Engaging Residents in Performance Measurement – Bellevue, Washington Style  
by Rich Siegel

How do citizens know if their city government is doing what it should be doing? What criteria do citizens use to determine how well their local government is doing its various jobs? What indicators are most useful to citizens?

These were the questions addressed by the city of Bellevue and city residents during a recent series of focus groups and a large structured citizens’ forum of nearly 60 residents. Residents were randomly selected to participate in this unique effort to see how government is doing through the eyes of its citizens. The project is supported by a grant from the National Center for Civic Innovation in New York city.

“Bellevue is a national leader in obtaining feedback from our residents”, said Steve Sarkozy, Bellevue’s city manager to the residents gathered at City Hall. “We use formalized feedback mechanisms that help us gauge how well we are doing in meeting the needs of our residents”, he said. “We have performance measures that we spend a great deal of time developing, we use statistically valid citizen surveys to get residents’ feedback, and we use best practice standards where we benchmark what we do compared to the best models of service delivery in the country if not the world,” he said to the gathered residents.

City governments across the country have developed performance measures to track their operations, programs and service delivery in a systematic way. Such measures are useful to government administrators in that they provide objective, quantifiable indications of progress toward stated objectives.

The city of Bellevue employees approximately 175 key performance measures across its departments and programs that it reports to the public in its Annual Performance Report. Many are highly technical or specialized in nature, at a level of detail required for city management and beyond most citizens’ need or desire to know. In 2001, Bellevue culled a list of 16 performance measures from the larger list of 175 to arrive at a limited set of measures – or Bellevue Vital Signs -- that would give residents and other stakeholders a sense of the city’s overall health. These measures are meant as a bridge to connect the values of citizens and the performance of Bellevue city government.

There is the critical distinction between the Bellevue Vital Signs and performance measures. Performance measures are a way for city government to evaluate how well it is doing. The Bellevue Vital Signs are a way for citizens to evaluate how well city government is doing.

The purpose of this unique citizen review of key city performance measures was to see them through the eyes of Bellevue residents – to evaluate their utility to citizens as indicators of city government performance. If they are meant as a way for citizens to evaluate city government performance, then their effectiveness can only be judged by citizens.

The key question is: To what extent are the Bellevue Vital Signs used and useful to citizens?

The Citizen Forum, held in the Bellevue City Council Chambers, consisted of electronic interactive polling and facilitated small group discussion. After a welcome by city manager Steve Sarkozy, participants were introduced to the 16 existing Bellevue Vital Signs. Using individual wireless handsets, participants would indicate answers and thoughts on a variety of suggested key performance measures using their handsets. They were able to “vote” secretly to reduce bias or overt influence from other participants but their answers were public, and results were tabulated instantly and projected on a large screen for all to see. Participants used the individual wireless handset to indicate their opinion on 29 indicators using a rating of “1” when the indicator was “not very meaningful” from a citizen’s perspective to a rating of “10” for “very meaningful”.

Nearly all of the indicators – the current set of 16 Bellevue Vital Signs, indicators suggested by earlier focus group suggestions, and additional indicators recommended by forum participants -- were rated as useful: 28 of 29 indicators had an average (mean) rating above the scale mid-point of 5.5. The range of ratings was relatively narrow: 9.02 to 4.80. The overall mean rating was 7.24.

Some patterns were notable:
• 7 indicators had mean ratings above 8.0;
• 17 Indicators scored above the mean rating of 7.24;
• 5 of the top 10 rated indicators were suggested by citizens in either the focus groups (3) or the forum (2);
• 10 of the 16 current Vital signs indicators rated above the mean;
• The current Vital Signs were spread throughout this list: 3 were ranked among the top 4 indicators here and 3 were ranked as the bottom three;
• 7 of the current Vital Signs are derived from the citizen survey; 2 of those 7 were ranked in the top 10, and 5 were ranked in the top 20;
• At least 4 new indicators in the top 20, suggested by the forum or the focus groups, would most likely be survey measures as well.

Of course, there were only 79 citizens involved in the focus groups and forum, so the results are not projectable to the population as if this had been a sample survey. However, the citizens involved were selected to be representative of Bellevue’s population and spent two or three hours considering and talking about the performance of city government with each other, and specifically evaluating the Vital Signs. Their judgments, as represented in these findings, are an invaluable source of insight for city administrators. Starting with the 16 Vital Signs, these citizens ended up with 29 indicators ranked in order of their usefulness.

