furthermore, the rating for opportunities to attend cultural activities was lower than elsewhere. Finally, the number of residents having interaction with the city continued a decade long slide.

<sup>9</sup> [www.coloradotruster.org/attachments/0000/3848/OrganizationalCapacityAssessmentTool.pdf](http://www.coloradotruster.org/attachments/0000/3848/OrganizationalCapacityAssessmentTool.pdf)

Because The NCS indicated that 3 in 4 residents had access to social media such as Twitter and Facebook, City staff proactively launched a social media campaign called 'Wednesday Walkabout' – a video series promoted through the City's social media channels to help inform residents both old and new alike about the history and different amenities in their community.

In addition to this social media outreach campaign, Ankeny publishes an interactive site to let residents learn about the results of The National Citizen Survey on the City website ([www.ankenyiowa.gov](http://www.ankenyiowa.gov)).

The image shows two overlapping screenshots. The top one is a press release from the City of Ankeny, dated August 7, 2013, titled "Ankeny showcases slice of life with social media campaign". It includes contact information for Deb Dyar and a quote from the National Citizen Survey (NCS) stating that residents value quality schools, business opportunities, and amenities. The bottom screenshot is a webpage titled "National Citizen Survey" from the City of Ankeny. It explains the purpose of the survey, lists four key benefits of conducting it every two years, and provides a link to contact Deb Dyar. A highlighted box states: "According to the 2013 Citizen Survey, 95% of respondents rated Ankeny as a great place to live." The page also features download icons for Acrobat Reader, Winzip, and other formats.

A Case Study in Online Resident Outreach and Communication

## Fort Collins, Colorado

Fort Collins has been conducting biennial citizen surveys for more than a decade. Clearly the voice of residents is intended to help steer the direction of the city. Biennial budget documents are salted with scores of references to the citizen surveys among many measures that managers use to set targets for improving community quality. By putting residents central in the strategic direction of the city, Fort Collins takes the risk that unscripted "reviews" and resident perspectives may not match the preferences of staff or elected officials. Such is the nature of democracy at its best.

Besides its rich history with citizen surveys, the City of Fort Collins has partnered with Mindmixer™ to create a website to promote civic engagement online called Idea Lab (<http://idealab.fcgov.com/>). They operate the website as a "town meeting" allowing residents to respond at a time and place convenient. After creating an account, residents can share ideas, join discussions and help local government and other community organizations take action around an issue through shaping decisions, impacting policy and spreading awareness.

This virtual town hall has posts about sustainability, transportation, community engagement, diversity, and quality of life to name a few. Conversations occur between residents, city staff and community organizations.

The image shows a screenshot of a social media post from the Idea Lab website. The post is titled "Widen our sidewalks and incorporate them into the trail system." and is dated APR 23, 2013. The author is Margo E. The post text suggests widening sidewalks along busier streets like Timberline and Lemay to encourage biking. There are 2 comments: one from Dave G14 suggesting an annual block party, and another from jimmy sawyer (Administrator) suggesting applying for grant money from Neighborhood Services.

## Marketing and Advocacy

Public outreach can also be about branding. With traditional marketing outlets and the advent of social media, local governments are now choosing to



promote their communities and the work they do to visitors and residents alike. Reimagining or branding is an increasingly popular approach for cities and counties to highlight their unique attributes in a strategic voice.

A Case Study in Community Branding

## Greeley, Colorado

Greeley, Colorado has a rich agricultural history of sugar beets, produce, corn and cattle as well as a highly-regarded university. However, as the longtime home of a meat processing facility, Greeley grew to have a reputation inside and outside the city as a place that featured some of the less attractive attributes of agriculture. A simplistic summary of a complex community, this stereotype, born out of the city's agrarian heritage, seemed to have a tail wind that blew into all parts of Colorado until City leaders had had enough. It was time for this city, with a population just shy of 100,000, to allocate resources to define the problem more clearly, gather and analyze data, set baselines for future comparisons and, most importantly, to take action.

The citizen survey results confirmed what everyone knew, but the survey put a number to it: two-thirds of Greeley residents thought that the community's image was not good.



**The cultural scene is weak.**

No, not by any means!

