Citizens and their community groups are a major audience and customers for council members. Citizens are likely to have considerable interest in the results of government services as well as tax levels, particularly if that information relates to their neighborhood and special interests. In addition, citizens can be a major source of information to local officials in setting priorities and their other deliberations.

The media is also of major interest to local officials because of their lines of communication to citizens and their often considerable influence. The media are likely to be interested in outcome information, particularly if it shows bad news.

This Action Guide suggests ways to develop a two-way dialogue whereby the public assists in setting priorities and outcomes indicators, helps evaluate services, understands whether results are being achieved, and can understand and use the resulting information when needed.

**Summary of Actions**

- Seek input from your citizens on (a) their needs/wants; (b) their evaluation of services; (c) their views on how services can be improved; and (d) priorities for goals and objectives.
- Use focus groups to obtain input from citizens on what results should be tracked by the government.
- Provide outcome information to citizens in forums, meetings, newsletters, media interviews, and web-sites. Offer periodic briefings on local government accomplishments to neighborhood and other citizen groups.
- Provide to citizens outcome information likely to be of greatest interest to them, such as breakouts of outcomes by neighborhoods.
- Provide annual reports to citizens, neighborhood associations, and other community groups that highlight the results achieved.
- When the government reports to its citizens or media, require that the information provided includes the bad with the good – but also includes explanations and plans to correct the problems.
- Work with the media to encourage their use and proper understanding of results-based information.

**ACTIONS**

**The kinds of information to seek from citizens.** The primary group affected by services are the citizens of the community. Obtaining information about their needs and feelings about services is an important element of legislating for results.

**ACTION:** Seek input from citizens on:

(a) Their needs/wants/priorities;
(b) What results should be tracked and reported;
(c) Their evaluation of services; and
(d) Their views on how services can be improved.

Use this information to help establish priorities and make budget, program, and policy decisions.

**How to obtain information.** There are numerous ways that information can be obtained from citizens. Elected officials should be aware of the various methods that can be used and chose those appropriate for their community.
ACTION: Sponsor focus groups with citizens, or similar type of meetings, to obtain input on what results should be tracked by the government. These sessions should be facilitated by a professional outside the government. (See Examples: King County, WA and Bellevue, WA)

ACTION: Provide funding, for regular, representative, citizen and business surveys. Have these findings summarized, including the highlights of the findings, for local officials’ review. Properly done surveys, even ones that include only a small sample of citizens, are the major way to obtain representative, reliable, data on the views and experiences of citizens. Surveys are being increasingly used by local governments to obtain citizen input.

Periodic surveys of citizens and businesses in your community are a major way to help you identify citizen needs. These surveys also can provide citizens’ evaluations of services and their suggestions for improvements on any of the services they have used or to what they have been exposed.

In addition, obtain systematic feedback from the “users” of individual department services with major findings reported to the city. Such surveys can be a very useful tool to help in identifying problem areas and subsequent resource allocation. (See Examples: Prince William County, VA and International City/County Management Association)

ACTION: Meet with neighborhood association and other community groups to obtain insights as to priorities and into selection of service outcome indicators. (See Examples: Kirkland, WA)

ACTION: Request summaries and highlights of complaints that have been reported to identify the subjects of frequent complaints. Be aware, though, that complaints may not be representative of the all experiences of the public because some citizens are not likely to complain.

ACTION: Use public hearings and informal contacts with citizens outside of city hall. Recognize that such information may not be representative of the experiences of the majority of the public.

ACTION: Hold regular meetings on government performance with citizen advisory committees. Suggest that the advisory committees hold their own periodic meetings with departments to discuss the departments’ outcome before meeting with the council.

ACTION: Use citizen committees to monitor the outcome data and have them provide recommendations on issues and problems raised by the information they gather. Ask the committees to provide periodic progress reports for the community. (See Examples: Albuquerque, NM)

**Communicating with citizens on outcomes.**
The primary group affected by services are the citizens of the community. They will be interested in what results are being achieved with the resources provided. Effectively communicating results information to citizens is one of the most important products of legislating for results.

