

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC



FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC

*Adding the Voices of the People
to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting*

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Fund for the City of New York
Center on Municipal Government Performance

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Three organizations and their leaders were essential to the development and implementation of the work described in this report. The Fund for the City of New York's (FCNY) history, mission and commitment to help improve government performance enabled its Center on Municipal Government Performance to be formed and to flourish within its midst. Financial and other support from FCNY's board have been constants since 1995. The Fund's recognized leadership in introducing Scorecards of government services was a pioneering contribution in the 1970s. Mary McCormick, the Fund's president, encouraged our interest in building on that tradition and also in trying a fresh approach to performance measurement and reporting. She has created a climate in which new approaches to urban problems and the investigation and application of new technology toward that end flourish. Her national acclaim as a successful "social entrepreneur" has been reflected in her support for our work, which has been essential to its success. I am personally very grateful for her sustained encouragement, advice and more.

Simply stated, the Center and its work could not have been accomplished without the interest, vision, persistence and substantial financial and intellectual support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The Center was the recipient of the very first grant in the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's Performance Assessment of Municipal Governments program. This program, conceived by Ralph Gomory, president of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, has since become a major nationwide initiative. Dr. Gomory's involvement, the sustained support of our work by his Foundation's board and the tireless efforts over these nine years of Ted Greenwood, Program Director, have been the lifeblood of this project. We hope that this report and our other accomplishments, past and to come, are helping to move government and the public in closer alignment—the desired outcome both our organizations share.

We say again and again, as we describe the work of the Center on Municipal Government Performance, that we started our work by listening to the public first.

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DYG, Inc. showed us how to do that. Daniel Yankelovich, DYG's Chairman, grasped the significance of our mission when we were starting out in 1995. He counseled us on the various routes we might take to find out how people judge government and recommended, wisely, that we conduct focus group research. Then, Madelyn Hochstein, DYG's President, took over and guided the design and implementation of rounds of focus groups, the telephone survey and the synthesis of findings. Madelyn has been a superb colleague, listening to and respecting our needs and requests, ensuring high quality results, providing sound advice and offering inventive ways to do this unusual work. She is a problem solver and a "yes" person. It has been and continues to be a pleasure to work with and learn from her. Many of the observations and even words in this report come from reports and presentations developed jointly by DYG and us. Although I take full responsibility for what appears in this report, I must say that I cannot even try to sort out now which of the two of us said what first.

This work is a departure from the traditional approaches to performance measurement and reporting, yet the contributions of many institutions and scores of analysts, past and present government officials, academicians, writers and other professionals who have championed the importance of assessing, measuring and reporting about government performance must be acknowledged and recognized by all of us. The list is long and could not be completed in this section, but it starts with the work of Harry Hatry and the Urban Institute in the 1970s. Many others are mentioned elsewhere in this report.

An undertaking such as this could not be initiated without extraordinary staff support. Verna Vasquez, Associate Director of the Center on Municipal Government Performance, started with us after the first round of focus groups had been conducted. She listened to and watched the tapes of those sessions many times and learned from them. She attended, with me, all 15 second round focus group sessions. She analyzed the voluminous data that emerged from the profilometer readings from our first and second street smoothness surveys, managed the fieldwork of the second survey and worked on both reports. She was on the first shopping trip in search of handheld

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computers when ComNET (Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking) was being developed and has been involved in its developments since. She suggested that CitizenGauge be a web-based citizen survey and helped start it up. She has been a manager, analyst, chief administrator and trusted aide. Her presence has helped us through daunting challenges, including completing this report.

Other members of our staff, past and present, have made invaluable contributions to implementing our findings. Joyce Klemperer and Ezra Polonsky brought ComNET to a higher level and guided the development of *ComNET Connection*, our web-enabled database. Joyce has helped oversee ComNET's wide expansion within and outside this city too. Harriet Gianoulis not only takes care of *ComNET Connection* but of many of our programming needs, web updates and all manner of technical and operational matters. ComNET's users praise her professional and helpful manner.

Rick Bruner has provided us with terrific designs, good-looking materials and better and better training modules. He pushes us to do more to reach out and tell our story. He is right.

AiLun Ku, our newest staffer, works on our national Government Performance Reporting Demonstration Grant Program and also helps keep our office functioning. Her energy and her administrative, computer and problem solving skills help keep us all on track.

I owe a great deal of thanks to Ned Steele, president of MediaImpact. Ned has been a patient, steady and firm presence in helping to get this report done. Many aborted versions preceded this one, but Ned helped set a successful schedule for the production of this final version. He helped with many drafts, read every word I wrote and had fine suggestions.

I thank all those mentioned and others who have worked with me for their support and interest in the Center's mission. I alone, however, am responsible for errors that may appear. Along with that responsibility has come much pleasure too. Developing the

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vision, direction and work of the Center has been one of the most satisfying things I have ever done.

Barbara J. Cohn Berman

Vice President, Fund for the City of New York

Director, Center on Municipal Government Performance

SUMMARY

WHY LISTEN TO THE PUBLIC? (CHAPTER 1)

Since 1995 the Fund for the City of New York's Center on Municipal Government Performance (CMGP) has been studying and identifying how people in New York City evaluate local government performance. CMGP has done so by listening directly to the public via rigorous focus group and telephone interview research. This research paved new ground. While much has been written about the value of measuring, assessing and reporting on government performance and how to do it, little, if any effort, has been directed to finding out how the public itself goes about rating government's performance. The work described here starts to address this important missing link by adding the voices of the public to government performance reporting.

Many respected experts and professionals who work in the field of government performance initially advised CMGP that public input would add little new understanding. The general public, we were warned, would not be able to discriminate among city services, would rate all services equally (and poorly) and would largely echo prevailing media coverage about their government.

The opposite turned out to be true. Focus group participants were interested in, articulate and thoughtful about the topic at hand. They demonstrated that they could discriminate and prioritize among services and make independent judgments about them— and they provided us with a wealth of cues and indicators they use to do so. They did not blame government for all the urban ills and gave credit for work done well. CMGP's research demonstrated that people's comments and observations about government performance are indeed worth listening to.

Perhaps our most consistent and compelling finding was that people judge government performance in ways that often differ markedly from the standard measures that governments use to evaluate themselves. Governments tend to report statistics about their operations

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and measure inputs (e.g., dollars spent, vehicles purchased, applications received) and outputs (e.g., tons of garbage collected, asphalt laid). More recently they have started to identify some outcomes of their efforts. The public, however, while interested in the full range of government activities, tends more to make judgments about the quality and effectiveness of government's activities.

In the private sector, businesses systematically use market research to obtain valuable insight and feedback about their products from consumers. Often, they adjust their businesses accordingly based upon such consumer evaluations. By and large, for a variety of reasons, governments do not follow this approach. *When municipal governments do not hear or understand the ways in which their constituencies evaluate their performance, a "disconnect" ensues: government is evaluating its effectiveness using one set of criteria; the public may be applying quite another.*

In sharing the results of our work with local groups from across the United States, and even from other continents, we have heard repeatedly that our New York City-centered findings resonate strongly in other localities too. Our findings are already being taken into account in other places. For example, programs we created as a result of this work are already operating in at least four other cities in the United States despite vast differences in the sizes of the governments and the population they serve; officials in several communities, states and provinces in Australia, the U.K. and Japan, among other places, are finding these initiatives relevant.

We present our findings here in the hope that local governments will begin to be more comfortable listening to their public and will use standards and measures that align with what their constituencies care most about. We would also hope that this new way of working with the public will lead to improvements in both performance and relationships between government and its citizens.

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HOW WE LISTENED TO THE PUBLIC (CHAPTER 2)

This report's findings stem from original research carried out between 1995 and 2001, years in which the role of local government was being questioned, re-examined and in some cases redefined. Our investigations began and concluded with two rounds of focus group research, in which New York City residents spoke openly, knowledgeably and with conviction about their perceptions of the quality of the services that their local government delivered. The focus groups were conducted in 1995 and again in 2001. In between these two periods, we supplemented the findings with one-on-one telephone interviews.

All of the focus group and telephone interview sessions were conducted independently and professionally under the Center on Municipal Government Performance's overall direction by DYG, Inc., the non-political social research company founded by Daniel Yankelovich and Madelyn Hochstein.

The initial 1995 series consisted of 15 two-hour focus groups populated by 151 people from 29 community districts in New York City. Participants reflected a broad palette of income groups, generations, ethnicities and nationalities. A similarly sized set of focus groups was conducted in November – December 2001. Much change had occurred in New York City over the intervening six years, and we wanted to see if those changes altered the essential findings of the 1995 work in any significant way. In fact, *the ways* in which people judged government performance remained consistent.

In each session, participants were asked to think about and then discuss interactively, how and why they judged and rated 34 separate categories of service that New York City government provides.

Additionally, in 1998 we conducted a telephone survey of the public's satisfaction with its interactions with local government. DYG spoke to 500 New Yorkers about their encounters with their city's government. This sample was not large enough to provide statistically reliable findings on all of New York City's myriad agencies, so

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we do not include statistical results from this component. Nonetheless, the phone surveys affirmed one of the basic findings from the focus group work: the nature of an interaction with a government employee or agency is highly important and can determine the way a person judges the entire agency and even government itself.

Independent data about how people rate their interactions with government is not collected as a common practice. We strongly recommend that this information be sought, analyzed and used to help improve performance.

TEN SIGNIFICANT OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HOW PEOPLE VIEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CHAPTER 3)

The research yielded ten broad important observations about how people view and evaluate local government:

1. People are interested in local government and grasp its complexity. While they hold firm expectations about how government should perform, they temper their views with a reasonable dose of realism.
2. People's judgments about local government are formed primarily by their own personal experiences.
3. An individual's personal interaction with government employees, particularly an initial encounter with an agency, defines how that individual judges the agency.
4. People are clear in what they want and do *not* want during an encounter with government.
5. People assess government services differently from the way government agencies assess themselves.
6. People readily acknowledge improvements in service delivery when they occur.

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7. People believe that some, but not all, government services are better in affluent neighborhoods.
8. People want, like and need information from government.
9. People rarely complain about taxes, but deeply resent poor performance, “goofing off” or being treated disrespectfully.
10. People ultimately feel powerless to improve the delivery of city services.

HOW PEOPLE RATED THE IMPORTANCE, PERFORMANCE AND THEIR FAMILIARITY WITH 34 GOVERNMENT SERVICES (CHAPTER 4)

At the start of every focus group session, participants read through brief descriptions of more than 30 different city responsibilities so they would all have a common understanding of the major services delivered by city government before they discussed them with one another. They then independently, without discussing their thoughts with anyone else, evaluated and rated every service on three scales: how familiar they were with the service, how important they thought it was and how well the service was performed. We used those ratings to help start conversations among the people in the group. Our primary interest was in *why* people rated as they did.

Since their ratings are from a qualitative rather than a quantitative study, they cannot be said to be statistically representative of the entire population. Nonetheless, these are the ratings of our diverse focus group participants; we present them as additional insight into the people we listened to.

Some services ranked consistently high or low in both 1995 and 2001; for others, ratings changed significantly. Despite these changes in some services' ratings, people reached their conclusions in 2001 in the same way in which their predecessors had in

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1995. Both groups based their conclusions largely on their personal experiences and those of their relatives.

People readily understood this exercise, were discriminating and thoughtful in their rankings and did not confuse the different criteria.

For example, the five services with the highest ratings for *performance* in 2001 were:

- Respond to and Prevent Fire
- Public Libraries
- React to and Prevent Crime
- Emergency Management
- Emergency Medical Services

But when the groups were asked to identify high-performing services that were also “very important,” a different order emerged. The combined ratings for both performance and importance ranked the following as the top five:

- React to and Prevent Crime
- Emergency Medical Services
- Respond to and Prevent Fire
- Emergency Management
- Protecting the Environment

SUMMARY

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND FOR ADDITIONAL NEEDED INFORMATION THAT EMERGED FROM LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC (CHAPTER 5)

In our focus group and phone survey work, we heard extensive comments from the public on how people perceive and evaluate government. *These comments seemed inescapably to suggest new types of government performance measures—the kinds of measures that reflect the quality of government’s work and interactions with the public.* For the most part, local governments do not seek or produce this type of information.

In this chapter, we present side-by-side the public’s verbatim comments and concomitant new performance measures or information that the public wants, needs and should have reported to them. Some examples include:

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

What People Said

“I called 911 for my grandmother. They came quickly, knew what to do and got her to the right hospital in time.”

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Public satisfaction with:

- Initial response time to reach patient
- Elapsed time for patient to be transported to appropriate hospital
- Knowledge, compassion, competence and responsiveness to the medical problem

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EDUCATION: K-12

What People Said

"In my child's school, there are signs all over that say, 'We can successfully educate all children.' It's very inspiring and encouraging."

"I hate to say it, but I'm going to send my kids to a private school. I'm going to find the money and I'm just going to do it."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Parents' satisfaction ratings of their school and the school system, with reasons for the rating

MASS TRANSIT

What People Said

"Sometimes you have to wait 20 minutes for the train during rush hour...."

"The reliability is wonderful."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Waiting time for arrival of bus or subway, by location, line, time of day and day of the week

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

What People Said

"They [library staff] are very helpful."

"The system has vast resources. Even if a book is not in your library, you can go on-line, you can reserve the book. They'll send it to your library and give you a date when you can pick it up."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Citizen satisfaction with staff responsiveness, caring, courtesy and helpfulness

Frequency with which a desired selection is available on shelves

Success rate/length of time for reserving or ordering a book

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THREE NEW WAYS TO REPORT PERFORMANCE THAT WE CREATED AFTER LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC (CHAPTER 6)

We listened to the focus group participants and identified new ways in which data on government performance could be collected and reported that reflect people's concerns. From among these, we selected three government functions that people identified as important, and for which no performance measurements seemed to exist that met the needs expressed by the people we listened to. We then developed and implemented methodologies and measurement programs for the following three areas.

Roadway Smoothness: The rideability and smoothness of New York City roadways were considered very important by most focus group participants, but no adequate measurements existed. CMGP adapted to city streets technology and a widely-accepted roughness index that are commonly used on high-speed highways and airport runways. The technology is called profilometry, which involves state-of-the-art laser equipment that provides objective data about the surface of the streets. The index used is known as the International Roughness Index (IRI). Although to our knowledge, neither had been previously applied to city streets, we tested them in New York and found that with modifications, they were applicable, reliable and measured what people care about. A panel of New Yorkers who were also in the focus groups rode over sample streets measured by the profilometer. They helped us turn the profilometry readings into **Smoothness Scores** and **Jolt Scores**—measures that are meaningful to them. The Smoothness Score is the percentage of blocks rated “acceptably smooth,” with focus group participants setting the standard. The Jolt Score reports the number of significant jolts per mile, again with focus group participants defining “significant.”

We published two reports based on our two citywide profilometry surveys of almost 700 miles of randomly selected streets, conducted in 1997 and 1999, entitled *How Smooth Are New York City's Streets?* These reports include maps showing the two scores for every one of the city's 59 community districts. We shared our findings

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with New York City officials and nationally with many transportation experts and government officials. Since then, several cities have begun conducting similar studies of their roadways.

Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking (ComNETSM): In focus groups, we learned that people often base their assessment of local government performance on a wide range of conditions they observe on the streets. However, ameliorating street conditions such as illegal dumping, dead trees or inoperative streetlights and graffiti, are the responsibility of different agencies, which operate independently. No data exist that cut across agency lines to reflect the scope of conditions or problems encountered on a typical street. CMGP addressed this by creating ComNET—a program that enables community organizations to use easily-operated handheld computers with cameras to accurately record the nature and location of a wide, customizable range of street-level conditions. Local groups canvass routes they select to record problems. Detailed yet easy-to-read and understand reports can be compiled within minutes of completing a survey route. Maps can be created to pinpoint the locations of problems.

The local groups then use the information to pursue solutions by either reporting problems to government agencies, utility companies, etc., or taking action themselves to improve their neighborhood. Each condition recorded is associated in the software to the name of the appropriate government department or other responsible organization. ComNET has been operated successfully in more than 30 neighborhoods by community groups, nonprofit organizations, business improvement districts and other organizations in New York City. Through partnerships with local organizations in other cities, ComNET is also operating in many communities in Worcester, Des Moines, Seattle and Philadelphia. ComNET not only enhances monitoring of street level conditions and helps improve them, it promotes civic awareness and involvement for adults and for middle school and high school students who have performed complete ComNET surveys, delivered presentations on their findings and gotten results.

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Local governments have found ComNET reports to be useful to them for many reasons: they enable government to address multiple problems efficiently; they are accurate, verifiable and objective. Moreover, ComNET enables the public and government to communicate more effectively about mutual concerns and to solve problems more cooperatively.

CitizenGauge: CMGP also learned that the public forms judgments about government agencies by how they are treated in their initial encounters with an agency. This “front-line” experience, which can be by phone, in person or by mail, is critical in establishing a judgment regardless of whether the ultimate outcome of the matter is favorable or unfavorable. Moreover, these initial experiences tend to be formative and lasting. People cite five broad categories in setting their expectations for initial encounters with an agency: *Accessibility, Courtesy, Knowledge, Timeliness and Responsiveness*. These expectations apply to the full range of government workers who interact with the public, from intake personnel and receptionists to attorneys, inspectors and other professionals.

CMGP developed CitizenGauge to capture ratings of these five standards. CitizenGauge is a way for members of the public to report on and rate their frontline experiences anonymously on an independent website. CitizenGauge enables government and the public to learn about the responsiveness of different offices and agencies from the public’s ratings. CitizenGauge may be adapted to any city and to specific agencies alone. It consists of an easy-to-navigate, brief survey instrument. It is now operating live on the Internet. Several cities and agencies have expressed interest in adapting and using it.

AFTERWORD

Initially we did not know whether listening to the public was feasible or useful as a way to enhance the measuring and reporting of local government service. We learned that it is, in both respects. Professionally designed and administered focus group research does add valuable new perspective to the field of government performance

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measurement. Listening to the public in a non-confrontational setting is possible, and we strongly recommend it.

While our research centered on New York City, we saw broader implications emerge. In presenting our work at national and international forums, we observed that our focus group participants had articulated truths that transcended the borders of New York City. This is principally why we decided to publish this volume.

We do so in the hope that readers—whether from the spheres of local government, academia or the community—will listen and reflect on the messages they have read here, and then further explore and advance the way local government is structured and how its agencies and employees perform.

More work is needed to develop further the potential performance measures suggested in this report. Our Center on Municipal Government Performance will continue to do this work. All of us though—in government, community organizations, think tanks, academic institutions and foundations—can contribute to the worthwhile mission of bringing the voices of the people into government’s performance standards, measures and reporting.

Chapter 1

WHY LISTEN TO THE PUBLIC?

Since 1995, the Fund for the City of New York's Center on Municipal Government Performance (CMGP) has been studying and identifying the way people judge the performance of their local government by listening directly to people. Rigorous focus group and telephone survey research has revealed what people expect from, like and want from government; much of this is measurable. When we started formulating the work of the Center, many of the people with whom we conferred advised us against consulting with the public at large. They argued that people would express only negative views of local government and that their views are formed largely by news media and, therefore, are predictable and need no further investigation. They said that, for the most part, people would be uninformed and non-responsive to questions about their government and its services. They recommended that we meet with community leaders and government experts instead. Nonetheless, we chose to stay with our original idea. The methodology we implemented is described in Chapter 2 of this report.

It became evident from even the first focus group sessions that participants' responses were quite different from what was predicted. People in all the groups gave informed, reasoned, carefully considered responses. They did not paint city government or its services with broad brushstrokes. They distinguished among services and agencies. (People are familiar with most agencies and their responsibilities but not with relatively obscure distinctions among city and state agency jurisdictions.) They had very specific things to say. If they were not familiar with a program or service, they acknowledged that readily. Groups composed of young adults and the highest income category were less familiar with local government than the members of other groups, but generally people's comments were rich in detail and substance.

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Most significant, however, is that we heard that people judge government performance in ways that often are quite different from the standard performance measures governments tend to report on. We present the findings here so that local governments can start to use standards and measures that reflect what people want to know and what people care about. We hope that the knowledge derived from listening to the public will encourage governments, current and future public administrators, government observers, communities and all interested parties to communicate with one another cooperatively and continuously so that government services will be delivered in ways that are responsive and meaningful to its citizens. A further hope is that subsequently the ways these services are performed are measured fairly and accurately and the results are reported regularly.

CMGP started this work for several related reasons. The overriding one was to help bridge what appeared to be a widening gulf between the public and its government. Public calls to eliminate government agencies, privatize government functions and cap government expenditures reflected the public's dissatisfaction and had become commonplace by the 1990s. On the other hand, it had been observed that budget cuts and criticism left many government employees feeling misunderstood, unappreciated, frustrated in their ability to please the public and sometimes even resentful toward the public.¹ Since the Fund for the City of New York created Scorecards of government performance in the 1970s, a natural extension of that work was to look anew at how performance measurement and reporting could influence and improve interactions between government and the public.

Private sector organizations that deliver services or products are accustomed to consulting directly with their customers for feedback, at random, on a regular basis. They apply various market research techniques to determine if they are meeting the customers' needs and expectations, and then make adjustments in how they conduct their business, aligning their performance more closely with what they hear from the customer. Having done so, they complete the loop by measuring outcomes from this

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same perspective: “How did the marketplace respond to our actions?” Government entities do not practice this approach.

An obvious explanation for the difference between the private and public sector’s relationship with the people they serve is that private sector organizations thrive by capturing market share from their competition. Hence, they need to know what their “market” is thinking about their products and services. Government organizations, by contrast, are not in a competitive situation. Another less obvious ancillary explanation is that government does interact with the public quite a bit, by receiving and responding to complaints, enforcing regulations, performing sometimes unpopular inspections and listening to objections in public hearings or other meetings—all of which can be contentious experiences. There is no incentive to go beyond these encounters to consult with random members of the public in a non-confrontational situation, simply to find out what they are thinking.²

In the latter part of the 20th Century, some government leaders, academicians, experts in the field of government performance, government watchdog groups and writers experimented with and argued for new ways to measure government performance.³ In essence, their thrust was (and still is) to add “outcome” measures. As an illustration, it has been fairly common for performance reports to include information about the cost for overtime for snow removal personnel (inputs). Reports might also contain the number of tons of snow that was removed (outputs). Examining outputs is a significant step forward, but it does not answer the critical question: “How well are we meeting the expectations and needs of the public?” The number of tons of snow removed does not reveal how long it took for the snow to be removed from which types of thoroughfares and neighborhoods, and where snow was not removed. Nor does it tell if the streets, once plowed, were left in rideable condition. These latter factors are the standards and measures of the *outcome* of government’s efforts which usually reflects the way the public rates this particular government service (snow removal).

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If government cannot align and measure its service delivery to be responsive to public needs, a “disconnect” ensues: the government agency thinks it is doing a good job, based on its criteria, but the public is using an entirely different set of measures to gauge success or failure.

The mission of the Center on Municipal Government Performance, then, is to add the voices of the public to government performance reporting. When we started our work, we had no idea if we would learn anything new by listening to people, especially since New York City government has over 20 years of experience producing sophisticated and extensive performance reports twice a year.⁴ We did, in fact, learn a great deal from this new approach, and we summarize our observations and findings in this report so that:

- Local government leaders can consider the applicability to their environments and use the observations and approach to help improve both performance and relationships between government and its citizens;
- The general public and civic organizations can gain a better understanding of why government may appear “unresponsive” to their calls for improved service and can work together with government to devise new ways to measure the effectiveness of service delivery;
- The academic community, particularly those responsible for the education of new generations of public administrators, can consider and begin introducing the new measures of service delivery that this model suggests; and
- A wider effort to begin using citizen-based government performance measures can start to take root in communities across the country.

This report is organized in the following fashion: Chapter 2 explains in general terms how we went about our work, how the findings can be used and the limitations of these findings. Chapter 3 provides ten insights, gained by listening, into how people judge government performance. Chapter 4 presents the ratings the focus groups accorded the performance of 34 different local government services. It then provides

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grids showing the confluence of 2001 focus group members' ratings of those same services in terms of the people's familiarity with the service, their rating of its importance and their judgments about how well the service is performed. Chapter 5 contains actual quotes and comments from the focus groups about services they discussed which seem to call for the development of new performance measures. Specific suggestions for some new measures and needed information are included. Chapter 6 describes three initiatives undertaken by the Fund for the City of New York's Center on Municipal Government Performance to develop and then apply new approaches and new measures of government performance that stemmed directly from the comments and observations of the people we listened to during our research. The Afterword contains ending thoughts about the implications of this work and the future.

¹ See Daniel Yankelovich, "Three Destructive Trends: Can They Be Reversed?," delivered at National Civic League's 100th National Conference on Governance, November 11, 1994.

² Initial responses from leaders and top managers of 27 cities, counties and states who received demonstration grants under a program run by the Center on Municipal Government Performance confirmed and added additional information. To qualify for a grant, the grantees were obligated, among other things, to consult with their citizens before producing an annual performance report. This requirement proved to be the most difficult one for grantees. Few had any prior experience they could call upon to help them reach out to a wide, representative swath of their public and to simply listen to them. Once they did, however, they found the comments surprisingly (to government) revealing in that they learned that many of the items in their reports were unclear or irrelevant to people, and other matters that people consider important were missing from the reports.

³ See, for example, various publications by Harry P. Hatry and the Urban Institute; *U.S. Government Performance and Results Act of 1993*; Vice President Albert Gore's *National Performance Review* (1993); David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's *Reinventing Government* (1992); David N. Ammon's *Municipal Benchmarks: Assessing Local Performance and Establishing Community Standards* (2001); Theodore Poister's *Measuring Performance in Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (2003); Paul D. Epstein's *Using Performance Measurement in Local Government* (1984); Jacob B. Ukeles's *Doing More With Less: Turning Public Management Around* (1982);

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Katherine Barrett's and Richard Greene's ongoing work at *Governing Magazine*; a series of national conferences entitled *Managing for Results* sponsored by the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University; the inception of the *Citizen-Based Performance Assessment of Municipal Governments* program by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation in 1995; the Governmental Accounting Standards Board's *Reporting Performance Information: Suggested Criteria for Effective Communication* (2003); some programs of the National Civic League and the International City/County Management Association.

⁴ A revision of the City's Charter in the late 1970s included a requirement that two annual Mayor's Management Reports be produced, detailing the activities of every mayoral agency. One report, on a full year's activity, is submitted to the City Council three months after the end of every fiscal year; a second report covers accomplishments during the first three months of every new fiscal year.

Chapter 2

HOW WE LISTENED TO THE PUBLIC

We chose focus group methodology to start our investigations into the way people judge government performance. We weighed the merits of other methods of public opinion research such as telephone interviewing, sending mail questionnaires and interviewing respondents at their home or on the street, before coming to this decision. We determined that the focus group approach was far preferable for several important reasons. Mail questionnaires provide static information and do not allow the researcher to probe behind the written response. People who are interviewed on the telephone usually do not allow protracted, exploratory conversations. At-home interviewing is very expensive, time-consuming and limited by the number and type of respondents willing to let a stranger into their home. And on-street interviews allow little research control over the respondents selected. They also suffer from problems similar to telephone interviewing. Nonetheless it is necessary to keep in mind that focus group research is not statistically projectable or trackable. It is qualitative, not quantitative, in nature and meant to shed more in-depth and detailed insight into the thinking and reasoning of participants than is possible via a quantitative survey.

We implemented carefully planned focus group research with DYG, Inc., the non-political social science research company co-founded by Daniel Yankelovich and Madelyn Hochstein. DYG pre-screened by telephone or in-person randomly selected New Yorkers, enabling us to select the desired demographic profiles. The discussions took place at an appointed time convenient to the respondents in a setting conducive to discussion. The discussions lasted for two hours—adequate time to explore how judgments are made about many different government functions and to hear the opinions of all who were in the groups.

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A FIRST ROUND OF FOCUS GROUPS

In the spring of 1995, DYG, Inc. worked with us to design and then conduct 15 focus groups with people from varied income and age categories and with diverse ethnicity. We asked DYG to create some individual groups with people from the same neighborhood so that we could learn whether neighborhood location influences the way the public perceives its municipal government services.

One hundred fifty-one people from 29 different community districts throughout the city were heard from in the focus group sessions. There were people from the major generational segments: Seniors, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and others. Men and women of European, Native American, Asian, Hispanic, Caribbean and African American descent were in these groups. The following criteria governed the recruitment process:

- The groups were to be made up of “everyday” New Yorkers. Social activism, political engagement or any other awareness criteria did not factor into the screening one way or the other. The exception is that city workers and their immediate relatives were excluded from the groups to avoid the possibility of such an individual biasing the group discussion.
- Most participants were required to have lived in the city for several years so that they would have had adequate experiences to form judgments they could discuss in the groups. Exceptions were made for participants from newer immigrant groups and younger professionals. Yet, even these participants had to live in the city for at least one year.
- Residents in all five boroughs were to be represented.
- One group would consist of owners or operators of small businesses in different boroughs; they did not have to live in the city.

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- Finally, we wanted to be sure participants represented, as best as possible, the rich ethnic and socio-economic diversity that is New York City. While it is impossible to capture every ethnic group in a 15-group study, we took many steps, including consulting with demographers, before selecting the neighborhoods from which respondents were selected to be sure that major ethnic groups as well as emerging new ethnic groups were represented as fully as possible.

The focus groups were led by DYG's professional moderators who followed a guide prepared by DYG in consultation with the Center on Municipal Government Performance. At the start of the two-hour sessions, participants were given a stack of 34 cards, each one describing a category of service that New York City government performs. Participants were asked, before any discussion took place, to mark on their cards which services they considered critically important, how familiar they were with the service and to rate how well they thought each service was being performed on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the best rating. A professional moderator then initiated discussions after asking a member of the group to name a critically important function and at least half of the group agreeing that it was critically important.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, people in the focus groups were interested in the topics being discussed, were articulate, thoughtful and forthcoming. They presented a range of views, gave considered judgments and, at their own initiative, tried to be "fair" in their evaluations. We found that people do discriminate among services and prioritize the relative importance of various services. With some few exceptions, people's views were not determined by the neighborhood in which they live. People travel around the city, to their jobs, their schools, to see their families, to get medical attention, etc. Their judgments are formed by all their experiences in the city.