A primary objective of this citizen engagement project was to categorize the Vital Signs into:

1. Indicators to keep;
2. Indicators to modify;
3. Indicators to discard; and
4. Indicators to add.

The project was advisory, of course. The indicators in each of these four categories depends in large part upon how many Vital Signs the city of Bellevue wants to have. If it is less than the 29 that came out of this project, then the question is how and where to draw the line:

In summary, Bellevue learned a number of valuable lessons.

1. Participants indicated by their involvement, that many of Bellevue’s current Vital Signs provided them with the “citizen” level of information that they wanted. They suggested dropping a few of the current Vital Signs, rethinking others, and adding some that they deemed important to get an overall sense of the city’s “health”.

2. Residents are eager to find out information about their city’s performance but they would like to see summary data first and know where to obtain more detailed information.

3. it’s Your City Bellevue’s “public” newspaper has become a credible and reliable source of information about the city of Bellevue. It is favored by participants as a communications medium and is valued more than other information sources such as local newspapers, government television, and utility bill inserts.
For additional information on this project please contact Rich Siegel at 425-452-7114 (e-mail rcsiegel@ci.bellevue.wa.us) or check out Bellevue’s Annual Performance Report at www.cityofbellevue.org/perform.

Table 2
City of Bellevue
Citizen Based Vital Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>2002 Actual</th>
<th>2003 Actual</th>
<th>2004 Actual</th>
<th>2004 Target</th>
<th>Target Met Or Exceeded</th>
<th>Citizen Workshop % rating indicator as Useful to Very Useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents’ overall satisfaction with Parks and Recreation in Bellevue</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrol response times to critical emergencies from dispatch to arrival</td>
<td>3.4 min.</td>
<td>3.3 min.</td>
<td>2.1 min.</td>
<td>4.2 min.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of violent and property crimes committed per 1,000 population</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents saying they are getting their money’s worth when thinking about city of Bellevue services and facilities</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody’s Investors Service Bond rating</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents rating their neighborhood as a good to excellent place to live</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident satisfaction rating for clean streets (fairly clean to very clean)</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of fires confined to room of origin</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential street average pavement rating</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violations of state and federal drinking water standards</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiac arrest survival rate</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents rating Bellevue as a good or excellent place to live</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents fairly satisfied to very satisfied with job city is doing in planning for the future</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water service interruptions per 1,000 service connections</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents saying Bellevue is headed in the right direction</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Mobility Management Areas achieving concurrency</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bellevue Vital Signs Trends 1997 to 2004

1. Overall Satisfaction with Parks and Recreation in Bellevue

Nine in ten (89%) respondents are either very or somewhat satisfied, overall, with parks and recreation in Bellevue, with twice as many who are very satisfied (63%) than are somewhat satisfied (25%).

Very few respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (5%), somewhat dissatisfied (1%) or very dissatisfied (1%).

2. Patrol response times to critical emergencies

When a life is threatened, people want a quick response from their Police Department. In Bellevue, Police respond quickly to these emergencies. Although Priority 1 calls make up a small percentage of all dispatched police calls (historically about 1%), they are the most critical. In 2004, police reported a 2 minute and 6 second average response time to most important calls, slightly faster than the 2003 response time average of 3 minutes and 18 seconds. The improvement in response time is attributed to faster dispatch using a “quick dispatch” protocol. Now, a police vehicle is sent to the scene of a Priority 1 call while information is still being received by the call taker. Officers receive additional information while on route. Traffic congestion continues to hamper response times in Bellevue. Since 1998, Bellevue Police have responded within the performance target established for this measure.

3. Number of violent and property crimes committed per 1,000 population

Part 1 crimes include violent crimes, such as murder and rape, and crimes against property, such as burglary, auto theft, and arson.

The 5,064 part 1 crimes of 43.5/1,000 population reverses a declining trend since 2000. Although just .5 less than the 2004 performance target, part 1 crimes increased in 2004 primarily due to an increase in auto thefts, auto prowls, and burglaries.
4. Percent of residents saying they are getting their money’s worth when thinking about city of Bellevue services and facilities

Slightly more than four out of five (82%) respondents feel they are getting their money’s worth for their tax dollar. This is similar to percentages reported in previous years. The percentage of respondents who feel they are not getting their money’s worth (9%) decreased significantly compared to 2001 and 2000 results (14% in both years).