The Greeley Philharmonic just celebrated its 103rd season making it one of the oldest symphony orchestras in the nation

The new Creative District highlights the people, galleries and activities that make Greeley's creative class glad they're here [www.greeleycreativedistrict.org](http://www.greeleycreativedistrict.org);

However, about the same percent felt that more effort should be put into improving the community image through “communication, marketing and image building with residents and external audiences, community appearance, etc.”

This and other data gave Greeley's leaders the information they needed to move forward. It clearly showed that the city had grown and evolved from its early agricultural roots and that people were fed up

with the old misperceptions. A partnership was formed by Greeley City government with the Greeley Chamber of Commerce, University of Northern Colorado, Aims Community College and others to improve the city's image.

With financial and civic support, Greeley embarked on an aggressive marketing and image initiative to show the state – and even local residents – that Greeley was far more than its distant history. The advertising campaign within the initiative, named “Greeley Unexpected,” includes photos, conversations, traditional advertising, social and traditional media engagement and multi-media placements that highlight the great things about Greeley that too many people did not know or ignored.

These images, from the Greeley Unexpected campaign, help tell the story of a diverse and creative community and generate enthusiasm for the little known facts that Greeley is home to a variety of interesting individuals and businesses, from internationally known musicians to a special effects house that creates animatronic horrors for Hollywood.

For more information about the Greeley Unexpected campaign, a Flickr gallery of Greeley scenes, and more, visit: <http://www.greeleyunexpected.com>.

For more information on local government branding, see ICMA's Knowledge Network Community Branding Resources: [http://icma.org/en/BlogPost/529/Knowledge\\_Network\\_Community\\_Branding\\_Resources](http://icma.org/en/BlogPost/529/Knowledge_Network_Community_Branding_Resources)



## Earmark

By “earmark,” we simply mean “use resources.” Those resources could be finance, personnel or facilities but reallocation of resources is one common use of The NCS results and those decisions often are linked to the budget. Sometimes direct questions of residents tell you whether there is support for a bond issue or tax increase and sometimes the ratings you receive about the characteristics of your community suggest that new resources are needed to boost flagging opinion.

A Case Study in Earmarking

### Pocatello, Idaho

In Pocatello, Idaho some residents brought to council’s attention the sore state of the existing animal shelter and the need for a new place. Because city council members were careful stewards of the public treasury, they were reluctant to forge ahead with a new expenditure, even if it was for wayward pets. Pocatello, Idaho used survey results to determine if there was enough resident support to include a ballot initiative in a local election. Clearly, as you see in the table of results, below, there was!

Now, the question did not include a price or a payment structure, but the overwhelming sentiment in favor showed that there was an opportunity to move forward (even with the expected decline in support once costs were identified) and that clear opportunity helped council make a decision to put the shelter’s construction on the ballot.

To what extent would you support or oppose the construction of a new Animal Shelter to improve and expand the facility?	Percent
Strongly support	47%
Somewhat support	40%
Somewhat oppose	7%
Strongly oppose	6%
Total	100%

In the words of one city administrator, “... on the last survey, we had one question asking about support for replacing the city’s animal shelter. The response on that particular question was so strong that a very conservative council was nonetheless motivated to put the question on the ballot for a \$2.8M bond (in Idaho, cities cannot go into long-term debt without a vote of the citizens and it has to be 2/3 YES (66%) in order for a general obligation bond to pass). The bond passed with 72%. I’ve pointed to this result as

an example of why surveys are useful. You think there is no support and has no chance in a bond election? The survey suggested otherwise and in fact it was otherwise. I’m fairly certain that without the survey, the question never would have made it to the ballot, let alone pass. So there you are.”

You can see a great video about the Pocatello Animal Shelter and how the bond measure helped them achieve their goals on their website: <http://www.pocatello.us/animal/>.

A more recent trend in governing relates to the use of performance-based budgeting (see Fort Collins’ “Budgeting for Outcomes” <http://www.fcgov.com/citymanager/budget.php>) or priority-based budgeting (see Boulder’s “Priority Based Budget” <https://bouldercolorado.gov/budget/priority-based-budgeting> ). Performance budgeting is based on an organization’s mission, goals and objectives. It is a way to allocate resources and link the distribution of fund to measured results.<sup>10</sup> Because the key outcome or “result” of local governing is resident satisfaction, surveys are often used to include residents in the budgeting process. Many local governments are now using resident opinion to help evaluate resource allocations made based on performance-based budgeting. Organizations that are using Priority Based Budgeting, first seek clarification about what community goals should drive resource allocation. Not only are elected officials asked what community goals should be, but The National Citizen Survey includes questions to assess community values that provide empirical evidence of what residents feel is most important for funding. (See <http://www.pbbcenter.org/> for more on Priority Based Budgeting.)