They provided us with a wealth of cues and indicators that they use to judge government performance—and many do not customarily appear in government-sponsored performance reports. We were able to turn some of what we heard them say into new performance indicators (see Chapter 6) and we present other possibilities in Chapter 5.⁵

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A SECOND ROUND OF FOCUS GROUPS

To further test the focus group methodology for the purpose of identifying citizen-based performance measures, we planned, with DYG, a second round of focus groups scheduled for the early fall of 2001, six years after the original groups were conducted. Much had happened in those six years, including the economic boom of the late 1990s (and a subsequent downturn) and the influx of new immigrant groups, particularly from Asia. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's administration was nearing its end.

The terrible events of September 11th and a subsequent airline crash in the city changed the original timing. Together with DYG, we took various soundings to determine if and when city residents could and would be able and willing to discuss topics related to the city government's overall performance. In November and December 2001, 15 focus groups were conducted using criteria and a process similar to the first round in 1995. Each group consisted of nine to eleven people; 150 New York City residents participated. This time special efforts were made to include new residents to the city, working seniors and people with young families, since demographic information indicated that their presence in the city had increased. People from all five boroughs, 37 community districts and 53 neighborhoods were represented in this round. Since we found no discernible difference between the responses from the separately selected business owner group and the other participants in the 1995 round—indeed many of the groups contained people who owned or operated businesses—we determined that it was unnecessary to have a separate business owner group in 2001.

Although *the ratings* of the services changed, *the way in which people judged government performance* remained consistent from 1995 to 2001.

⁵ Included are some of the comments made by people during a customer satisfaction survey we conducted in 1998. We wanted to test the usefulness of customer satisfaction surveys—an oft-used methodology by the private sector—in developing citizens' ratings of their *encounters* with

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government agencies and employees. We asked DYG to conduct a random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey to determine if objective valid ratings of people's experiences with the frontlines of government can be systematically obtained in this manner. Despite our earlier reservations about conducting surveys via the telephone for our broad initial purpose, we wanted to test if the RDD method could be useful for this more limited inquiry, especially since we did not have a list of government's "customers" from which we could draw a sample. Over 5,000 random telephone calls were made throughout the city to reach 500 New York City residents who were willing to talk on the telephone about an encounter they had had with city government in the twelve months prior to the phone call. They rated their experiences and gave us much information about their impressions of and needs from government. But, all told, the 500-person sample was not large enough to cover, with a suitable degree of statistical reliability, the many important functions, departments, offices and locations that comprise New York City's government. Therefore, we do not present statistical results from these interviews. Nonetheless, responses confirmed that people's satisfaction with their encounters with government is a very important measure. Subsequently, we created and introduced CitizenGauge—an online survey that allows the public to report on and rate their frontline experiences with government. CitizenGauge is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Chapter 3

TEN SIGNIFICANT OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HOW PEOPLE VIEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As we listened to people talk about the way they judge specific areas of government performance, some clear, consistent themes emerged that, once noted, held true throughout their discussion of *all* government services. These observations are important because many of them fly in the face of assumptions we heard from people at various levels and in different branches of government when we were planning these studies. Moreover, once acknowledged and accepted, this information can help government have a better understanding of the public's needs and, in turn, can help government respond to these needs directly. The views noted here were expressed by people across neighborhoods, income levels and ethnicities, in both rounds of focus groups. They rang true for all of them, and probably will for all of us.

OBSERVATION 1: *People are interested in local government and understanding of its complexities. Although people are firm about how they expect government to treat them, they are realistic in their expectations about what local government can do. They temper their aspirations for life in the city with realism and do not blame government for every problem. They know that resources are limited and that government cannot do everything.*

They do not blame government for all urban ills. For example, they understand that an ambulance can be delayed because of heavy traffic; that the large demand for low income housing cannot be met easily, quickly or even fully; that supplying potable water to the entire city is an extraordinary feat as is government's ability to provide public transportation. They recognize and state that many of these services "can't be perfect."

They noted that actions by the public itself caused some problems. ("You can't really

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blame the ambulance on the delay time [when] cars do not move for those ambulances.”)

OBSERVATION 2: *People’s judgments about local government performance are formed primarily by their own personal experiences.* Even when people read published reports about government or hear about them, they do not accept the reports blindly; they test them against their own experiences. For example, if the published crime rate is low but they feel threatened and unsafe on the street, or have been a victim of a crime and know of others who have been too, they question what data are included in the crime rate, and what is excluded. (“*They don’t include muggings in the crime report, to keep the rate down.*” “*They say the air is clean, but I see a film of soot on my windowsill every morning. That can’t be good. I wonder what it is that they are looking at.*”)

There are two exceptions:

- Some people from the highest income groups cited newspapers and magazines as their source of information about government because they normally have little personal experience with many government services, such as public schools, public hospitals, social services; and
- The media influences people’s judgments of services that are more distant from their daily lives. For example, if people have not been in a shelter for homeless persons, or visited a prison, or been involved with child protection, they are inclined to believe newspaper, radio and television reports.

OBSERVATION 3: *The nature of the interactions with government employees and agencies is critical to the way people judge an agency and government itself.* Often, the very first experience a person has with an agency—frequently with a person on the frontline, or the gatekeeper—is decisive in people’s judgment about the entire agency. (“*The triage nurse was so rude and couldn’t tell me how long I had to wait for my child to see a doctor. I know that there are good doctors in that hospital, but I will never go back there.*”)

People were very clear about what they expect from all city employees and their agencies. Their expectations, once stated, sound both obvious and reasonable, yet they say they are not always met:

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Ten Significant Observations About How People View Local Government

- Easy access to the office or person responsible for the service they need
- Easy access to information they need
- Courteous *and* respectful treatment
- Helpfulness and responsiveness
- Initiative
- A problem-solving attitude
- Compassion
- Reasonable, knowledgeable and timely responses
- Sensitivity to and respect for cultural differences among the population
- Even-handed treatment to all people

When these expectations are not met, people judge government poorly.

OBSERVATION 4: *People are clear and specific about what they do not want from government. That list includes:*

- A run-around
- “Voice-mail jail”
- No response or very delayed response
- Rude, demeaning, unconcerned or otherwise poor treatment

Both good and unsatisfactory experiences are remembered for a long time.

OBSERVATION 5: *People discuss and see government services differently from the way government is arranged and responds.* Government is organized and delivers its services in departmental ways. Government employees’ reference points are their

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own agencies. In their training they learn to see clear boundaries around their agency's responsibilities. They dissociate from functions and people in other agencies. *The general public, on the other hand, sees connections and relationships among functions.*

For example, when they are on the street, people observe the whole panoply of street level conditions, and if the street looks clean, feels safe, the lights work, the road is smooth, etc., they feel that government is working well. They do not say as they walk on the street that the environmental agency is doing a good job or the public works department is not performing well, and so on. Indeed, from the public's point of view, street level conditions, as a whole, are important indicators for judging local government performance. In New York and in our work with other cities, we see that at least ten government and other organizations are responsible for maintaining some aspect of the street environment. Yet there are no performance measures that cut across agency jurisdictions and report on the state of multiple street level conditions.

Similarly, people see connections among other functions that cut across agencies, such as:

- The full range of social services offered
- Crime, correction, probation, employment, homelessness, mental health
- Education, parks, out of school programs, child health, domestic violence, child protection
- Homelessness, health, mental health, public safety

OBSERVATION 6: *People recognize and acknowledge improvements in government performance.* People noted with enthusiasm and specificity that some government services and performance had improved between the time of the first focus group sessions in 1995 and the second round in 2001. They singled out, in their discussions, improvements in:

- Public safety, noting that the city feels much safer;

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Ten Significant Observations About How People View Local Government

- Public transportation, especially the subways that are “cleaner, brighter, more reliable and safer;”
- The extent of homelessness, which they assess by observing fewer homeless people on the streets

OBSERVATION 7: *People feel that some, but not all, governmental services are better in upscale neighborhoods.* They single out public schools, police, parks, litter and snow removal, housing and health inspections of restaurants and grocery stores as examples of services they believe are better in upscale areas.

OBSERVATION 8: *People want and like information from government.* The public’s desire and need for information spans a wide range. They want to know: what services are provided and by whom; how best to communicate with an agency;⁶ in advance, when roadwork or any other activity that affects their lives is scheduled and why; where after school and summer youth programs are available; which restaurants and food stores have health violations; how public schools in their neighborhood are rated; why one roadway is being repaved and another is not, etc. Many people in the focus groups use the Internet and like getting information from the city’s website.

People seek information because it helps them control, plan and simplify their days and their lives. When government provides information, people conclude that government cares about them.

OBSERVATION 9: *Interestingly, people rarely complain about taxes, but they express deep outrage and resentment when:*

- they see “shoddy work”
- they see public employees goofing off
- they are treated with disrespect
- there is malfeasance and/or misfeasance

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Then they say: *"This is the public's (or my) money that is being wasted!"*

OBSERVATION 10: *Despite their sophistication and interest in local government, people feel powerless and say that they cannot effect changes in how city services are delivered.* Typical comments include: *"You can't fight city hall;" "You can't change the system."* Many attribute this sense of hopelessness to the rigidity of bureaucratic procedures, vested interests and unions. They also mention that there are no incentives for government employees to *"go out of their way to right a wrong."*

A critical issue for many was not having an effective feedback system in place so they could learn the effect of a complaint registered or a suggestion made.

⁶ Subsequent to the completion of these focus groups, New York City's government introduced its 311 telephone number and service—a one-stop opportunity for people to obtain information about city events, lodge a complaint about any city service or obtain a wide range of information without having to do research to determine which agency they need. This innovation goes a long way toward meeting the public's need for easier access to government.

Chapter 4

HOW PEOPLE RATED THE IMPORTANCE, PERFORMANCE AND THEIR FAMILIARITY WITH 34 GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Before the focus groups started their discussions, every participant was given a pack of 34 cards—each card briefly described a different city function. Along with the moderator, people read through every card’s description to ensure that they all had a common understanding of the major functions of city government. They were then asked to enter on the cards their ratings of all 34 services without discussing their thoughts or ratings with anyone.

- They rated how *familiar* they were with each of 34 services rendered by local government, (whether they were very familiar, moderately familiar or less familiar with each service);
- They were asked to designate how *important* they thought each service was (very important, moderately important, less important); and
- Using a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best rating, they were asked to rate how well they thought each service was being *performed*.

These ratings were used to start conversations among the people in the groups. Our primary interest was to delve into the reasons *why* people rated as they did.

Although people’s judgments of some city services changed over the six-year period between 1995 and 2001, how people came to their judgments about performance in 2001 was consistent with the approaches that were used by participants in the 1995 focus groups. Both groups used similar cues: primarily their personal experiences and those of family members. This observation led us to conclude that commonly cited cues lend themselves to be developed into meaningful performance measures. Typical comments and the cues people used to rate the performance of these and

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other services appear in Chapter 5.

These focus groups were not quantitative studies; therefore, the ratings cannot be said to be statistically representative of other members of the population. Nevertheless, they do represent the ratings of these diverse focus groups. We present them here as additional information and insight into the people we listened to.

Exhibit 4-1 shows the performance rankings (1 being the best) of the 2001 and 1995 groups. The most dramatic improvement was in the rank of the Police Department's function of providing public safety. This function was discussed at length in both sets of focus groups.

Running a close second in improvement ratings were the operations of the subways and buses. Much of this improvement was judged in terms of the increased sense of safety people felt while on the subways and in subway stations.

Two services ranked near the top in both years: the Fire Department's ability to respond to and prevent fires and the work of the public libraries.

It is also noteworthy that four services with low ratings in 1995 were again rated in the lowest third of the 34 services in 2001: maintenance of the roadways; preventing homelessness and providing services to people who are homeless; providing homes for low-income residents; and maintaining school buildings. Ratings of another frequently discussed topic—the protection of children—declined from 19th place in 1995 to 31st place in 2001.

CHAPTER 4

*How People Rated the Importance, Performance, and their Familiarity
with 34 Government Services*

Exhibit 4-1: Performance Rankings of City Services: 1995 and 2001¹

2001 Rank	(1995 Rank)	City Services
1	(2)	Respond to and Prevent Fire
2	(4)	Public Libraries
3	(23)	React to and Prevent Crime
4		Emergency Management ²
5	(6)	Emergency Medical Services
6	(3)	Taxation
7	(12) & (7)	Parks and Recreation ³
8	(20)	Protecting the Environment
9	(1)	Landmark Preservation
10	(16)	Business Services
11	(5)	Public Colleges and Universities
12	(30)	Mass Transit: Subways, Buses and Ferries
13	(8)	Services for the Elderly
14	(21)	Street Cleanliness
15	(9)	Cultural Affairs
16	(29)	Public Health: Disease Control, Health Standards
17	(13)	Public Hospitals and Ambulatory Care
18	(26)	Social Welfare: Public Assistance
19		Maintenance of Public Buildings ⁴
20	(14)	Mental Health, Substance Abuse Services
21	(27)	Education: K-12
22	(17)	Building Code Enforcement
23	(10)	City Planning
24	(18)	Enforcing Housing Standards
25	(11)	Consumer Protection
26	(15)	Control of Inmates
27	(32)	Transportation: Maintaining Roads, Controlling Traffic ⁵
28	(25)	Regulating Taxis
29	(31)	Maintaining School Buildings
30	(24)	Human Rights
31	(19)	Social and Protective Services for Children
32	(22)	Increasing the Housing Supply
33	(28)	Public Housing and Other Housing for Low Income Residents
34	(33)	Social Services for Homeless Persons and Families

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Notes from Exhibit 4-1

¹ Focus group research conducted by DYG, Inc., for Center on Municipal Government Performance, Fund for the City of New York.

² This new agency was created in 2001.

³ In 1995, participants were given the opportunity to discuss parks and recreation separately; however, they did not discuss recreation. Therefore, in 2001, we combined these two functions, which come under the jurisdiction of the same agency.

⁴ This function was not discussed in 1995.

⁵ Although traffic was discussed and people were unhappy when heavy traffic delayed their travel, they seemed to feel that traffic problems were an expected part of city life. As for maintaining the city's roadways, however, people felt that the city could do a much better job. The ratings here primarily reflect their judgment of roadway maintenance.

CHAPTER 4

How People Rated the Importance, Performance, and their Familiarity with 34 Government Services

Two grids demonstrate the result of DYG's cross-matching the importance and familiarity ratings (Exhibit 4-2) and the performance and importance ratings (Exhibit 4-3) for the 2001 focus group participants. Although the findings shown on the grids speak for themselves, services for which people said they were "less familiar" require some further explication. Even for these services, people made their judgments based on their personal observations. For example, when discussing how they rated the service of "Maintaining Public Buildings," they used their observation of the condition of *even one* public building that they happened to have been in to rate the service, although they said they were not familiar with how the city maintains all public buildings, the number of public buildings, etc. Some less familiar services may have been rated less important also because of lack of familiarity with them. The city planning function is an example of this practice. There were discussions about the function of city planning and people agreed that "*it sounded like a good idea*" but they hadn't had personal experience with it.

For these exhibits, importance, performance and familiarity are organized by thirds: "Very Important" being the top third in importance ratings; "Moderately Important" being the middle third and "Less Important" being the bottom third in importance ratings.