ACTION: Include information on outcomes in forums, meetings with individuals, civic groups, special interest groups, interviews with the media, web-site materials, and in newsletters. Ask for opinions on the results and how these results might be improved. Offer to meet with neighborhood and other community groups to provide them the latest information on the outcomes the local government has achieved. (See Examples: Charlotte, NC)

ACTION: Provide to citizens jurisdiction-wide and/or agency annual “state-of-the-community” reports that highlight results information, including both strong and weak outcomes. (See Examples: Cambridge, MA; Carlsbad, CA; Coral Springs, FL; San Jose, CA; and Waunakee, WI)

ACTION: Prepare for citizens a readable and shortened version of the budget (“Budget-in Brief”) that provides recent and projected outcome information, as well as summary costs information, on government’s services.

ACTION: Provide outcome information broken out by neighborhoods or other major citizen demographic characteristics. Citizens are much more likely to be interested in information that pertains to their own situation, rather than only seeing aggregate data on the whole jurisdiction (See Examples, Charlotte, NC (2))

ACTION: Post the results information from each agency — regularly (such as twice a year), and in a timely fashion — on the government’s web-site and in public libraries. Make certain that this information is easily accessible to citizens. (See Examples: Bellevue WA (2))

**Reporting bad news.** What do you do when the outcome news is not all that good or even bad? One reason
Communicating With Citizens and Media

Elected officials are nervous about outcome information is the challenge of dealing with poor results.

**ACTION:** Report the poor results, provide accurate as possible explanations as to why, and identify actions already taken and plans for future actions to correct the problem. Poor results should not be repressed because in the long run, the consequences tend to catch up with you.  
*(See Examples: City Auditor)*

**Getting objective media coverage.** Outcome information is likely to be of particular interest to the media, but they will likely need help in understanding the information. The outcome information needs to be provided to them in a fully understandable and useful form.

**ACTION:** Work with media on major issues and encourage them to focus on results. Develop long-term relations with key local media. Return phone calls promptly and be candid with them.

**ACTION:** Develop a primer for the media on asking outcome-based questions and understanding what the information can (and cannot) tell them. Emphasize that the information on results does not tell what caused those results.

**ACTION:** Let the media have ready access to outcome reports after internal review.

**EXAMPLES**

**King County Washington**

In early 2007, the King County, WA Council sponsored a series of five two-hour workshops across the county to discuss government budget priorities. Participants were asked to evaluate and prioritize programs across the range of government services. The 232 citizens were selected randomly from a list of registered voters. This selection process provided for a more representative sample than is typical for public meetings, where most citizens are likely to have special interests. After these sessions, the council held two evening public forums.  

**Bellevue, Washington (1)**

In 2005, the City of Bellevue, WA used two focus groups and an “electronic town hall meeting” to review the existing 16 city outcome indicators, “Vital Signs” chosen by city staff, and citizens were given the opportunity to add other outcome indicators to the list of Vital Signs that they believed to be of most interest to Bellevue’s citizens. A total of 79 citizens recruited at random participated and they added 13 indicators. Each participant was provided a handset for anonymous voting on the indicators. See Attachment 9-1 for Examples of the Vital Signs.  

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2 King County, Washington  
3 City Of Bellevue, Washington
Bellevue, Washington (2)
At the meetings described under Q2, the City of Bellevue citizens rated on a scale of 1-10 the usefulness of each of the following media “when you want to know about the Bellevue City Government.” Here are the average ratings for each question (1= “Not Very Useful” and 10 = “Very Useful.”):

- Publish in city newspaper 7.6
- Email 6.6
- Mail it to my home 6.4
- Post on city website 5.9
- Put on city TV station 3.6