Respondents were read a brief description summarizing the types of services and facilities the city provides, including the following: police and fire services, parks and recreational facilities and activities, local roads and sidewalks, environmental protection, neighborhood preservation, long range planning, sewer and drainage services, and funding for social services. Respondents were then asked whether they feel they are getting their money’s worth for their tax dollar.

5. City bond rating

Bellevue maintains adequate cash reserves for all of its funds, has very little long-term debt, and consistently receives awards of excellence for both budgeting and financial reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association. Additionally, Bellevue has received a Certificate of Distinction from the International City and County Managers Association (ICMA) for its work with performance measuring. Simply put, the city of Bellevue is well managed and financially strong. In 1998, Moody’s Investors Service provided the city of Bellevue its highest bond rating of Aaa. Bonds that are rated Aaa are judged to be of the best quality and carry the smallest degree of investment risk. Bellevue continues to retain the Aaa rating, which reflects our conservative revenue estimating practices, not adding significant new programs or ongoing expenditures during good economic times, and the city’s overall prudent fiscal practices. Moreover, our bond rating reflects a dynamic downtown, quality and vibrant neighborhoods.

6. Neighborhood as a place to live

Cities are ultimately defined by the livability of their neighborhoods. Bellevue is not an exception. A very large percentage of residents (92%) reported that their neighborhood is a good or excellent place in which to live (this was slightly higher than our target of 90%). Equal to the percentage reported for the 2003 Performance Measures Survey, ninety-two percent (92%) of 2004 respondents consider their neighborhood to be an excellent (50%) or good (42%) place to live.

Only slightly fewer 2002 (89%), 2001 (91%) and 2000 (89%) respondents said their neighborhood was a good or excellent place to live.
Very few respondents reported their neighborhood is a fair (7%) or poor (<1%) place to live.

7. Customer satisfaction rating for clean streets

Bellevue residents are pleased with the level of street cleaning in the city and have been for quite some time. The 97% satisfaction rating for 2004 was 2% higher than our target of 95%. During the last seven years, residents’ satisfaction rate for clean streets has never been lower than 94%. Bellevue cleans residential streets quarterly, and arterials and collectors monthly. Bike lanes are swept twice per month.

8. Percent of fires confined to room of origin

The ability to contain a fire to the room of origin is a key measure of the effectiveness of a community’s fire prevention and suppression programs, as well as its building codes. Over the years, the combination of strengthened codes, such as requiring sprinkler systems in commercial occupancies and multi-family housing complexes, newer and more fire retardant building materials, and proactive prevention programs, has significantly impacted the containment of fires to the room of origin. The Fire Department contained 88% of all structure fires to the room of origin during 2004, three percent better than the 2004 target of 85%.

9. Average pavement rating for residential streets

The city of Bellevue employs a pavement rating system that considers a number of factors, including traffic volume, asphalt wear, ride comfort, and age. The city maintains a computerized pavement database and regularly assesses pavement condition. Average pavement ratings are determined through assessments that consider the extent and severity of the pavement defect observed. Residential streets were rated at 80 in 2004. Roadways are rated on a scale from 0-100, with 100 being a new surface. Roadways are typically a candidate for maintenance when a score reaches 50 for arterial streets and 30 for residential streets. Additional information about the city’s pavement rating system is included in the annual State of Mobility Report, available from the Transportation Department.

Comprehensive programs for street cleaning and repair help to preserve the city’s investment in existing facilities, minimize potential city liability, and reduce the long-term costs of major reconstruction. Current city policy requires that adequate resources be allocated to preserve the
city’s existing infrastructure before targeting resources to new facilities that require additional maintenance obligations. This commitment to existing infrastructure maintenance means that future stakeholders will not be subjected to deteriorating roads and other facilities or to excessive future costs related to “catching up” on needed repairs.

10. Violations of state and federal drinking water standards

Bellevue’s water is safe and clean. In 2004, Bellevue, once again, incurred no violations of state and federal drinking water standards. The Utilities Department enforces high design and maintenance standards that translate to quality water. In response to a question in the 2004 Performance Measures Survey 93% of respondents said that Bellevue Utilities does a good to excellent job in providing water that is safe and healthy to drink.