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Exhibit 4-2: Matching Importance and Familiarity Ratings of 2001 Focus Group Participants

		FAMILIARITY RATING		
		VERY FAMILIAR	MODERATELY FAMILIAR	LESS FAMILIAR
IMPORTANCE RATING	VERY IMPORTANT	1 Public Health: Disease Control, Health Standards 2 Roadway Maintenance & Traffic Control 3 Crime Reduction & Prevention 4 Emergency Medical Services 5 Education: K-12 6 Subways, Buses & Ferries	1 Social & Protective Services for Children 2 Respond to & Prevent Fire 3 Public Hospitals & Ambulatory Care	1 Emergency Management 2 Protecting the Environment
	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	1 Public Colleges & Universities 2 Street Cleanliness	1 Social Services for Homeless Persons & Families 2 Services for the Elderly 3 Human Rights 4 Enforcing Housing Standards 5 Public Housing & Other Housing for Low Income Residents 6 Maintaining School Buildings 7 Social Welfare: Public Assistance	1 Control of Inmates 2 Building Code Enforcement 3 Mental Health, Substance Abuse Services
	LESS IMPORTANT	1 Regulating Taxis 2 Public Libraries 3 Parks & Recreation	1 Cultural Affairs 2 Taxation	1 Maintenance of Public Buildings 2 City Planning 3 Business Services 4 Landmark Preservation 5 Consumer Protection 6 Increasing the Housing Supply

Source: DYG, Inc., Focus Groups Conducted for the Fund for the City of New York, 2001

CHAPTER 4

How People Rated the Importance, Performance, and their Familiarity with 34 Government Services

Exhibit 4-3: Matching Performance and Importance Ratings of 2001 Focus Group Participants

		PERFORMANCE RATING		
		HIGH PERFORMANCE	MODERATE PERFORMANCE	LOWER PERFORMANCE
IMPORTANCE RATING	VERY IMPORTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Crime Reduction & Prevention 2 Emergency Medical Services 3 Respond to & Prevent Fire 4 Emergency Management 5 Protecting the Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Education: K-12 2 Public Health: Disease Control, Health Standards 3 Public Hospitals & Ambulatory Care 4 Subways, Buses & Ferries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Social & Protective Services for Children 2 Roadway Maintenance & Traffic Control
	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Public Colleges & Universities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Social Welfare: Public Assistance 2 Building Code Enforcement 3 Enforcing Housing Standards 4 Mental Health, Substance Abuse Services 5 Services for the Elderly 6 Street Cleanliness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Social Services for Homeless Persons & Families 2 Maintaining School Buildings 3 Control of Inmates 4 Public Housing & Other Housing for Low Income Residents 5 Human Rights
	LESS IMPORTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Business Services 2 Public Libraries 3 Taxation 4 Parks & Recreation 5 Landmark Preservation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Cultural Affairs 2 Maintenance of Public Buildings 3 City Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Consumer Protection 2 Increasing the Housing Supply 3 Regulating Taxis

Source: DYG, Inc., Focus Groups Conducted for the Fund for the City of New York, 2001

Chapter 5

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND FOR ADDITIONAL NEEDED INFORMATION THAT EMERGED FROM LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC

We have observed from our research that the public rates its local government in some ways differently from the typical performance measures used by government. From the observations reported in the previous chapter, we conclude that new measures of and reports about local government performance are needed and must be accessible to the public to reflect:

- The *public's* ratings of the nature of their personal interactions with government agencies and employees. These ratings should include: accessibility, courtesy, knowledge, timeliness and responsiveness;
- The whole range of observable street level conditions, regardless of which agency is responsible for them;
- Other services and functions that involve more than one agency;
- The *quality* of work performed, assessed from the public's point of view;
- Outcomes by neighborhoods; and
- The extent to which the public receives feedback about complaints they have reported.

In this chapter, we present typical agency- or function-specific comments, verbatim, from the focus groups. The remarks cited here are about functions and services discussed frequently during the focus group sessions; they identify what cues people used to rate these services. Using these comments as a foundation, we suggest in the

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following pages new performance measures or information that should be obtained and reported to the public.

We are not suggesting that governments report citizen-based performance measures *only*. Governments have information about the state of the infrastructure, the economy, finance and budgets and other significant matters, including legislative and judicial mandates that the public would not naturally know about, but that influence government performance and resource availability. This information also needs to be reported, in ways that people can understand, so they can raise questions and/or make connections between what they know and want and this underlying relevant information.

Nor do we suggest that the public is always correct in its perceptions about government performance or in the conclusions it draws. For example, the conclusion that the city is doing a good job in providing services to the elderly by simply seeing trucks on the street marked “Meals on Wheels” may or may not be correct, since the speakers did not know about the quality of the meals, or the extent of the coverage of this service compared with the need for meals. Furthermore, this feeling of comfort about the provision of this service may lead the public to feel that it is adequately funded, or that they are available uniformly and consistently throughout the city which may not be the case.

Nonetheless, people’s perceptions—especially when no other reliable information is available to amplify their perceptions and experiences—become, in Emile Durkheim’s words, “social facts.”* Government needs to know how the public is arriving at its assessments and then develop ways to present the facts to correct mistaken conclusions.

* Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895)

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

CRIME REDUCTION AND PREVENTION

Views about the Police Department were considerably more complex and multi-layered than those of virtually any other municipal function. The reactions of people in these studies to the issues of crime and Police Department performance were inextricably interwoven around two distinct threads: their feelings about their own personal safety and their views of the manner in which they, and those in their family or community, are treated in their interactions with the police. It was possible in some cases for participants to take comfort in an improved overall sense of safety and security, while expressing concern or even anger over how they perceived the police went about doing their jobs.

Focus group participants also tended to measure the extent of crime by their own experiences and observations regarding personal safety, more than by the actual, “official” crime rate statistics.

Moreover, the findings suggest that people’s reactions to the police run even deeper than their observations and perceptions, reaching into essential contradictions between society’s sometimes competing desires for protection, order and unfettered individual liberties. One aspect of this seeming dichotomy was expressed succinctly by the citizen who said, *“We need more police presence. Yet if there are too many police visible, it is like living in an armed camp. When you see lots of police, you know something is very wrong.”*

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CRIME REDUCTION AND PREVENTION

What People Said	Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed
<i>"Now, in the city, you can walk any time of the day or night and you feel safe."</i>	People's perceptions of their own and their family's and community's safety
<i>"I definitely have noticed a change in crime. I've had personal experiences with crime and it just seems safer."</i>	People's recent experiences with crime
<i>"Before, chains were getting snatched off you and watches were being taken. All kinds of things were happening. You don't see that many things happening nowadays."</i>	
<i>"Before last year (2000), I never went into Harlem. Now, I can...this is beyond comprehension that I would drive there and feel comfortable walking around and everything."</i>	How safe people feel about walking alone on the streets at night Hour of the day/night at which people no longer feel safe to be walking about
<i>"The streets are safer. You can actually go out late at night and go for a walk without even worrying about somebody actually coming up and doing something to you."</i>	
<i>"The police officers are a lot more visible, which makes me feel a lot safer."</i>	Citizen satisfaction with the visibility and presence of police on the streets, by neighborhood
<i>"They are doing a good job because everywhere you look, you feel safe, because you see a cop car passing by or one on the corner."</i>	
<i>"I see a lot of change because now you're seeing more cops on the street patrolling the area."</i> (continued)	

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

CRIME REDUCTION AND PREVENTION (continued)

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

“There are certain neighborhoods where they do have police, a lot of them, and there are certain neighborhoods where you don’t see [any] at all.”

“It’s good to see police in the neighborhood; but when you see a lot of police, it feels like a police state.”

“They want to keep the crime rate low so they don’t count every mugging, attempted car theft and other things they don’t consider so important.”

Information about *what is* and *what is not* included in official crime rate statistics

“Recently my car was vandalized and I called the police and when they came to my house, they didn’t even get out of the car to look.”

People’s overall satisfaction with the quality of each interaction with police

“There’s no compassion. There’s no feeling. It’s just mechanical.”

People’s ratings, specifically, of the courtesy, respect, compassion, helpfulness and responsiveness they experience in their direct interactions with police

“I got mugged and I was like: ‘Stop that guy!’ My mugger ran right past the police and the police sauntered slowly over to me, letting him get away.”

“They totally disrespect some people. We’re not animals. We’re people.”
(continued)

People’s satisfaction with the quality of each interaction with police, by race and neighborhood

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

CRIME REDUCTION AND PREVENTION (continued)

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"They first look at your skin, they listen to your accent, they see where you live and then they'll decide how to help you, and that should not be the case regardless of your race or anything else."

People's ratings, specifically, of the courtesy, respect, and compassion they experience in their own direct interactions with police, by race and neighborhood

"In all my dealings with the police, they have always been disrespectful. For example, whenever they ask me for my ID, they never call me by my last name. They call me by my first name.... They treat you according to I guess how they perceive you in terms of your class. They would never call a person in a tuxedo by their first name."

Number of civilian complaints regarding lack of courtesy or respect, by race of person and neighborhood

Number of civilian complaints regarding verbal abuse

"A lot of times when I see cops, it seems that they are an occupying force and they look at you and how you dress and whatever."

"[The police need] more relationships with people in the neighborhood. I mean, like truly building relationships. I want to see a cop come up to me, and I want him to be white, and I want him to be grinning in my face and say, 'How are you doing this morning?'"

"The police. These men are 24 or 25 and they have a chip on their shoulder. They think that they're the bosses."

Standards set by department to evaluate their interactions with the public

"They need to train them; it's a different type of policing they have to do in Harlem than they do on 86th Street or the Village or any place else."
(continued)

Type and frequency of police training, including cultural sensitivity training, in how to interact with the public

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

CRIME REDUCTION AND PREVENTION (continued)

What People Said	Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed
<i>"You have to really understand the cultural values to work on the problems or issues."</i>	
<i>"They need more police of color in our neighborhoods."</i>	Racial composition of police force compared to population
	Racial composition of each class of new recruits
<i>"I know a lot of people that felt that the police picked on them because they were a minority."</i>	Perceptions of discrimination, abuse or mistreatment, by race and by community
<i>"I am very fond of saying that police <u>protect</u> other areas in the city but they <u>police</u> my neighborhood."</i>	
<i>"...A black person may have a completely different opinion. I never have a problem with a police officer."</i>	
<i>"They [Civilian Complaint Review Board] have no real power, they can only recommend."</i>	Citizen satisfaction with the complaint process
<i>"Who will go against the cops?"</i>	Citizen rating of the ease or difficulty in filing a complaint about police
<i>"The funny thing is trying to get the form, because you have to get it from a cop. I saw something in the news, how the police gave the person such a hard time to get this form." (continued)</i>	Citizen satisfaction with courtesy and respect shown during the complaint process

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

CRIME REDUCTION AND PREVENTION (continued)

What People Said

"I have read statistics unfortunately of the Civilian Complaint Review Board last year, and I don't know if my numbers are right, but I think the idea of what I'm going to say is right. They have received, I want to say, 350 complaints in a certain time frame of which seven were acted on."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Percentage of civilian complaints resulting in disciplinary action; total, and by race and community

Number of civilian complaints of non-responsiveness or inaction, by neighborhood and race of complainant

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

What People Said

"I've had a couple of experiences where I had to call 911 and before I could turn around someone was there. To me, they do awesome work."

"I called 911 for my grandmother. They came quickly, knew what to do, and got her to the right hospital in time."

"Well, you can't really blame the ambulance on the delay time because..., especially in the city, cars do not move for those ambulances."

"My uncle had been shot and we called 911 and they took almost an hour to get there. He was dead at the scene." (The participant believed it was the wait that caused his uncle's death.)

"My wife and I ended up delivering my sister's baby. They took so long to arrive."

"They never come if you don't live in the 'correct' neighborhood."

"I was in a restaurant when a woman passed out. We couldn't wake her. Many of us called and after a half hour no one from EMS came. Then someone called and said, 'A policeman has been shot.' In 45 seconds EMS was there. So they can negotiate traffic if they feel it is important enough."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Public satisfaction with:

- Initial response time to reach patient
- Elapsed time for patient to be transported to appropriate hospital
- Knowledge, competence and responsiveness to the medical problem

Response times (citywide and by neighborhood):

- From when initial call for assistance is made to first in-person contact with patient
- From initial call to arrival into emergency room

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (continued)

What People Said	Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed
<p><i>"They came out as fast as they could and they performed their duties. They treated me very nicely."</i></p> <p><i>"They are trained to care."</i></p> <p><i>"They [EMS workers] took control and they were very good, very nice and careful."</i></p>	<p>Satisfaction rating of compassion, courtesy, respect and responsiveness</p>
<p><i>"...They were argumentative with some patients, where they wanted to go, because they want to take you where they want to take you because it's closer or whatever."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't know under what constraints they operate, but sometimes they cannot take you to the nearest hospital."</i></p>	<p>Satisfaction with selection of hospital, or with explanation of why a hospital other than patient's first choice was selected</p>

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

EDUCATION: K-12

Focus group participants were aware that education systems make extensive use of standardized achievement and other tests to evaluate student and school performance. The people in the groups cited reading and math scores too. They also identified additional criteria for measuring pedagogic and overall educational performance. In both sets of focus groups, people said that the education of our children requires priority attention by the city. These comments were made before the start of the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who identified public education as his priority and introduced many initiatives including successfully changing the former Board of Education into a mayoral agency, accountable to City Hall.

EDUCATION: K-12

What People Said

"My wife, she went to every district in Queens just to find out what school—to find out what's what."

"The few good schools in the system are in the better neighborhoods. The money is not being distributed properly."

"I am so disgusted with the [public] school system... We moved to Riverdale thinking we'd have the kids in public schools and now I have them both in private schools."

"In my child's school, there are signs all over that say, 'We can successfully educate all children.' It's very inspiring and encouraging."

"It used to be unheard of to send your child to a private school unless it was for religious reasons."

(continued)

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Easy to understand information about quality ratings for neighborhood schools

Parents' satisfaction ratings of their school and the school system, with reasons for the rating

Parents' perceptions about whether high expectations are set for teachers and students, by school

Percentage of students who attend private schools, by income, race, community

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

EDUCATION: K-12 (continued)

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"I hate to say it, but I'm going to send my kids to a private school. I'm going to find the money and I'm just going to do it."

Percentage of dissatisfied students who transfer out of a school or the system

"The teachers are saying they are underpaid and we're not getting good teachers."

Comparison with adjacent or comparable school districts of:

"A lot of new teachers do not get the training that they need."

- Teacher salary scale
- Teachers' experience
- Teacher training

"...Now tests are easier so the quality of the teachers is going down."

In-service teacher training and development

Quality standards and ratings for teachers

"I think our schools, where my daughter goes anyway, are overcrowded. She says that there are too many people for the teachers to pay attention to her."

Average class size and teacher-student ratio by grade, school and neighborhood

"When I went to school there were 25 kids in the classroom. Nowadays there are 35 to 40. Kids are being educated in closets, in janitor's closets, just to have space."

Over-capacity enrollment by grade, school and neighborhood

Usage of non-classroom space for instruction by school and neighborhood

"I have never sent my kids to public schools. First of all, I don't feel they are secure in school."

Incidents requiring intervention of police or other safety personnel, by school

"You can't learn if you have to worry about staying alive."