Following is a verbatim description from one of the Livermore, California managers showing how Livermore uses The NCS results in a comprehensive budgeting process.

<sup>10</sup> K. Carter, The Performance Budget Revisited: A Report on State Budget Reform - Legislative Finance, Paper #91, Denver, National Conference of State Legislatures, pp. 2-3

A Case Study in Strategic Budgeting

## Livermore, California

*Quickly, let me outline the budget process as we developed it in Livermore. I see the various parts of it as a "mosaic", which when put altogether create an overall, coherent picture.*

*"First, we conduct The NCS every other year to use as a basic "report card" to gauge how residents feel about city services."*

*"Next staff prepares proposed work plans around services which take into consideration the results of The NCS. These two elements, the results of The NCS and the proposed work plans, are then sent to the City Council as background input for the annual City Council Goal Setting session as they develop priorities for the two-year budget. The Council then lists the proposed priorities (their own, ones from the proposed work plan which could be modified by the Council) on big newspaper sheets. Each Council member is given five colored dots to stick on their favorite items. The 5 items getting the most "votes" become the City Council priorities for the next two years. Obviously, this does not mean that other matters would not come up or be addressed during the two years, but does give clear FOCUS on what the staff and Council want to accomplish over the next two years. It is also helpful in avoiding leaping onto some big, new idea during the two years, because staff outline for the Council how assigning resources to the work on the "new idea" would delay or eliminate work on the Council's major Two Year Goals."*

*"Next, The NCS results, the newly minted Council goals, and the subsequently revised work plan are then used by the CM and Department Heads, along with their own professional views, to prepare a Preliminary Budget. The City Manager and Assistant City Manager meet in a Department Head Team meeting to hammer out a budget - this is a true team meeting where every Department Head hears, presents, and considers their budget request to every other Department (this is quite different than the traditional approach where the CM and ACM would meet with each Department Head separately). The Team approach means that the Police Chief has to "defend" the PD requests to the likes of the Library Director and Human Services Director! Although the CM has ultimate veto power (which we have never once had to actually use), the Team works until it develops a plan that everyone*

*can support (in fact the Budget Transmittal letter sent to the Council is always signed not only by the CM but every Department Head!)."*

*"Next the Preliminary Budget is sent to the Council for presentation, review, public comment, and eventual Council adoption. So the "mosaic" is created from the following pieces: The NCS results, the staff proposed work plan, the Council Goal Setting Session, the Council approved revised work plan, the staff proposed Preliminary Budget, public hearings, and finally Council adoption."*

A Case Study in Strategic Budgeting

## Peoria, Arizona

Another example of local government altering services based on resident preferences as stated in The National Citizen Survey is Peoria, Arizona. As the recession was biting into Peoria's dwindling budget, the idea to close city operations one day a week and to consolidate 40 hours into 4 days was tested among staff and council. Before moving forward on the idea, leaders wanted to assess the interest of residents in four 10 hour days instead of five 8 hour days. The 2009 citizen survey for Peoria had this question:

To save money, the City of Peoria is considering closing City Hall on Fridays, but extending the hours of service counters (for utility payments, building permits, etc.) from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Other city services, such as libraries, Rio Vista Recreation Center, fire and police would not be impacted by this change. To what extent would you support or oppose this change?	Percent
Strongly support	54%
Somewhat support	37%
Somewhat oppose	3%
Strongly oppose	5%
Total	100%

Support for the shift was extensive, so in 2010, the government shifted its hours of operation to help offset revenue shortfalls.