Prince William County, Virginia
The Prince William County, VA Board of Supervisors supports an annual survey of a random sample of its citizens used to supplement agency data and other information. For example, the relatively low levels of public satisfaction with library services in two districts in the county has been an important factor in the Board’s approval of including new library facilities in each of those two districts in its 2006-2011 capital improvement program.5

The International City/County Management Association
The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) provides survey questionnaires that can be used by local governments to obtain performance data from citizens in 15 service areas. Comparative data are available from a number of local governments on responses to the performance indicators covered by these questionnaires.5

Kirkland, Washington
The City of Kirkland, WA encourages the formation of neighborhood associations, noting that they serve as an important communication link between the city and its residences and are an effective way to improve and maintain the quality of life in their neighborhood.6

Albuquerque, New Mexico
The Albuquerque, NM City Council established a citizen commission called the Indicators Progress Commission. It monitors and reports to the council and community on progress being made by the city towards achieving community goals.7

Charlotte, North Carolina (1)
Charlotte, NC is City Council members used neighborhood-level ratings reported in their biennial Quality-of-Life Surveys in their neighborhood and district meetings with constituents. The information has been used to help inform citizens and generate discussion. The findings categorize neighborhoods as stable, transitioning, and challenged, based on a number of quality-of-life indicators (which include physical, social, economic and crime dimensions).8

Charlotte, North Carolina (2)
Charlotte’s, NC is Quality-of-Life Study findings are reported for each of 173 “neighborhood statistical areas” and, separately, for 73 inner-city neighborhoods for each of four dimensions (physical, social, economic and crime) and for an overall quality-of-life composite score. The report is posted on the city’s website. It includes color-coded maps showing neighborhood ratings for specific dimensions such as crime.9

Cambridge, Massachusetts
Cambridge, MA City Council provides an annual “State of the City” report.

Carlsbad, California
Carlsbad, CA City Council posts its annual “State of Effectiveness” report and results of its Annual Citizen Survey on its website.10

Coral Springs, Florida
Coral Springs, FL publishes an annual “State of the City” report from the city council and city manager. It is posted on the city’s website and mailed to all residential and

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4 Conversations with county staff in June 2006 and review of documents, such as the County’s Capitol Improvement Plan
5 ICMA website, www.icma.org
7 Albuquerque, NM website.
8 E-mail communication from Pamela Syfert, City Manager, Charlotte, North Carolina (June 2, 2006) and Metropolitan Studies Group, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte Neighborhood Quality of Life Study 2006 (September 1, 2006).
9 Metropolitan Studies Group, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte Neighborhood Quality of Life Study 2006 (September 1, 2006).
10 E-mail communication from Joseph Garuba, Assistant to the City Manager, Carlsbad, CA (June 2, 2006).
COMMUNICATING WITH CITIZENS AND MEDIA

In addition to identifying new activities, the report includes a “Performance Measures” section for each “strategic priority” area. Each such section lists a number of “key intended outcome” indicators with data on the values for the most recent year and a two-year target for the indicator. Attachment 9-2 shows a page from a recent report that contains one of these sections. Examples of key indicators include:

- Overall quality rating for city services and programs (from citizen survey)
- Percent of plan reviews completed within 15 days
- Number of accidents at 16 major intersections
- Percent of Code cases brought into voluntary compliance prior to administrative/judicial process
- Percent of minority residents who feel that the city is a great place to live (from citizen survey)

**San Jose, California**

San Jose, CA prepared an eight-minute TV video shown on the city’s cable channel in July 2002 on its citywide program “Investing in Results.” The video was posted on its web site. The video explains that the key in this new effort is for the city to be “customer focused” and “results driven.” An important element, the video says, is that the city government views residents as customers and uses performance data to track progress, to make improvements, and to help allocate resources.

**Waunakee, Wisconsin**

Village of Waunakee, WI’s “State of the Village 2006” report to its citizens provides a sample of outcome indicators in its sections on “how well are we doing?, which are included, along with sections on “How much does it cost?” These are provided for each major city function.