Number and type of disciplinary actions taken, by school

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

EDUCATION: K-12 (continued)

What People Said

"In P.S. ___ they have books dating back to 1970, so I don't feel that the education can be met if their books and stuff like that are not up to date."

"There are some schools that don't have any books."

"In my child's school, we get weekly reports from the teacher about what they are doing and the assignments my child is responsible for. I really appreciate that."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Availability of up-to-date textbooks per student, school and neighborhood

Schools that request parents to provide additional supplies

Information regularly provided to parents on classroom activities and students' assignments

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

FIRE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION

In both sets of focus groups, the way the city reacts to fires was rated very highly. People use the same key indicator as government does (response time after a fire is reported). They also mentioned other factors that cause them to rate this service so well.

FIRE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"I think they [firefighters] are really passionate about what they do and they work really hard. They're more passionate about what they do than other City workers."

Public ratings of commitment, compassion, courtesy, fair-mindedness, knowledge and abilities in safeguarding the public from fire

"They will come in and risk their lives for us, whether we are rich or poor, and no matter what the color of our skin."

Satisfaction ratings and reasons for the ratings

"Every time you turn around they're always there for us. They're always in motion."

"We have good management, good equipment, good people who put their lives on the line. You would never see them turn away from a fire."

"I think everybody should look at the preventive programs they [firefighters] have. They come out to various schools, organizations, they monitor stuff. They just do an outstanding job."

Scope and effectiveness of educational/prevention activities

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

FIRE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION (continued)

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"Sometimes you hear stories of where they do a little excessive damage."

Acceptable standards for damaging property in response to fire

Results of independent investigation into complaints received regarding property damage by firefighters

"They can be reckless driving their trucks."

Number and type of vehicular accidents by fire house; sanctions applied

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

CHILDREN'S PROTECTIVE SERVICES

The concern for the welfare of children was emphasized in most of the focus groups. The participants' worries addressed programs and functions of many different services, ranging from education and recreation to protection. Comments about protection appear below.

CHILDREN'S PROTECTIVE SERVICES

What People Said	Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed
<i>"I'm going on television reports...glaring omissions by the city...incredible oversights and lack of attention and lack of personnel... under-trained people cause children to be lost, killed, neglected to the point of death."</i>	Average caseload/case worker Length of time for case workers to submit, and agency to act on, recommendations for emergency intervention to ensure a child's safety Percent of case worker's time spent in field investigating cases Information about quality standards in place for investigating reports of abuse and following up on open cases
<i>"Some kids are not protected. Some kids are given back to their abusive parents. It's not being followed up."</i>	Success rates (no further incidents) with children returned to or allowed to remain in family environments after case worker intervention or investigation
<i>"I think they should be very careful about who the foster parents are going to be that they pick. Some of them are just really going after that check that they get every month.... I've seen a lot of that going on in my neighborhood. I think they need to be more careful."</i>	Frequency with which the quality of foster care placement is monitored Standards set for caseworkers' pre-placement evaluation of prospective foster parents

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

AFTER SCHOOL AND OUT OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS

People saw the need for after school programs as cutting across different agency lines, such as education, child protective services, parks and recreation.

AFTER SCHOOL AND OUT OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS

What People Said

"He (my son) was totally disappointed that that school has no after school program."

"I would like to know where there are after school programs and how I can enroll my child."

"You need like a summer program or tutoring in the afternoon."

"No (out of school) programs for kids...and if they do, it's way out and you have a long waiting list."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Easily accessible information regarding availability of out of school programs, their cost, enrollment capacity, age of participants, activities and subjects offered, by neighborhood

Presence of waiting lists and waiting times to enroll, by program and neighborhood

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

“Delivering potable water to everyone in the City is a mammoth job and the City does it everyday.”

Adequacy of the delivery of safe water, by neighborhood

“They say the air is clean, but I see a film of soot on my windowsill every morning. That can’t be good. I wonder what it is that they are looking at.”

Elements included in the measurement of clean air quality

“Near the ferry terminal the buses are allowed to sit with their engines on, polluting the air, all the time, but they enforce the ‘no horn honking’ rule because that’s how they get our money.”

Level of enforcement of no idling rules for public buses and for other vehicles

Level of enforcement of no horn honking rules and other noise pollution regulations

Revenue received for enforcing no horn honking rules

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

SERVICES TO THE ELDERLY

What People Said

"I think the city is doing a good job. I see those trucks with Meals on Wheels delivering food. That's a good thing."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Types of services offered and delivered to senior citizens

Outreach to senior citizens and care-givers regarding services available

Percentage of eligible needy senior citizens receiving services, by neighborhood

Satisfaction with services offered and delivered

Information about the nutritional adequacy of the meals provided by Meals on Wheels

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

PUBLIC HEALTH: DISEASE CONTROL, HEALTH STANDARDS

People consider the public's health to be a public safety issue. They noted that the absence of epidemics indicated that overall health protection was good.

In both rounds of focus groups people expressed concern about the safety of food served in restaurants, by street vendors and sold in grocery stores. Even though no one reported illness from food, they observed unsanitary conditions and reported odors of rotting food in some grocery stores in poorer neighborhoods. They expressed concern about the adequacy (frequency, completeness, honesty) of inspections and lack of follow-up after inspections.

PUBLIC HEALTH: DISEASE CONTROL, HEALTH STANDARDS

What People Said

"...I have seen them closing restaurants, and they'll be open the next week with the same condition, and they don't do much about it."

"Now why was the health inspector there like a week before and you're still seeing rats and everything? Maybe like there's payoffs and everything."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Public information about standards required of food establishments

Public information about standards for and ratings of inspectors' performance and disciplinary actions taken

Quality assurance steps taken and sanctions imposed on food establishments to ensure continuous compliance with food safety standards

Reasons why follow-up inspections are not required when violations are found, if that is the case

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

PUBLIC HEALTH: DISEASE CONTROL, HEALTH STANDARDS (continued)

What People Said

"In L.A. every restaurant has to have a letter from the Health Department. It's graded between an A and fails if it is below a C. They're forced to shut down until they clean up. I wish there was something like that so that we know what we're getting into."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

An understandable and publicly accessible rating system for food establishments

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

PUBLIC HEALTH: PUBLIC HOSPITALS AND AMBULATORY CARE

What People Said	Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed
<i>"Sometimes when you go to some of the city agencies that provide health care, you have to sit down there and wait so long that you'd rather not go at all."</i>	Waiting times at public health facilities Explanations to patients of reasons for waiting for treatment
<i>"Well, most city hospitals are training hospitals. These are where the doctors train." "She has to go to a neighborhood clinic, and they're not very good. She's not getting the proper care that she needs for her illness."</i>	Levels of training and certifications for physicians, specialists and medical personnel, by facility Information regarding age, quality and state-of-the-art of medical equipment and facilities
<i>"No, horrible attitude. Do not spend a night in ___ Hospital." "The triage nurse was so rude and couldn't tell me how long I had to wait for my child to see a doctor. I know that there are good doctors in that hospital, but I will never go back there."</i>	Patient satisfaction with courtesy, compassion, respect and responsiveness of staff and level of service
<i>"I was in the emergency room. The cubicle was dirty. The bathroom hadn't been cleaned. There was blood on the floor in the main room. How can a dirty hospital give good health care?"</i>	Cleanliness standards and ratings for all hospital facilities

CHAPTER 5

*Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for
Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public*

TRANSPORTATION: ROADWAY MAINTENANCE

The condition of the roadways was discussed in almost every focus group. Participants made clear that they rate the roadways on the basis of how smooth the roads are when they ride (and walk) on them. While such a measure may at first seem to be subjective, it is in fact possible to quantify and objectively measure the quality of street paving as experienced by a motorist. The Fund for the City of New York's Center on Municipal Government Performance undertook a project to create an objective scale for measuring street smoothness and the presence or absence of severe jolts. We then applied this scale on a citywide basis by actually driving roads throughout New York City's five boroughs with a sophisticated measuring device, recording and reporting on our findings. This project is described in Chapter 6.

TRANSPORTATION: ROADWAY MAINTENANCE

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"I'll drive down to D.C., or far distances, and I know when I'm in the City. I know when I'm back (because) the car just starts shaking."

Smoothness Score

Jolt Score

"When they have to fill a pothole, they make it concave or they make it convex, so you hit a bump when you go over (it)."

"Potholes and manholes...they crack your axle—hubcaps come flying off."

"You need an all-terrain vehicle."

"You know, it is rare that you can find a street that's flat. Where the manhole covers are not sticking up. Where there are no deep depressions."

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

TRANSPORTATION: ROADWAY MAINTENANCE (continued)

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"You see a lot of work going on, but nothing is ever done."

Continuously updated, accessible information on locations of, purpose, status and timeline of road construction projects

"They don't finish a job and they start another."

"So it's like one minute they are tearing up one side of the block, they'll repave it, it looks nice. A couple of weeks, eight weeks later, they'll come back and tear it up."

Information about work that is needed at specific sites and how it will be scheduled and coordinated to minimize disruption and repeated efforts

"When a road is under construction, they don't publicize that alternatives exist. There are no signs about what alternate routes to take, when you get to a road that is closed."

Information on-site and publicly announced about alternate routes around construction

"It is a big improvement now that they are doing some construction at night when there is less traffic."

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

MASS TRANSIT

Comments here cover the operations of the subways and buses.

MASS TRANSIT

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"The safety, I think they are providing more safety now."

Crime incidence statistics, by subway line and bus route, by geographic area, by time of day

"The subways, especially the buses, they are not safe late at night."

Percentage of high-crime hours that buses, trains and stations are protected by police

"I now feel safe on the subways at night. I didn't, a few years ago."

Information regarding stations that have and do not have agents present throughout the day and their crime statistics

"When there is a station agent present, I feel safer."

"I grew up in the city and I think the subways really are much cleaner."

Measurements for cleanliness of subway stations, subway tracks and of buses, by line, borough and neighborhood

"It is kind of ridiculous. I mean it smells. It smells horrible. There is dirt, trash all around, rats running all around the tracks eating bread."

Presence or absence of vermin and refuse

"The reliability is wonderful."

Waiting time for arrival of bus or subway, by location, line, time of day and day of the week

"The reliability, it's still a problem."

"Sometimes you have to wait 20 minutes for the train during rush hour, and then they hold it before it starts to move into midtown."

Accessible schedules for subways and buses at each station

Deviation in arrival times from published schedule

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

MASS TRANSIT (continued)

What People Said	Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed
<i>"...You wait 20 minutes for three buses to come, instead of one coming every seven minutes."</i>	Frequency of, and reasons for, bunching of buses
<i>"It's always packed. People are crushing each other to get inside the train."</i>	Number of trains and buses where (a) no seats are available, and (b) no standing room is available, by time of day, line, geographic location
<i>"...In some of the trains, there is no information. If there is information, the PA system doesn't work properly."</i>	Presence, timeliness and audibility of the public address announcements in trains and stations
<i>"I take a bus and then a subway to work everyday. Why don't they communicate with one another? The other day, for instance, after getting off the bus I found that my subway wasn't running. If the bus driver had told me that, I would have stayed on the bus and been able to get to work another way."</i>	Timely public announcements of service interruptions affecting connecting bus and subway service
<i>"This has happened many times: It's raining. We're waiting at the beginning of the bus route. We're waiting in the pouring rain. The bus driver is in the bus, the doors are closed, he's reading the newspaper and won't let us in."</i>	Courtesy, compassion and responsiveness ratings

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

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STREET CLEANLINESS

When people talked about street cleanliness, they often spoke about visible conditions on the streets that went beyond the responsibility of the Department of Sanitation. Their conversations included topics such as the presence of graffiti, vermin, long-standing puddles in the streets (ponding), etc. It was these observations that led the Center on Municipal Government Performance to create ComNETSM, Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking, a means by which all visible problems on the street could be identified and reported to appropriate agencies. See Chapter 6 for further information about ComNET.

STREET CLEANLINESS

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"The city seems cleaner now than it was years ago, all year round."

Citizen satisfaction with street cleanliness

Publicly available, monthly street and sidewalk cleanliness Scorecard ratings, by section of the city

"I remember the vacant lots when I first came here in the 1960s. There were these huge piles of garbage on the vacant lots, and you rarely see that now. So, comparing with what I came here with and what is here now, I think they are doing a marvelous job."

Presence of trash and litter in vacant lots, by neighborhood

Response time for handling complaints of trash in vacant lots

"They [Sanitation workers] throw bags and they break and all the garbage spills out and they leave it there. They don't care. That's why we have rats and all that stuff."
(continued)

Citizen satisfaction with sidewalk, alley or street cleanliness conditions after trash pickup

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

STREET CLEANLINESS (continued)

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"I find sometimes the street is messier once they [Sanitation workers] have been there... all the supers and the handymen have to come out and clean up after the sanitation guys."

Frequency with which residents or occupants have to clean up sidewalks and curbs after pickups

Frequency/amount of spillage of loose trash during pickup

"The garbage cans are overflowing. There are just not enough garbage cans. They're too small. A little wind and everything blows around."

Extent and frequency of overflowing sidewalk litter baskets

Distribution of trash cans, by neighborhood; explanation for differences by neighborhood

"In Harlem, you have to walk two or three blocks to come to a trash can. And once you find one, it is overflowing."

"It seems like the higher the income area, the better the service is."

Citizen satisfaction with refuse collection, by neighborhood

"I think they do a pretty good job, but when it comes to snow removal and stuff like that, yeah they do the hills pretty well, but if you're on a side street, you've got to wait for the sun to melt it a lot of times."

Percentage of secondary and tertiary streets cleared within a designated time period after snowfall

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Public libraries were one of the highest rated services by participants in both rounds of focus groups.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"They [library staff] are very helpful."

Citizen satisfaction with staff responsiveness, caring, courtesy and helpfulness

"The system has vast resources. Even if a book is not in your library, you can go on-line, you can reserve the book. They'll send it to your library and give you a date when you can pick it up."

Frequency with which a desired selection is available on shelves

Success rate/length of time for reserving or ordering a book

"I've been to a library where there's a heavy Indian community and they have Indian videos. In my community, there are a lot of Jewish and Russian people, and they have Hebrew and Russian books and literature for them."

Availability of material that reflects language and cultural preferences of the community

Quality and quantity of information about community activities

"They're very community minded. They have all the announcements of programs and activities that are going on. I just think the library is the essence of the neighborhood."

"The community libraries are good for kids."

"I took a computer class at the 58th Street library and it was fantastic."

Citizen satisfaction with classes, lectures and storytelling offerings

"They have storytelling for the kids."

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

PUBLIC LIBRARIES (continued)

What People Said	Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed
<i>"It's not for those students that want to write a research paper or anything. They don't have enough materials."</i>	Adequacy and accessibility of materials for research
<i>"They don't have updated books."</i>	Number/type of books not available in current editions
<i>"My biggest complaint about the library is the time.... They don't open until 12:00.... They're just not open long enough. I don't think the city provides the funds that are necessary."</i>	Citizen satisfaction with hours and days of operation
<i>"There are whole days when local libraries are not open due to cutbacks. What does a school child with a research project do if the library is closed all day?"</i>	
<i>"The building is clean and well-maintained."</i>	Building condition and cleanliness rating

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

PARKS AND RECREATION

Comments were primarily about neighborhood parks.