## Enact

One of the greatest strengths of local government is its ability to shape communities using policies and laws. Systems-level change is often easiest achieved through changes in local policy. The principal activities of local government legislation are to develop, introduce, reform, and implement policies, and ensure that policies that are implemented do strengthen communities and address areas of weakness or need. Policies enacted by local governments can:

- Tax
- Subsidize/grant/loan
- Alter economic conditions
- Regulate
- Structure rights
- Generate information, keep records, disseminate information
- Fund government service
- Provide jobs
- Build and maintain infrastructure
- Reform the government itself<sup>11</sup>

Whether it is adoptions to design codes, the limitation of parking spaces, utility rebates provided to older adults, or business relocation incentives, local officials have significant power to address the deepest community needs. Fort Collins, Colorado is featured in the case study below for its work in sustainability and climate change.

A Case Study in Surveys for Policy

## Fort Collins, Colorado

Policies built on broad-based resident perspectives will receive stronger community support than policies created with only special interest input and the perspectives of residents with easiest access to council. Knowing that community values supported air quality programming, in 2011, the City contracted with National Research Center, Inc. to conduct a survey of its residents about climate attitudes and policies. The survey was designed to help local leaders create policies that best reflected resident preferences and the survey helped policy-makers create plans to address the concerns of different

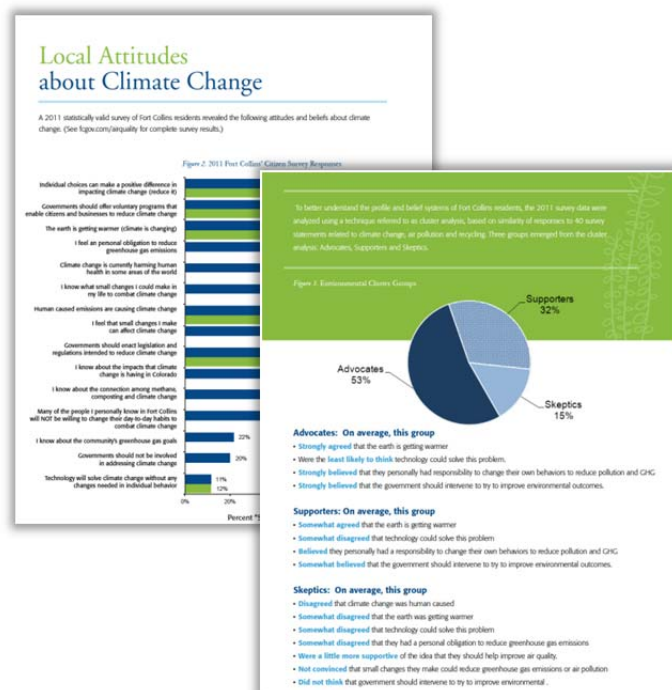
<sup>11</sup> People's Policy Institute: Participatory Policy Analysis: Achieving Systems Level Change Through CBPR [http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf\\_files/CCPH\\_call\\_slides\\_10-21-09\\_bXw.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/CCPH_call_slides_10-21-09_bXw.pdf)

resident groups using a population segmentation approach with survey results.

From the Fort Collins Climate Status Report, 2012: “Fort Collins has long been committed to reducing the community’s carbon footprint.” City staff identified the number one reason to have a community-wide air quality action plan as this: “First, city residents have high expectations for a clean environment. Residents have identified the Air Quality Program as being the single most important program for protecting their future quality of life, according to the City of Fort Collins 2003 Citizen Survey.” (in Fort Collins Air Quality Plan, May 2011. p.1 <http://www.fcgov.com/airquality/pdf/2011-AirQualityPlan-Final-LowRes.pdf>).

The 2011 survey demonstrated that residents were broadly committed to government’s role in reducing greenhouse gases and, with the cluster analysis of survey results, the survey showed what drove supporters, skeptics and advocates. The survey also showed that skeptics amounted to only 1 in 6 Fort Collins adults while supporters and advocates comprised over 80% of the population.

For other examples of policies enacted by local governments in terms of climate change, see <http://www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate/local/local-examples/case-studies.html>



## Evaluate

*"We must, in other words, become adept at learning. We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are 'learning systems', that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation." (Donald Schon 1973: 28)<sup>12</sup>*

The concepts of "learning organizations" and, more recently, "data driven communities" have been influencing governments to improve by tracking performance. If you have recently completed The NCS or any type of citizen survey, you have begun the process of becoming a learning organization. A key is learning how to use data to assess needs and then evaluate the results of actions taken to address the needs.

