

*Citizen Initiated Performance Assessment*

# Citizen Partners Make Government More Responsive

Between 2001 and 2004, nine Iowa cities created citizen teams designed to give the public a voice in improving local government. The project was sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and guided by university faculty, and the model gained national attention as an effective method for using results-oriented management while nurturing a strong climate of civic engagement and cooperation.

Called **Citizen Initiative Performance Assessment (CIPA)**, the model is also considered a valuable tool for decision-makers—useful in program management, strategic planning, budgeting, and public relations.

This issue brief introduces CIPA concepts to Indiana decision makers and briefly illustrates how those concepts were used by local governments in another state. The Iowa CIPA model is a useful management tool that could benefit some Indiana communities. Based on the Iowa experiences, the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment has recently launched a new initiative called the **Quality of Life (QL) Dialogue** and is offering information and other services for local governments that wish to use CIPA.

## Goals of CIPA

CIPA uses citizen teams who work with legislators and city staff to select and develop performance measures for public programs. These performance measures are then used to determine whether government services are effective and what should be done to improve them. The goals of CIPA are as follows:

- improve communication between citizens and public officials,
- clarify public expectations of government services,
- use public input to guide results-oriented management, and
- build stronger trust in government.

## How CIPA Works—the Iowa CIPA Project

In 2001 to 2004, nine Iowa municipalities used CIPA to assess major local government services, including fire, police, street services, traffic management, snow removal, neighborhood development, and trash collection.

## Quality of Life Dialogue for Indiana Communities

The Center for Urban Policy and the Environment has launched a new initiative called the **Quality of Life (QL) Dialogue** and is offering information and contract services for local governments that wish to use CIPA.

Led by Professor Alfred Ho, a co-leader of the Iowa CIPA project who recently joined the Center as a faculty scholar, the goals of **QL Dialogue** are to help local governments:

- articulate citizen demands and expectations;
- use citizen-initiated performance measures to guide decision-making;
- organize informed dialogues among citizens and local officials about quality of life issues; and
- use citizen input to generate long-term strategic vision and performance goals for public programs so that governments become more results-oriented.

For more details, please visit the project website (<http://www.urbancenter.iupui.edu/qldialogue/>)



The first step in CIPA is the recruitment of citizens and elected officials to form a CIPA team. In Iowa, citizens for each city's team were recruited from a broad range of sources, including citizen advisory boards, high school parent organizations, neighborhood associations, religious and community organizations, and via city newsletters and telecasts.

The teams from each city functioned independently, but they all used the same outside facilitators to guide discussions and ensure that the meetings stayed focused. Project staff at Iowa State University provided additional information and data support.

*“The CIPA Project sets people on the way to resolving problems. You educate citizens when you talk about ways to deal with the problems. It is empowering.”*

*Carla Johnson  
Citizen member of the Des Moines CIPA Team*

Once the teams were organized, each selected several public services for evaluation. By limiting the number of services evaluated in one year, the cities avoided putting too much workload on any team. To cover all major municipal services, some cities created a review cycle of two to three years and covered a few services annually. This gave each department time to take responsive actions so that the public and the city council could reasonably hold them accountable for results.

After selecting the services for review, the CIPA teams identified the critical elements of the selected services, factors that reflect how citizens view “success” in a selected service. For example, for police services, the critical elements included maintaining a low crime rate, the quality of officers' training, officers' legal knowledge and compliance, response time, and professionalism when interacting with citizens. For street services, the teams looked at traffic flow, road safety, timeliness of repairs, accessibility of emergency services, and clarity of signs and road marks.

Based on the critical elements, the CIPA teams developed and selected specific performance measures to evaluate the quality of public services. In a few cities, the CIPA teams were very comfortable with the idea of performance measurement and moved quickly. In other cities, teams wanted more details and took more time to evaluate each service.

Regardless of the time taken, all performance teams reported open and worthwhile discussions about city services. Some cities also provided departmental tours for team members to give them

hands-on experience with the operations of the selected services. Most city staff were genuinely interested in the concerns of the citizens and their ideas about the city's work. City officials and citizens also had constructive discussions about the legal, fiscal, and managerial constraints that the cities faced. Most city personnel were willing to consider any innovative solutions suggested by the citizens.

City officials bore the primary responsibility of data collection. However, in some cities, citizens helped by reviewing data collection instruments, such as surveys, and by assisting with some data collection tasks, such as handing out user surveys in public areas. In addition, university resources were used to help collect and analyze performance data from a variety of sources.

Outside facilitators were used to help council members and city officials use citizen input to develop a strategic vision and action plans for departments. Some cities also held work sessions for council members and program managers to help officials see how CIPA input could be used in policy design, program development and management, and budgeting.

The final and perhaps most crucial step in the CIPA process is the presentation of performance evaluation results to the city council and the public. In the Iowa project, a council meeting was usually held with the CIPA team to allow the team to discuss their assessment and formally ask the city council to consider the citizens' perspective. In some cities, special performance reports were issued to the general public to keep them informed about the status and progress of city services.