PARKS AND RECREATION

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"I live in the Bronx, but if I want to go to a park, I take my child to Central Park. I am afraid to go in the neighborhood."

Citizen satisfaction with neighborhood parks, and reasons for satisfaction/dissatisfaction ratings, by neighborhood/park

"...You can't even take your kids to the neighborhood park. What you see is cracked bottles or you see people drinking or sleeping."

Presence or absence of hazardous litter (e.g., broken bottles, needles, condoms, etc.), by neighborhood/park

"You can't go to the park because you're seeing all these people using drugs."

Presence of antisocial behavior in or near playgrounds, by neighborhood/park

"After eight o'clock it's dark and you're not safe there."

Citizen rating of overall safety from crime, by neighborhood/park

"The park by my house, they have redone the whole park, but they still have cobblestones on the floor. Why isn't it thick rubber matting when you're dealing with children?"

Safety of playground facilities and equipment, by neighborhood

"The new playgrounds are more children friendly, where if they do fall, they don't crack their heads."

"One park near my neighborhood is not really being maintained very well.... I see garbage.... No matter how many garbage cans are there, you still see garbage the next day."

Presence of litter and trash, by park

Citizens' cleanliness rating

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

PARKS AND RECREATION (continued)

What People Said

"Everything from the light fixtures, there's light, and they put up like a lot of antique lighting so it looks great. Benches."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Citizen satisfaction with overall environment of park; conduciveness to relaxation and play, for different age groups, by neighborhood/park

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

SOCIAL SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PERSONS AND FAMILIES

For most of the people in the focus groups, perception of the homelessness problem was determined by the frequency with which they saw homeless people living or sleeping on the streets. Such a perspective reflects the impact of homelessness on a neighborhood, but does not necessarily correlate with the actual extent of homelessness in a city, or how government provides assistance to homeless individuals and families. More people in the 1995 focus groups than in the 2001 groups had had experiences in homeless shelters, either as volunteers or by knowing people who were homeless. In 1995, they rated this service by the food and accommodations, the courtesy, caring, respect and efficiency of the staff, the level of security in the shelters and the frequency with which they saw homeless people on the streets, in ferry terminals and subway stations. In 2001 comments and ratings were confined to the degree to which the participants observed homeless people in public places.

SOCIAL SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PERSONS AND FAMILIES

What People Said

"You're looking at it today, and there are homeless people, but not such an abundant amount all over the place. You don't see tent cities all on the FDR as much. So, it has cleaned up."

"I'm constantly, constantly seeing these homeless people on every single corner, when I'm on the train, I'm walking the street, they've got signs, they're everywhere."

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Citizens' reports on:

- Number of homeless persons observed on the street
- Number of homeless persons in mass transit facilities

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

SOCIAL SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PERSONS AND FAMILIES (continued)

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"You hear of so many people afraid to go to the shelters because they're being abused. Some people, their stuff is being stolen, [they are] getting raped and they'd rather stay on the street than go into a shelter."

Reasons why homeless persons do not take advantage of shelters

"You constantly hear of people that are afraid, they don't go to shelters because they don't feel safe staying there at night."

"I think one way to alleviate the homeless problem is to establish more mental health facilities."

Coordination of mental health services with services to provide housing to homeless persons

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

Focus group references to mental health issues commingled with comments about homelessness and public safety. Participants often cited encounters they had in the street with people whom they perceived to be mentally unstable and at times threatening and potentially dangerous. Comments concentrated on the desired outcomes of a mental health service delivery system rather than on the actual delivery of mental health services.

MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

What People Said

“Those psychiatric places, they let them out during the day. You see them on the bus....I see them on the boat [S.I. Ferry].... Why would you let this person out by themselves?”

“You notice that the majority of accidents—like when they push [people] on the tracks—these are patients with mental problems. How could you let them out?”

“A lot of the homeless people have mental problems and they’re sent to jail, or they’re not really helped.”

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Number of reported incidents of threats to public safety involving discharged mentally ill patients

Percentage of homeless population who are evaluated for need of mental health services

Percentage of homeless population evaluated for need of mental health services, who then receive and successfully complete treatment

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

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SOCIAL WELFARE: PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

It should be noted that the focus group sessions took place before New York City fully implemented a program to encourage self-reliance and employment for public assistance applicants and recipients.

SOCIAL WELFARE: PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"The waiting time is way too long. The people who really need the help right away are not getting it."

Recipient/applicant satisfaction with timeliness and responsiveness of agency when an application or claim for public assistance is filed

"The whole attitude is that you are subservient to them. One day I was in a situation where I heard a caseworker or one of the intake people say that what they should do to all these welfare mothers is shoot them dead in the head."

Applicant and recipient satisfaction rating of accessibility, courtesy, respect and responsiveness of caseworkers and office workers

"I know a lady, she gets three checks per month and she uses it on drugs and does not use it on her kids. So, they should be more careful who they give money to..."

Number of charges filed, investigations conducted and administrative actions taken for fraud; results of such proceedings

Quality controls to avoid redundant payments

"You take somebody on welfare, put them into workfare, but then they are sweeping streets. What's there to learn in that?"

Percent of workfare job recipients who advance over time into more skilled or better-paying jobs, and who continue, over time, to be employed

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

PUBLIC HOUSING AND OTHER HOUSING FOR LOW INCOME RESIDENTS

Comments here refer to programs under the aegis of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development and of the New York City Housing Authority.

PUBLIC HOUSING AND OTHER HOUSING FOR LOW INCOME RESIDENTS

What People Said

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

"There's a lot of people that need it [low income housing] and it's just not available to them."

Average waiting time for placement in public or subsidized housing

"There are buildings, abandoned buildings, just out there that the city owns...and they are not making them available for low income people."

Number of residential units in abandoned buildings

- Reasons for not converting all abandoned buildings to low income housing

"I believe some of the housing just isn't even fit to be occupied. It's not safe, number one, and it's always in a deplorable condition."

Resident satisfaction with maintenance, cleanliness and safety of public housing

"One, they have to design these housing projects better. Right now, they're designed, they look like prisons. Two, they have to clean them up on a regular basis. Three, they need better security, more consistent security."

Crime rates by type of crime, by housing project

"Low income housing, most of it is sub-standard to live in."

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

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PUBLIC HOUSING AND OTHER HOUSING FOR LOW INCOME RESIDENTS (continued)

What People Said

“Okay, what happens is, you have some of the tenants in there and their children, and they tear these buildings up. It came to the point, even with the halls, they had to put a certain coating on the halls in the projects because they were setting the walls on fire.”

“...You can renovate a building until you turn blue, but it’s the people that bring the garbage and the filth in.”

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Incidence of vandalism

Prosecution for vandalism

Sanctions for tenants who do not adhere to proper code of conduct

CHAPTER 5

Suggestions for New Performance Measures and for

Additional Needed Information That Emerged From Listening to the Public

BUSINESS SERVICES

What People Said

“People can get [these services], just for being a black woman, just for being a man over thirty. I mean they have different things for people, if you’re part of the community. The information is there. It is not always accessible and available to people who really need to get it.”

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Satisfaction with ease of finding information about small business services and support

Satisfaction with the available information about small business services and support

Satisfaction with the adequacy of services to small businesses

“I deal with the city for the license and permits.... I have no problems. It really comes easy for me in that respect.”

Business owners’ satisfaction with ease of applying for permits, licenses, etc.

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BUILDING CODE ENFORCEMENT

What People Said

"I know when I see scaffolds, I go on the other side of the street."

"Across from the building where I work, is a pillar that supports an important building. It is rotted, rusted. I couldn't even believe it's actually holding the structure. It's rotted! I'm talking about a steel beam that's got to be two feet by two feet thick, and it's actually rotted and rusted and if it rains, water just trickles and it just sprinkles and it goes in different directions. It's amazing that this thing is still there and nobody's done anything."

"Some of the buildings I go into, they just look like they're about to fall apart, stairs, elevators."

"Instead of pre-acting, they're reacting. Once a tragedy takes place, then it's like, 'oh, hey, let's crack down on all the inspectors.'"

"I think maybe not enough resources really go to all of the places to inspect."

"It's just the building inspectors come in, and they actually say, 'give me this amount of money and I'll make it work for you, and if I don't see this money I'll make it harder for you.'"

Potential Performance Measurements and Information Needed

Number of accidents and injuries to workers and passersby due to construction sites

- Reasons for accidents to passersby

Number of routine, preventive inspections conducted, by neighborhood

Information regarding:

- Standards of conduct for buildings inspectors
- Supervision of inspectors, by neighborhood
- Actions taken when standards are not met

Chapter 6

THREE NEW WAYS TO REPORT PERFORMANCE THAT WE CREATED AFTER LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC

As people talked about the way they judge government's performance, we identified many new ways in which data could be collected and reported to reflect the public's concerns. Many are listed in Chapter 5. Once we heard from the public, we selected three local governmental responsibilities that people said were very important to them, and for which there had been no performance data or reporting that reflected the public's concerns. We developed the methodologies that would yield reliable data and replicable, trackable performance information, then applied them, initially, in New York City. Other localities are adapting them. Our work is described in this chapter. Each of these three governmental obligations is very different from the other two. We hope other jurisdictions will be inclined to adapt these or other efforts like them that are important to their constituents.

(A) AN AGENCY-SPECIFIC NEW MEASURE: THE SMOOTHNESS OF CITY ROADWAYS

The condition of the city's roads—their rideability, state of repair and their smoothness—was considered critically important by almost two-thirds of focus group participants in our first round of focus group research and over three-quarters in the second. Almost every group chose to discuss the function of maintaining the City's roadways. Roadway maintenance was one of the city services rated lowest by focus groups in 1995 and in 2001. There are no existing measures for this outcome (smooth, rideable roads) that resonate with the public. The comments we heard clearly illustrated the public's concerns and frustration:

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

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“My car’s axle was cracked going over one of those dips I couldn’t see until I was on top of it. The hubcaps went flying. I almost swerved into another car.”

“My neighbor tripped on uneven pavement while crossing the street. She broke her foot.”

“Why is it that the roads get smoother as soon as you leave the city? What do they do that we don’t do?”

The Center on Municipal Government Performance adapted and then introduced to New York City’s roadways a state-of-the-art pavement roughness measurement technology called profilometry and a widely accepted scale, the International Roughness Index. This laser scanning technology and measurement was originally developed from research sponsored by the World Bank to produce objective, accurate standards for highways.

In early 1997, a CMGP-sponsored pilot test was conducted in New York City to determine the reliability and feasibility of performing profilometry studies in stop-and-go traffic at speeds typical of *city* driving—the first attempt to do this, as far as we know. In this test, a car equipped with a profilometer device measured drops and rises in the pavement as the car traveled the streets. After careful review of the test data by engineers and a statistician, the data were determined to be reliable at varying speeds and on roadways of differing degrees of roughness. At the same time, DYG invited back some members of the focus groups who had discussed the condition of the city’s streets. The members of this panel of New Yorkers were driven over some of the same diverse streets as the profilometer-equipped vehicle and were asked to rate the ride from a passenger’s point of view. While in the car, they developed their own ratings, descriptors and categories, independent of one another. Then a focus group session was held to determine if there would be agreement among the group members. There was. They also asserted that two distinct aspects of the roadways need to be measured:

CHAPTER 6

Three New Ways to Report Performance That We Created After Listening to the Public

- the degree of smoothness (and roughness) and
- the number of “significant” jolts one encounters.

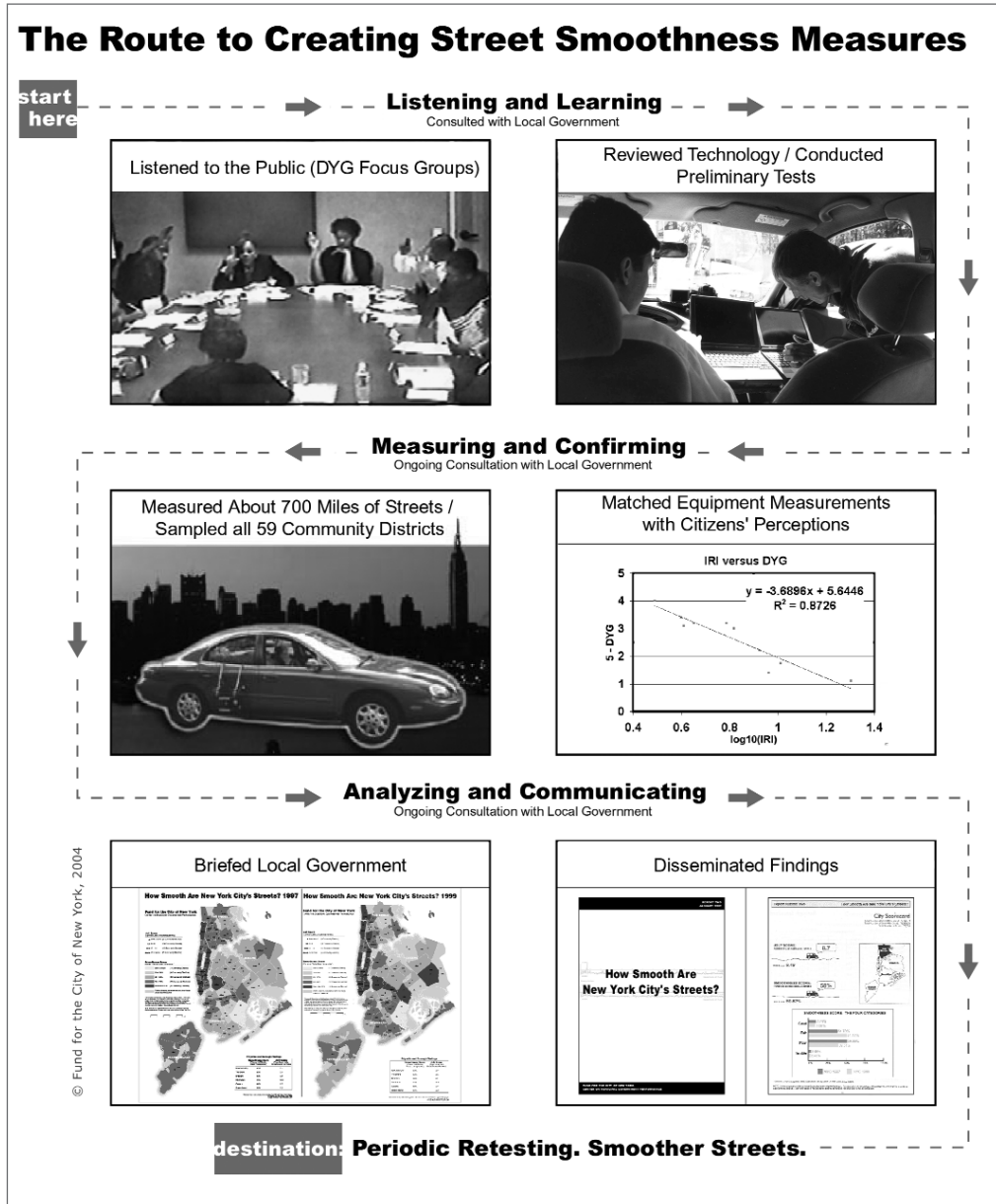
They suggested that smoothness measures should be reported in two general categories and four sub-categories: *Acceptable* ratings consisted of roadways they considered “good” and “fair.” *Unacceptable* ratings were roads they called “poor” and “terrible.”