### What is evaluation?

Evaluation can be defined in a variety of ways, but the following is a definition that may be most relevant to local governments:

Evaluation is the systematic way that data are assembled into a picture of (1) how well an organization is delivering its services and (2) the impact of those services on the target population.<sup>13</sup>

There are three major categories of evaluation best used in local government, and all three can provide meaningful evidence of service quality and impacts.

Needs assessments provide a picture of a community's or a community group's (like older adults or government employees) strengths and needs.

Outcome evaluations measure the results of government service or activity and generally include questions about the process by which outcomes are achieved (like police quality as one service delivery process attempting to achieve the outcome of a sense of public safety).

Performance measurement tracks service delivery efficiencies and resident opinion about the success of service delivery. (Such performance tracking can be

done in the service of an outcome evaluation for specific community values or goals.) Local governments benefit from all three types of evaluation to become learning organizations.

### Including the Voice of the Resident

Most government staff and elected officials believe they are in touch with residents' points of view. But understanding what residents want and what works can't come only from anecdotes or chance conversations with a few residents or staff. Valid and convincing assessment requires a grasp of evaluation principles and use of evaluation methods that bring in the voices of a representative sample of residents and offers robust empirical evidence about governing effectiveness. Although some needs assessments and evaluation are done without including the voice of the resident, it is best to include your greatest stakeholder.

### Needs Assessments

The first step in improving community livability is to understand the strengths and needs of the community. The NCS or any citizen survey serves as a valuable needs assessment tool because it lets community leaders understand what residents themselves find working and what opportunities lie ahead. Needs assessments also can be conducted on specific issues such as older adult community livability, transportation or parks and recreation. Surveys or focus groups for particular topics are important and efficient ways to collect additional information before spending extensive resources on new activities or strategies.

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A Case Study on Use of Deeper Investigation

## Longmont, Colorado

Longmont did annual citizen surveys for years and then its managers realized they wanted to understand more about some of those survey findings. To do that, staff decided to alternate the general citizen survey one year with a policy exploration survey the next. This way there would be more information about the "Why's" of results.

For example, in one general citizen survey, Longmont recognized that resident ratings of snow removal were middling and stagnant. Over many years, residents gave average ratings just short of "good" on a scale of "excellent, good, fair poor."

<sup>12</sup> Smith, M. K. (2001, 2007) 'The learning organization', the encyclopedia of informal education, <http://www.infed.org/biblio/learning-organization.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> P. H. Rossi and H. E. Freeman (1993). Evaluation: A Systematic Approach. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. To order this textbook on evaluation, visit: [www.sagepub.com](http://www.sagepub.com).

Ratings of Snow Removal Service Compared by Year								
years prior to current	Average rating (0=poor, 33=fair, 66=good, 100=excellent)							
	Current	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-8	-10
Snow removal on major streets	64	69	67	62	65	65	63	61

Although ratings for snow removal in other places were, on average, not as good as Longmont’s ratings, Longmont managers wondered if residents’ perspectives about snow removal were influenced by widespread disagreement with snow removal policy.

In the policy exploration survey following the “current” year of the general survey, National Research Center asked residents about the policy that might have the biggest impact on overall ratings of snow removal. Given that big storms tend to most influence ratings of snow removal, the question asked if residents supported or opposed the policy of forbidding parking on plow routes during a snow emergency.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that during a declared snow emergency, the City of Longmont should implement and enforce a no parking policy along the approved snow plow routes in order to more efficiently plow the streets?	Percent
Strongly agree	65%
Somewhat agree	28%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	2%
Total	100%

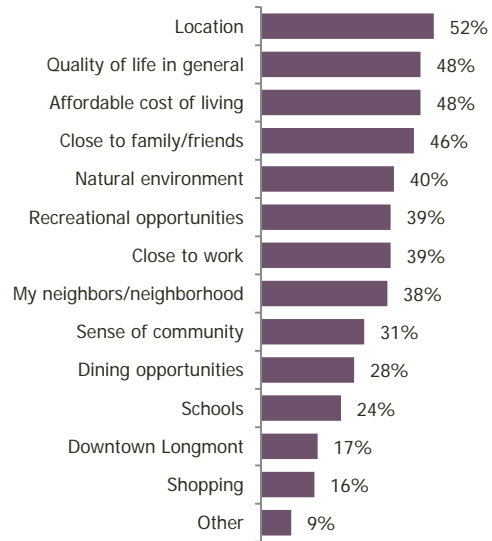
The vast majority of residents supported the policy, so no change has been planned. Although discovery that residents support the no-parking policy is unlikely to raise ratings, had policy makers unilaterally rescinded the policy and permitted parking on plow routes during big snow storms, those above average ratings likely would not have sustained.