11. Cardiac arrest survival rate

The percentage of patients in full cardiac arrest who have a pulse upon delivery to a medical facility is internationally accepted as an indicator of performance. The outcomes during the past five years have ranged from a high of 46% in 2004 to a low of 31% in 2001. The 2004 rate of 46% is above the 35% performance target set by the Fire Department and the highest survival rate achieved since reporting data in 1997. Some Emergency Medical Service (EMS) professionals believe that cardiac arrest survival rates are generally indicative of an EMS system’s overall effectiveness. Also, an impressive number of Bellevue’s residents are trained in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). According to the 2004 Performance Measures Survey, 65% of respondents said that they were trained in CPR; this is slightly less than the 71% who said that they were trained in CPR in 2003. Of greater concern, is the number of respondents who said they have not been trained in CPR (35% in 2004 compared to 28% in 2003).

12. Bellevue as a place to live

Nearly all (97%) residents surveyed describe Bellevue as a good or excellent place to live. This is equal to the percentage (97%) reported in the prior year’s survey and is significantly greater than the percentages of respondents who rated Bellevue as excellent or good in the 2002 (93%), 2001 (91%) and 2000 (93%) Performance Measures Surveys. In addition, 2004 respondents were significantly more likely to say Bellevue is an excellent place to live (the
highest rating) than they were in 2002, 2001 or 2000 (50% in 2004 versus 40%, 42% and 42% respectively). Very few respondents think Bellevue is a fair (3%) or poor (<1%) place in which to live.

When asked to mention characteristics of Bellevue that make it a “high quality” community, respondents mentioned several city services, such as good police services, good roads and streets, good park and recreational facilities. Additionally, respondents mentioned several city amenities such as nice homes, low crime, places to shop and dine, a good hospital, and the library.

These are the “high quality” city characteristics most often cited:

- Overall city services (42%)
- Parks, recreation and trails (30%),
- City amenities such as shopping, museums, dining, and hospitals (29%)
- Nice neighborhoods, low crime, well kept homes and good quality of life (24%)
- Education (19%)

When asked about “low quality” aspects of the city, 29% mentioned “too much traffic”. This is about the same percentage that cited “too much traffic” the previous year. It is a significant decrease from the 34% who cited traffic in the 2002 survey. Respondents cited other road and traffic signal issues such as potholes, not enough sidewalks, and traffic signals impeding traffic flow as “low-quality” characteristics. Additional “low-quality” characteristics mentioned by survey respondents were few and included issues related to the city government (9%) [such as, not enough street lights, unresponsive government, poor planning, not enough police, more facilities for kids are needed, and some respondents said they felt intimidated by the police]. 35% of those responding answered “Don’t Know,” suggesting that they could not think of anything “low quality” about Bellevue in general.

13. Percent of residents satisfied with job city is doing in planning for the future

Nearly equal percentages of 2004 (71%), 2003 (72%) and 2002 (70%) respondents report satisfaction with the job the city is doing in planning for the future. Significantly fewer 2001 and 2000 respondents reported satisfaction with city planning (63% in both years). However, in 2004 significantly more respondents report being fairly satisfied than report being very satisfied with the city’s future planning (45% versus 26% respectively).

Slightly more than one in ten respondents (13%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the city’s future planning; even fewer are somewhat dissatisfied (5%) or very dissatisfied (2%).
14. Water service interruptions per 1,000 service connections

Reliability of water service is often looked at in relation to the number of water service interruptions per 1,000 service connections. The number of service interruptions for 2004 of 2.18 per 1,000 connections is lower than the number of interruptions in 2003 and below the 2004 target of 3.0.

15. Direction in which Bellevue is headed

Since 2001, the percentage of respondents who feel that the city, as a whole, is generally headed in the right direction has remained level (78% in 2004, 2002 and 2001, and 79% in 2003). The percentage of respondents who feel the city is off on the wrong track (6%) is just slightly lower than reported in 2003 (9%), but is significantly lower than reported in 2002 (13%), 2001 (13%) and 2000 (16%).

16. Percent of Mobility Management Areas achieving concurrency

Traffic in Bellevue continues to be high on the list of challenges facing the city although the economic downturn has lessened traffic throughout the city. Bellevue calculates concurrency level-of-service for each Mobility Management Area (MMA), using a 2-Hour Method. Based on this calculation, the city has achieved concurrency in 100% of MMAs in each of the past seven years. CIP project completions are contributing substantially to congestion reduction: Without these CIP projects, six intersections would fail Level of Service (LOS) standards compared to two intersections with the CIP projects completed. All of Bellevue’s 13 sub areas (Mobility Management Areas or MMAs) met the LOS standards that are set in the adopted Comprehensive Plan.