Then, through correlation analysis, we found statistical agreements between the people’s ratings and the profilometry readings: the roads with the worst assessments from the people also had the roughest readings from the profilometers and *vice versa*. (See Exhibit 6-1 for a graphic description of the process we used to develop these measures.)

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

Exhibit 6-1



CHAPTER 6

Three New Ways to Report Performance That We Created After Listening to the Public

These preliminary studies assured us that a profilometer survey would provide accurate, replicable, objective measurements of the city's streets that would reflect the public's point of view. In 1997 and again in 1999, we engaged engineers who specialize in this work, to drive a car equipped with profilometers that counted and measured every dip and rise encountered from potholes, bumps, misaligned utility covers, uneven repairs and more, over almost 700 linear miles of randomly selected city streets (Exhibits 6-2 and 6-3).

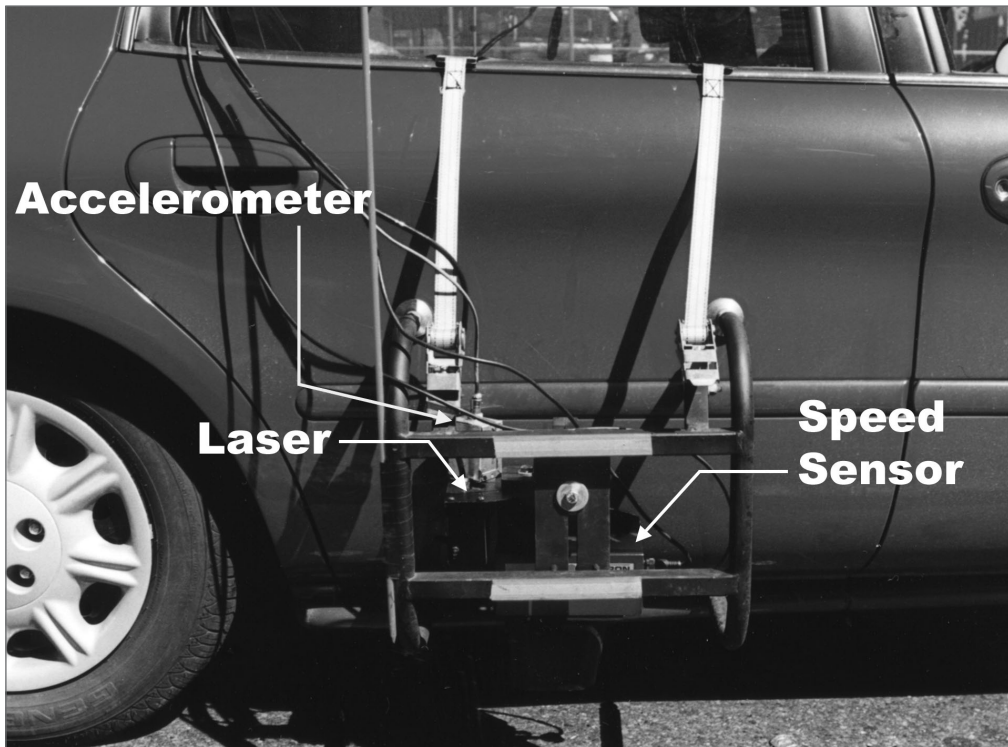
Exhibit 6-2



LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

Exhibit 6-3



We then produced the two indicators that New York City residents identified as meaningful to them:

Smoothness Scores are the percentage of blocks rated “acceptably smooth.” They are derived by applying the ratings of the focus group panel to the corresponding range of profilometry readings.

Jolt Scores are the number of “significant jolts per mile” encountered by a vehicle. The focus group panel told us what level of jolt met their standard to be considered “significant.”

CHAPTER 6

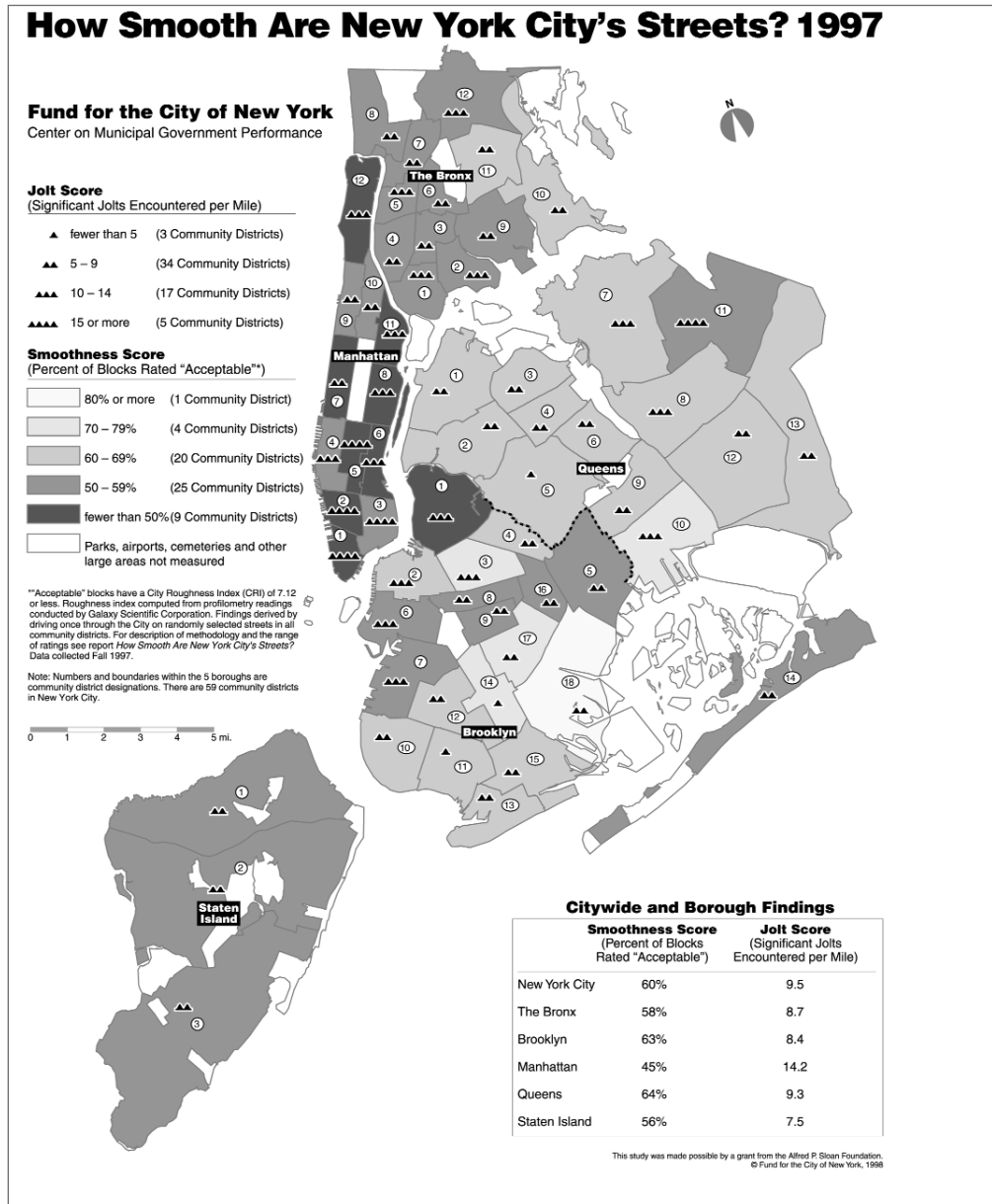
Three New Ways to Report Performance That We Created After Listening to the Public

The findings from the two surveys appear in two separate reports both entitled *How Smooth Are New York City's Streets?*⁷ Consistent with all our work, the reports are accessible to the public and designed to be easy to understand. A one-page map presents citywide and community districts' Smoothness and Jolt Scores (Exhibits 6-4 and 6-5). These maps are included in textbooks as examples of effective and creative ways to communicate performance data to the public.⁸

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Exhibit 6-4

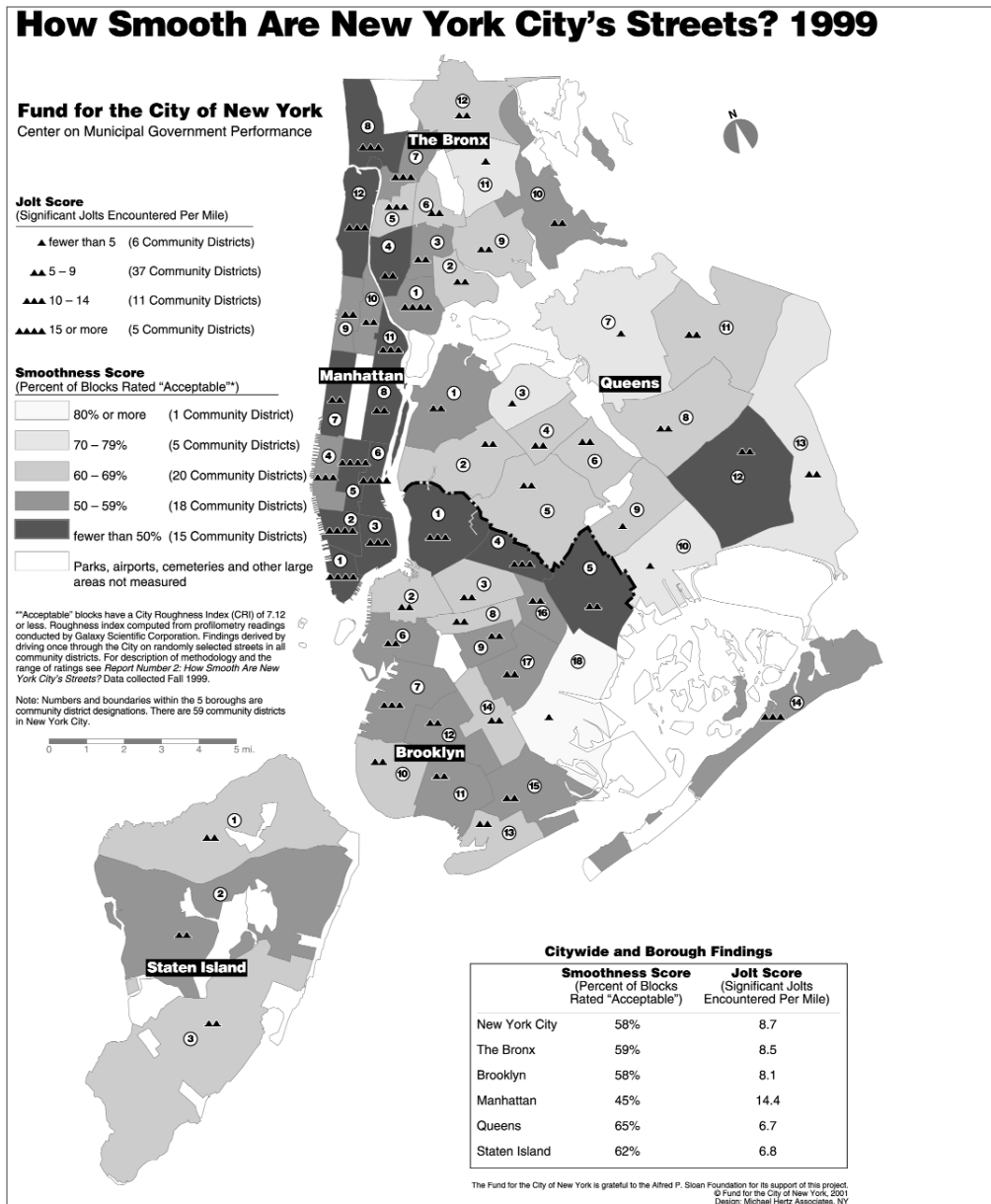


Source: Fund for the City of New York, *How Smooth Are New York City's Streets?*, 1998 and 2001.

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Three New Ways to Report Performance That We Created After Listening to the Public

Exhibit 6-5



Source: Fund for the City of New York, *How Smooth Are New York City's Streets?*, 1998 and 2001.

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Data from the surveys were provided to city officials so that they could analyze relationships among resources utilized, staff deployed and road conditions, among other things.

On the national scene, by making presentations, attending conferences and conferring with national transportation experts during the course of this work, we have interested engineers who specialize in profilometer studies to adapt their equipment to work reliably in cities. Before our work became known, these measures were not commonly applied to cities. Now several cities, including Austin, Texas and Anchorage, Alaska are conducting similar smoothness studies of their roadways.

(B) MAINTAINING THE STREET-LEVEL ENVIRONMENT: SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE WHEN SEVERAL AGENCIES ARE INVOLVED—COMPUTERIZED NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENT TRACKING (COMNETSM)

Our focus group research revealed that people's judgments about how well local government is performing are often determined by a whole range of conditions they observe on city streets. Typically, in the groups, people talked about an observable street-level problem which was the responsibility of the agency they were discussing—illegal dumping of refuse in a vacant lot, for example (enforced by the Department of Sanitation), and then mentioned other problems on the street that were the responsibility of other agencies or services: graffiti, dead or missing trees, inoperative street lights, abandoned vehicles, trip hazards, etc. As mentioned earlier, government is organized along departmental lines. (In New York City, more than 10 different government and other organizations have jurisdiction over some aspect of street level conditions.) There are no data that cut across agency jurisdictions to reflect the variety of problems on a street or in a neighborhood. The Center on Municipal Government Performance has met this need by creating what has become a highly successful, much heralded and widely adopted program: Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking (ComNETSM).

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Three New Ways to Report Performance That We Created After Listening to the Public

The ComNET program and process introduces easily-operated handheld computers with cameras to community organizations. The groups identify the areas they wish to survey. By using software developed by CMGP, the relevant street names are pre-entered into the handheld computers as are a full range of typical street-level problems. Then, local surveyors go through their area systematically, following pre-determined routes, identifying every problem they observe. Precise locations of each problem are recorded so that the observations can be verified and corrected by the governmental agency or other organization responsible. Detailed and summary findings are tabulated quickly. Reports for each agency, each type of problem and for all or specific streets can be produced minutes after the survey is completed. Every condition is associated in the software with the appropriate government department or other responsible organization. The reports are easy to read and understand. Maps can be produced showing the location of some types of problems or all of them. The local groups review their findings, decide which problems are important to them, what they want to refer to government and which problems they may want to address themselves to improve their neighborhood. The community representatives track how conditions change over time.

ComNET has been operated successfully in more than 30 neighborhoods by local nonprofit organizations, business improvement districts, block, neighborhood and community associations and local schools in New York City. Through CMGP partnerships with local organizations in other cities, ComNET has expanded throughout the U.S. It is operating in 13 large neighborhoods in Worcester, Massachusetts, overseen by the Worcester Regional Research Bureau. In Des Moines, Iowa, ComNET is sponsored by a city-wide group known as Des Moines Neighbors. Ten neighborhoods in Seattle, Washington are scheduled to be operating ComNET in the next year—four have conducted their first surveys already. That effort is run by Sustainable Seattle. The major business improvement district in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Center City District, is conducting bi-monthly ComNET surveys on about 1,000 blockfaces in the center of the city. Two groups learned about and observed ComNET in New York City and then introduced it in their locations: in Connecticut under the name CityScan and

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in some parks in San Francisco, using the name ParkScan.