For years, residents had been giving strong ratings to the overall quality of life in Longmont. City management and elected officials were interested in understanding what components of the community influenced those ratings. So following the biennial general citizen survey, the exploration survey sought deeper insight into community quality of life.

How would you rate your overall quality of life in Longmont?	Percent
Excellent	21%
Good	59%
Fair	18%
Poor	2%
Total	100%

In a question without response options, residents, in their own words, offered what they found to be most

appealing about life in Longmont. Results were as follows:



By learning what mattered most to residents of the community, local leaders are able to protect what seems to keep Longmont attractive – e.g. affordability and the environment – and to build on those aspects of community that may not yet be reasons to love life there (e.g. shopping and the downtown).

## Performance Measurement

Most government performance measurement systems collect and report data that already reside in administrative filing cabinets and on file servers. Beyond the use of these “hard” measures, the assessment of relative performance success should also include residents’ attitudes about the delivery of services and the qualities of the community that are meant to improve (in part) because of great services. Along with crime rates or road repair, assessments should include residents’ evaluations of the effectiveness of local policing and the quality of community mobility. Going beyond administrative records to track performance tells local leaders how well a city or county is meeting its vision of success.

The same survey that assessed community strengths and needs can be used to reevaluate a community at a later date. The NCS and other broad citizen surveys are intended not only to serve as a community needs assessment but also as a systematic performance monitoring tool. Many communities now use survey results in their performance measurement systems. The City of Westminster, Colorado and the City of Littleton, Colorado are great examples of

incorporating resident opinions into performance systems.

Survey Results Fit Well into Performance Measures

## Westminster, Colorado

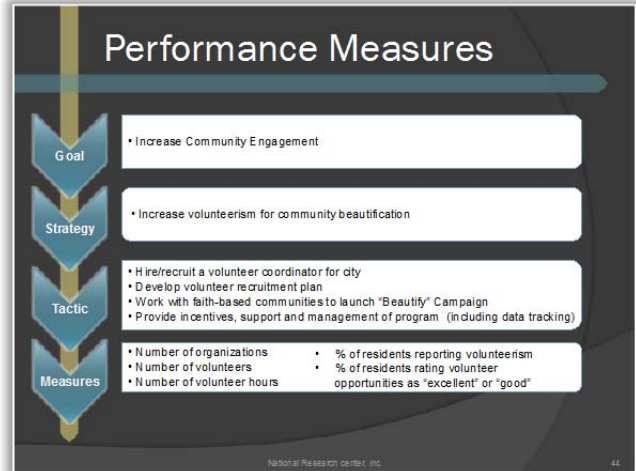
Westminster, Colorado has been on the front line of measuring and reporting performance for many years. City leaders view transparency about the efficiency and effectiveness of their work as a basic condition of local government. In its most recent report about its performance, "Take a Closer Look," staff wrote this:

"Performance measurement in the City of Westminster is continuously refined to ensure that the City is "measuring what matters." Through constant reinforcement, the City's performance measurement program works to improve the delivery of City services and the management of resources. Ultimately, performance measurement helps determine the progress made towards achieving the City's Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives."

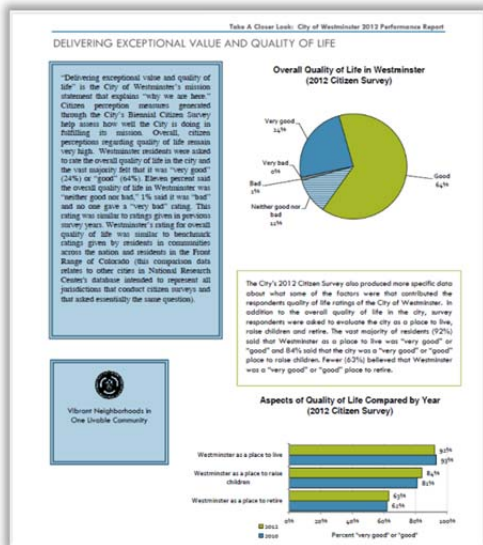
You can see on page 1 of that report (<http://www.ci.westminster.co.us/Portals/0/Repository/Documents/CityGovernment/CMO%20-%20Take%20A%20Closer%20Look%20Report%20-%202013.pdf>) that staff are keenly aware that measuring outputs and efficiencies are important only as they serve creation of a high quality of community. Therefore the report starts with resident perspectives about the quality of life in Westminster as reported in the most recent Citizen Survey,

conducted by National Research Center, Inc.