## **Results of CIPA**

The performance measures recommended by the CIPA teams were generally well received by departments. Input from the CIPA team was used along with other performance indicators, including social and economic indicators, general citizen surveys, user group surveys, hotlines, and complaint statistics so that public services were evaluated from different perspectives and that CIPA would reflect the interests of the entire community.

Data collection efforts were demanding but not overwhelming, partly because some measures were already being collected by departments regularly. For example, when evaluating police services, most citizens agreed that crime rates are important measures. They were also interested in the response times for departments to respond to citizens' complaints and requests for services, especially the response time by emergency services. For police and emergency-medical services, several performance teams asked that the crime rates and response time measures be categorized by area of a city to see whether there was any concern



of inequity in service delivery and whether a specific neighborhood had more serious problems that should be addressed.

Many city officials and citizen participants found CIPA to be a valuable education opportunity for all parties. Over time, citizens developed greater understanding of the complexities of city operations and respect for officials. Some citizen participants who had initially been cynical about city bureaucracy began to understand the challenges of government and how citizens themselves might take more responsibility for community problems.

Many city officials who were engaged in the project also identified CIPA as the most effective tool for creating two-way communication between citizens and city officials. According to a survey study, they ranked CIPA higher than public hearings, special budget outreach, citizen budget committees, and even direct interactions such as phone calls and e-mails from citizens. They also ranked CIPA as the second most effective tool (after direct citizen interactions) to gain public support for budget decision-making and to build a sense of community (Ho, forthcoming).

### Thoughts for Policy Makers

Performance measurement itself has been practiced in city governments for decades and has shown a positive impact on program management. However, in the past, city council members and citizens have often not been involved in the process. When some key groups are left out, performance measurement is primarily an executive tool and usually has limited impact on legislative decision-making. For this reason, the Iowa CIPA model emphasizes collaboration between citizens, elected officials, and city staff in developing performance measures.

CIPA can be a valuable tool for decision-makers, but like any worthwhile project, it has a price.

First, it requires time and effort by city officials to recruit citizens, organize meetings, communicate the results to the public, and integrate performance measurement into the decision-making process.

Second, CIPA requires a financial commitment from a city. City officials may need to work extra hours and may need funds to hire an outside facilitator. To compile performance measures, a city may also need resources to support new data collection initiatives, such as citizen surveys or better computer software. Other tasks also require resources—including data analysis, follow-up work to help city officials use the data to improve program management and budgeting, and public reporting of performance results.

Third, an effective CIPA program requires a long-term commitment. It often takes several years to cover all major services and allow the city to demonstrate service improvement over time. The Center for Urban Policy and the Environment is currently exploring how local governments can partner with the university so that some public engagement activities can be conducted more cost-effectively by using information technologies and the Internet.

Since effective CIPA requires the cooperation of city officials, it is important to gain their full support. For elected officials, the CIPA process is generally a natural task because engaging with citizens is central to the nature of their job. However, some departmental staff may be less comfortable working directly with citizens. This challenge is especially difficult if a city is highly politicized with a history of mistrust between citizens and public officials. The mentality of “us vs. them” may make some departmental officials reluctant to participate and share performance information publicly.

Nonetheless, the Iowa experience showed that citizens and city staff can develop a collaborative partnership to build a more efficient government. CIPA may be especially beneficial in a community where citizens distrust government as it helps taxpayers understand how their tax money is spent and builds trust between government and the public.

As many local governments today are struggling with rising costs and shrinking budgets, it has become more critical that governments meet the service expectations of citizens. This is why performance measurement needs to be linked to citizen participation, and the CIPA model may offer a venue for citizens, community leaders, and local officials to face these challenges together.

### References

Ho, A.T.-K. (forthcoming). Exploring the roles of citizens in performance measurement. *International Journal of Public Administration*.

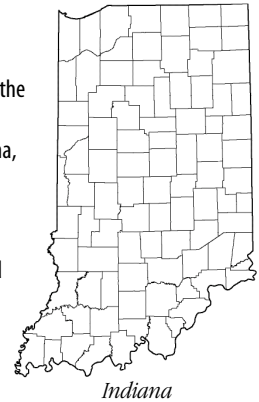


## Indiana's Future: Identifying Choices and Supporting Action to Improve Communities

This project, funded by an award of general support from Lilly Endowment, Inc., builds on the Center's research to increase understanding of the Central Indiana region. The Center's faculty and staff work to identify choices that can be made by households, governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to improve our quality of life. Our goal is to understand the people, economics, problems, and opportunities in Indiana, and to help decision makers understand the impacts of policy decisions. The Center also works to mobilize energy to accomplish these goals.

One way the Center works to achieve its goals is by offering assistance for projects that build stronger communities. The Center recently launched a new initiative called the Quality of Life Dialogue, a project designed to encourage discussion among citizens, elected officials, and public managers about important community issues. The goal of the Quality of Life Dialogue is to help local governments and agencies use citizen input and results-oriented management.

The Center for Urban Policy and the Environment is part of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis. An electronic copy of this document and other information about community issues can be accessed via the Center Web site ([www.urbancenter.iupui.edu](http://www.urbancenter.iupui.edu)) or from the Quality of Life Dialogue Web site at <http://www.urbancenter.iupui.edu/qldialogue/>. You may also contact the Center at 317-261-3000.



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