ComNET users (Exhibit 6-6) may choose the way they operate the program: they may purchase their own computers or use CMGP's; they may use ComNET CDs to install their own street names and street conditions or have CMGP do it; they may train themselves in the use of the hardware and software, using the ComNET training DVD or have CMGP staff do the training; and CMGP may provide field assistance. Furthermore, local groups may transfer the survey data into their own databases, if they have that capacity, and produce reports in that way, or, as most organizations choose, they may enter the data into CMGP's web-enabled database, *ComNET Connection*. In fact, organizations anywhere in the world can transfer ComNET survey data into *ComNET Connection*, store it there and produce reports from it.

Exhibit 6-6



CHAPTER 6

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ComNET promotes civic awareness and civic involvement for adults and for middle school and high school students. The students have conducted ComNET surveys in the neighborhoods surrounding their schools. With a ComNET-developed curriculum, they learn how to operate handheld and other computers, related technology and software, photography, data analysis, teamwork, new vocabulary, map reading and map making and how to make effective written and oral presentations. They also learn about government structure and functions. ComNET teaches young people about citizen responsibility and citizen power, embodying many of the lessons from the field of youth development.

Interest in ComNET continues to grow as communities throughout the country realize that it meets their needs to document problems in their neighborhoods and provide specific, factual, accurate information to government and others responsible for conditions on the streets. Before ComNET, capturing information about street level conditions and reporting the information to the many government agencies involved was a time-consuming and daunting task for the community members who had to design their own survey instruments, use paper and pencil to record information and hand-sort the findings to produce reports. ComNET makes their work much easier.

CMGP helps some local governments electronically link ComNET reports to their complaint systems. In Des Moines, for example, work orders are created electronically to remedy problems that the community group, Des Moines Neighbors, sends from the ComNET database.

ComNET is a useful tool for new organizations to record baseline information about their neighborhood. It helps groups and government track the recurrence of problems and enables organizations and government to set priorities for fixing problems. In Worcester, Massachusetts, for example, ComNET surveys documented the poor condition of many of the city's sidewalks. As a result, officials determined that a bond issue was required to fund what had heretofore not been identified as a serious problem. The sidewalk conditions can now be addressed, thanks to the residents

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taking the time to conduct ComNET surveys and the Worcester Regional Research Bureau's management of the ComNET program there.

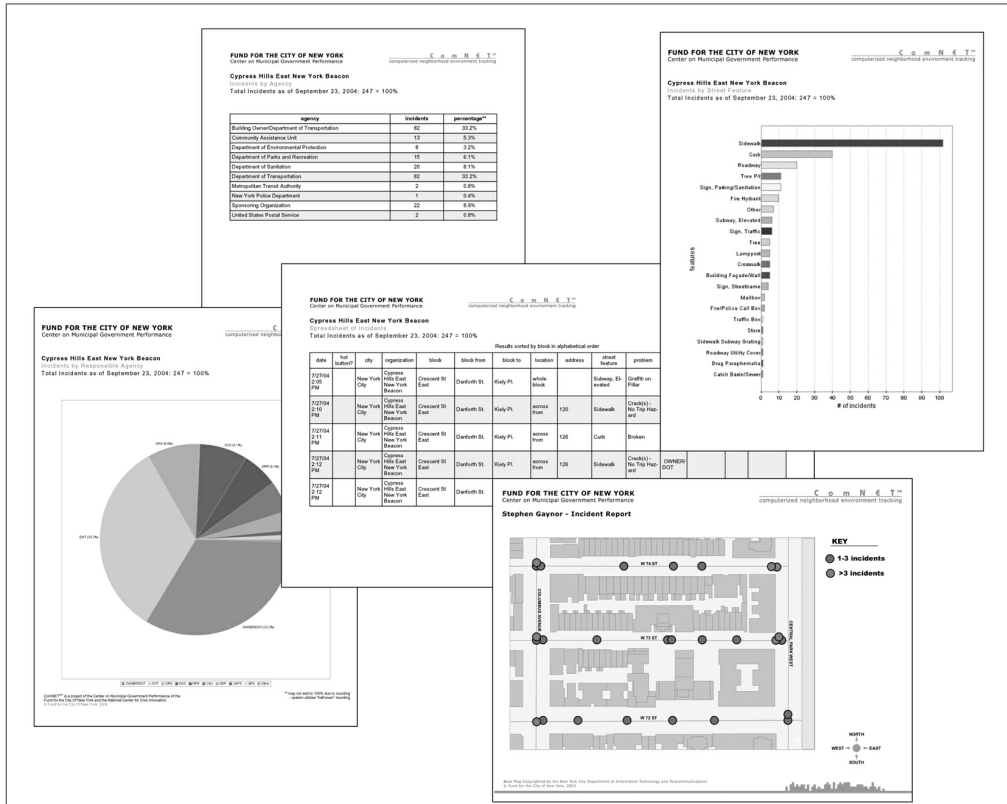
ComNET is also used to keep track of and to improve particular street features. For instance, New York City's Fashion Center Business Improvement District conducted an inventory survey of all their street signs—the type and location of them— as a means to develop a uniform and more attractive signage system for that large, important part of the city.

Local government officials have found ComNET reports (Exhibit 6-7) helpful to them because they are precise and objective. In addition, ComNET helps government agencies dispatch repair crews more efficiently, because they learn of multiple problems in the same area and can address them all in one trip, instead of responding to single complaints all over the city.

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Exhibit 6-7



ComNET achieves one of the prime purposes of the Center on Municipal Government Performance. It provides a way in which the public and government can communicate with one another about mutual concerns. The clear, objective data are verifiable, incontrovertible and unemotional. The reports provide government with the opportunity to learn of communities' priorities and discuss with community representatives government's plans and constraints. Both government and community members learn a new way of communicating and solving problems.

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Some aspects of the ComNET program are being applied to other public concerns. For example, ComNET's procedures for designing and following routes have been used for surveying the number of people who are homeless and on the street.

(C) A MEASURE THAT AFFECTS ALL AGENCIES: STANDARDS AND RATINGS FOR HOW GOVERNMENT RELATES TO THE PUBLIC—CITIZENGAUGE

We learned that people form judgments about government performance in general and about specific agencies and services in particular, by the way they are treated in their first interactions. No matter how well or poorly the agency ultimately delivers its service, the quality of the frontline encounter, be it an in-person, telephone or mail exchange, is vital. Favorable experiences with government's performance at this early and, sometimes only point in a citizen's encounter, lead people to think that government is available to them and able to serve their needs. An unpleasant experience leads to public cynicism, anger, distrust and lack of respect for government. It alienates people from their government. These experiences tend to be formative and lasting.

The important qualities that the public expects in their initial encounters with government include:

- **Accessibility.** Accessibility has two aspects to it: (1) knowing how to get in touch with the service provider or agency; and (2) the ease with which one can reach the person or obtain the information required.
- **Courtesy.** Respectful and polite interaction and helpfulness when contact is made.
- **Knowledge.** A person who has sufficient understanding of the city's operations and the agency's functions to respond appropriately to the public's initial inquiry.

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- **Timeliness.** A response within a reasonable amount of time. People understand that some of their requests require investigation and research, but they expect to be told how long it will take to receive an answer, and they want that estimate to be realistic.
- **Responsiveness.** Ultimately, an informed reply to the question, request or problem posed.

These expectations apply to the full range of government employees who interact with the public, from security guards, telephone answerers, receptionists and persons performing intake functions, to inspectors, technicians, triage nurses, doctors, attorneys, accountants and other professionals. For ease of remembering we have used the moniker *ACKTResponsively*, to keep in mind these five important qualities.

To capture ratings of these standards, we developed and introduced CitizenGauge—a way for members of the public to report on and rate their frontline experiences anonymously, if they wish, on an independent website. CitizenGauge enables government and the public to learn about agencies that are providing responsive services. Outstanding public service can be acknowledged and recognized. Areas that need improvement can be identified and addressed. Citywide information can be produced, as can comparisons among agencies and offices. CitizenGauge may be adapted to any city and to specific agencies alone.

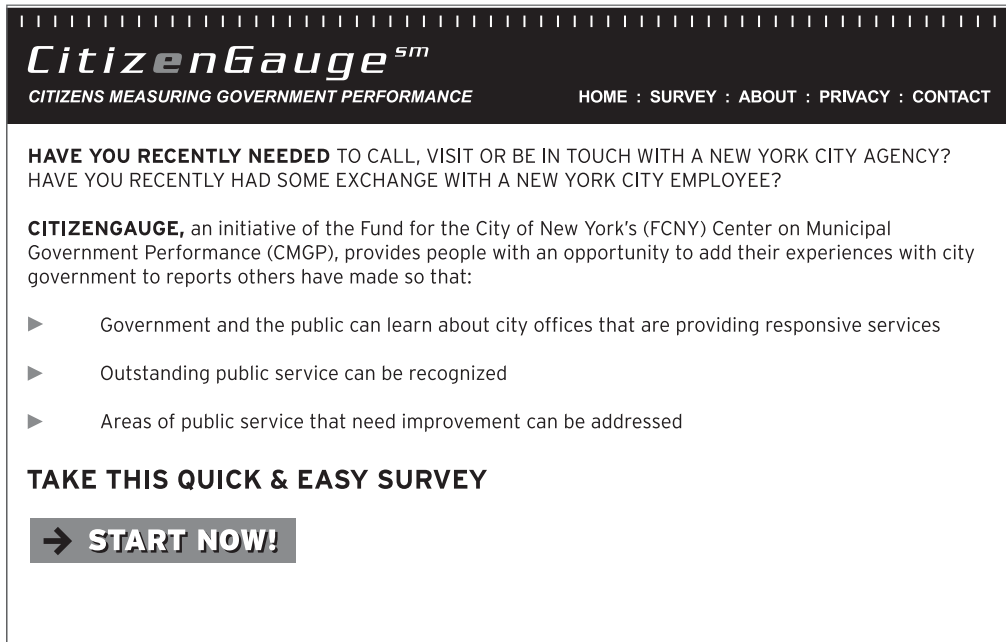
CitizenGauge (Exhibit 6-8) consists of an easy-to-navigate and understand, brief and pleasant-looking citizen survey that any member of the public can access to report on recent experiences they have had with government. The survey enables people to rate the five qualities mentioned above as they pertain to their particular experience. It also asks if the person thinks the individual or agency should be singled out for a commendation. It is similar to customer satisfaction surveys commonly used in the private sector to get feedback about their products and services from their users and then, in turn, to check on the comments to determine what adjustments, if any, are needed in how they are operating.

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CitizenGauge is now operating live (www.citizengauge.org). Several cities and agencies have expressed interest in adapting and using it to target needed improvements and recognize excellent performance.

Exhibit 6-8



The screenshot shows the CitizenGauge website header with the logo "CitizenGaugeSM" and the tagline "CITIZENS MEASURING GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE". Navigation links include "HOME : SURVEY : ABOUT : PRIVACY : CONTACT". The main content area asks, "HAVE YOU RECENTLY NEEDED TO CALL, VISIT OR BE IN TOUCH WITH A NEW YORK CITY AGENCY? HAVE YOU RECENTLY HAD SOME EXCHANGE WITH A NEW YORK CITY EMPLOYEE?". It then describes the initiative as an opportunity to add experiences to reports. A bulleted list highlights: Government and the public can learn about city offices that are providing responsive services; Outstanding public service can be recognized; and Areas of public service that need improvement can be addressed. A call to action reads "TAKE THIS QUICK & EASY SURVEY" followed by a "→ START NOW!" button.

⁷ These reports are available on the Fund for the City of New York's website: www.fcny.org or by mail from Center on Municipal Government Performance, Fund for the City of New York, 121 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013.

⁸ Harry P. Hatry, *Performance Measurement: Getting Results*, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C., 1999, and Theodore H. Poister, *Measuring Performance in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2003.

AFTERWORD

When we began our work we didn't know if listening to the public could or would yield new and useful information regarding how to measure and report about local government performance. In fact, we weren't even sure that we could find a successful way to do it. We learned quickly that professionally designed and administered and independently conducted focus group research does, indeed, furnish valuable information and new perspectives to the field of government performance measurement and reporting. Listening to the public in a non-confrontational setting is possible, and we strongly recommend it.

Furthermore, when we began our work, we expected to learn, primarily, about how New York City residents perceive and evaluate the delivery of their local government services. As we listened to the people, however, we began to suspect that broader implications were emerging. And, after making presentations about our work at many national and even international forums, we learned that the findings here resonate deeply with people elsewhere. Our focus group participants had articulated and revealed some truths that transcended the borders of the five boroughs of New York City, and this observation became a compelling reason for disseminating the findings in this publication.

We know that some of the comments that appear here from New Yorkers will not apply to all other locations. Yet we hope that this report, and the voices of the people who spoke to us so passionately, will motivate readers everywhere to find out, systematically and objectively, how people feel and think about government in *their* locales. We hope that readers—whether from the spheres of local government, academia or the community—will listen and reflect on the messages they have read here, and that they then will use their positions to further study, explore and advance the way local government is structured, and how its agencies and employees perform in the future.

LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC:

Adding the Voices of the People to Government Performance Measurement and Reporting

Clearly, more work needs to be done to hone, test, develop further and apply the many potential performance measures suggested in Chapter 5 of this report. Our Center on Municipal Government Performance will continue to do this work; others must do so too. This is the challenge for all of us, in government, watchdog groups, community organizations, think tanks, academic institutions and foundations—to bring the voices of the people into government’s performance standards, measures and reporting. After all, isn’t that what democracy is about?



Center on Municipal Government Performance
Citizens Measuring Government Performance
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The **Center on Municipal Government Performance** was established at the Fund for the City of New York in 1995 to improve trust, communication and accountability between government and the public. The Center applies market research and the latest technology to create innovative ways to assess government performance that involve the public and reflect its perspective. In doing this work, the Center hopes that the substance and manner of communications between the public and government will be constructive and instructive to both parties and lead to improvements in government performance. The Center's work started in New York City. Many other cities have adapted its approaches. The Center has been continuously supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

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BARBARA J. COHN BERMAN has worked in government, nonprofit organizations and in the private sector. She is Vice President of the Fund for the City of New York and founding director of the Fund's Center on Municipal Government Performance which has brought the citizen's perspective to government performance measurement and reporting and captured the interest of cities across the nation. She also serves as Vice President of the Fund's sister organization, the National Center for Civic Innovation, where she heads the National Government Performance Reporting Demonstration Grant Program. In government, she helped design New York City's first Housing and Vacancy Survey with the U.S. Bureau of the Census and oversaw many subsequent surveys. She led efforts to computerize rent computations and reduce major backlogs in New York's vast rent control operation when she was Deputy Commissioner for Rent Control. As Deputy City Personnel Director, she formed a new bureau to link human resource development of city employees with productivity improvement. She has been a management consultant to business, nonprofit organizations and government, has served on advisory committees of governmental organizations and boards of nonprofits, is asked to make presentations about the Center's work at national forums and has taught graduate courses in public policy and public administration. She is the author of two volumes of a study, *How Smooth Are New York City's Streets?* As a post-graduate, she was a Loeb Fellow at Harvard University.

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