Beyond resident perspectives on overall quality of life, Westminster as a place to live, raise children and retire, the performance report includes resident



opinions about the quality of public works services. In place of cubic yards of snow plowed or linear miles of streets repaired or gallons of water treated, are resident sentiments about the quality of snow removal, street repair and water as you can see below:



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A Mix of Survey and Administrative Data in a Community Scorecard

## Littleton, Colorado

The City of Littleton, Colorado produces an annual community scorecard (<http://www.littletongov.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=3278>) that presents data related to its City Council's goals. In the 2013-2014 report, performance data were presented in the following strategic areas:

- Assure a financially-sound city government
- Provide a safe community to live, work and play
- Develop and maintain the public infrastructure
- Preserve and cultivate a quality community
- Pursue a balanced and sustainable local economy
- Support environmental sustainability
- Foster community involvement, communication and trust

The report not only has hard data about sprinkler system installs, budget allocations, number of exhibits, visitors and miles traveled, but it also has resident perspectives about service quality and strategic direction directly from its citizen survey. Not only does the report include results of the survey but it shows how those results compare to results asked of residents in comparison communities.

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## Program Evaluation

Once you have decided to take action to improve your community, it is important to evaluate the results of your efforts. Strong governing requires both experimentation and use of evaluation data.

Strategies to Promote Successful Use of Evaluation

- Identify program goals, objectives, and performance measures well in advance of implementing their evaluation
- Regularly track service activities and outcomes
- Systematically measure service outputs (how many residents attended council meetings last year?) and outcomes (how much did their knowledge of community issues increase?)
- Regularly communicate evaluation results to staff, residents, and other stakeholders
- Use evaluation data to improve services
- Encourage organizational learning

Evaluations can be small or large, often based on the price tag of the new initiative. In the Educate section of this playbook, the reimagining campaign undertaken by Greeley, Colorado was presented. Although Greeley has only been working on this new branding initiative a short time, government staff wanted to assess its “penetration” at an early stage, so they launched a short, web-based survey to community stakeholders followed by a survey of residents of Greeley and residents in three of the state's largest cities – Denver, Fort Collins and Colorado Springs.



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A Case Study in New Program Evaluation

## Greeley, Colorado

Greeley, Colorado has created a new image initiative and campaign called “Greeley Unexpected.” (See the Educate section for more information on the initiative.) The initiative did not come cheap. The intent was to go big – to change the perceptions that (at least) Coloradans had about Greeley. After the initiative had been running for several months, stakeholders were getting antsy to know if their investment was paying off and City staff needed data to help determine the direction for the 2014 campaign. So City staff, working with NRC, designed and put in the field a survey for residents and non-residents to determine the reach and effectiveness of the first year’s campaign. This research was at least as much to keep stakeholders (including funding decision makers such as the City Council) in the loop about the City’s attention to the big evaluative question (“Have perceptions of Greeley improved?”) as it was to determine the answer to the question.

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The answer to the question has come with extensive and robust inquiry that has relied on surveys of residents and those from out of town.

With the results hot off the research report, this is how Greeley released the findings – a fitting way to reinforce the new brand!

## Next Steps

As you consider how to strengthen your community, remember that you don't always have to blaze a new trail to get the job done. This Playbook has many examples in broad categories that reflect common and effective action areas for local governments. Build on the examples you find here that resonate with your community and dive in or give a call to National Research Center staff or the organizations we have highlighted. NRC can help you get in contact with those best equipped to help you solve the toughest problems whether related to budget, communication, ballot questions, strategic planning or citizen engagement. Quality communities are what every local government strives to encourage, but the burden cannot rest only on the shoulders of local government staff and elected officials. National Research Center can facilitate your success.