**City Auditor**

One ex-City Auditor (who left office completely voluntarily) said in responding to a question as to what frustrated him as the City Auditor: “If you never, ever acknowledge mistakes, then it’s not possible to learn. In the political environment, it is a huge deal to say … we shouldn’t have paved the road with this kind of asphalt… I tend to say “I screwed up.”

11 E-mail communication from Kevin Knutson, Director of Communications & Marketing (formerly Budget Director), City of Coral Springs (June 2, 2006).
12 http://www.sanjoseca.gov/quest/publications.asp
## Attachment 9-1

**Bellevue, WA report of Citizen Based Vital Signs**

Below is an example from with citizen rating of indicators as useful or very useful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>2002 Actual</th>
<th>2003 Actual</th>
<th>2004 Actual</th>
<th>2004 Target</th>
<th>Target Met Or Exceeded</th>
<th>Citizen Workshop % rating indicator as Useful to Very Useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents’ overall satisfaction with Parks and Recreation in Bellevue</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrol response times to critical emergencies from dispatch to arrival</td>
<td>3.4 min.</td>
<td>3.3 min.</td>
<td>2.1 min.</td>
<td>4.2 min.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of violent and property crimes committed per 1,000 population</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents saying they are getting their money's worth when thinking about city of Bellevue services and facilities</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody's Investors Service Bond rating</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>Aaa</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents rating their neighborhood as a good to excellent place to live</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communicating With Citizens and Media

Attachment 9-2
Annual Report Extract Providing Outcome Information
For Citizens, City of Coral Springs, FL

The City provides support to neighborhood groups and individual homeowners and business owners in maintaining and improving aesthetics, safety, accessibility and mobility throughout the City. The City aims to lead by example in the stewardship of natural resources by preserving existing Environmentally Sensitive Land sites, promoting the expansion of the City’s tree canopy and native landscaping, and planning for the conservation of resources.

Expansion of Neighborhood Preservation Program
A Code Enforcement Officer was assigned to inspect multi-family housing units based on Neighborhood Preservation requirements and to act as the Section 8 Housing liaison. City staff met with the four Housing Authorities in Broward that operate within the City to establish an interlocal agreement regarding the monitoring of maintenance of Section 8 Housing. Overall, Code inspections have increased 42 percent over Fiscal Year 2004.

Management of Environmentally Sensitive Land Sites
In order to ensure the long-term health of our environmentally sensitive land sites, we not only maintain the sites themselves, but also address possible threats. City staff inspected fifteen properties bordering directly on Sandy Ridge Sanctuary looking for invasive plants that could threaten the ecological integrity of the sanctuary. Fortunately, none of the properties had invasive plants, requiring no further action.

Fire and EMS Response Time Improvements
As the City has become more populated and local traffic more dense, the City has used technology to improve emergency response times to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents. In 2005 we expanded the number of intersections outfitted with preemption devices that allow emergency vehicles to change traffic lights, added equipment to fire stations to shorten alert time, and enhanced our computer generated vehicle routing.

Performance Measures
FY 2004-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>2-Year Goal</th>
<th>1-Year Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of formal and informal neighborhood partnerships (10 each year)</td>
<td>60 projects</td>
<td>31 projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cooperative projects and the number of different partners (public, private and nonprofit) focused on enhancing the environment</td>
<td>8 projects</td>
<td>14 projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Crime Rate (crimes per 100,000 residents)</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>2,731.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Code cases brought into voluntary compliance</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of visitors participating in tours of 2 ESL sites (excluding Earth Fest)</td>
<td>200 per year</td>
<td>130 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve an overall reduction of 15% for the 85th percentile of speeds on traffic calmed roads</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of accidents at 16 major intersections</td>
<td>155 per year</td>
<td>132 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of riders on intracity bus routes</td>
<td>210,000</td>
<td>111,436</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

State of the City Report
This annual report (precoated) is published annually and mailed to more than 20,000 residents and businesses in the City. The report outlines all of the major business plan initiatives and accomplishments from the previous year.