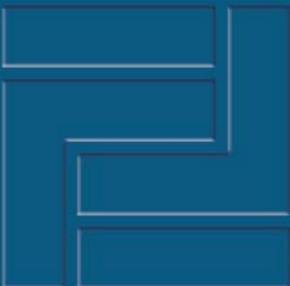




PROGRAM FOR IMPROVED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE REPORTING

Engaging *the* Public



in Local Government Performance Management

WORKSHOP HELD IN MAPLE RIDGE, B.C.

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2007

Acknowledgements

CCAF would like to thank all those who contributed to writing of this report. In particular, we would like to thank *Arn van Iersel*, former A/Auditor General and former Comptroller General of BC, for writing the report on Day 1 and to *Janet Bonaguro*, Manager, KPMG Victoria, for providing additional comments on the report. We also thank *Laura Benson*, Policy Analyst, District of Maple Ridge, for her report on Day 2 of the workshop. Furthermore, we would like to extend our thanks to *Ron Gibson*, Project Director of Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI), for providing us with suggestions on benchmarking and shared performance measurement initiatives, as a follow-up on the roundtable. Last but not least, CCAF is thankful to the District of Maple Ridge for hosting the roundtable as well as to all those who participated in the event.

Engaging the Public in Local Government Performance Management

Day 1, September 20, 2007

Overall Purpose of Workshop

The primary purpose of the workshop was to discuss how performance measurement and reporting could be used to better engage the public in the affairs of their municipalities and to improve municipal performance. Each of the municipalities now produce performance information but there is a strong desire to improve on its use and to better solicit the input of the public in defining what information they would like to see.

Workshop Process

Following an initial introduction by *Mr. Ken Stewart*, a councillor for the District of Maple Ridge and former member of the B.C. Legislative Assembly, a series of presentations was given. The first was by *Geoff Dubrow* and *Chris Hyde* of CCAF on their work in their area, including CCAF's related projects, their good practices study, and what can be done to improve public performance reporting. Second was a presentation by *Arn van Iersel*, former A/Auditor General and former Comptroller General of BC, on the British Columbia experience with performance planning and reporting. The final presentation was given by *Ron Gibson*, Project Director for the Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI). The presentations on Day 1 were followed by a workshop led by the District of Maple Ridge on Day 2.

The audience consisted primarily of municipal officials, from 10 different greater Vancouver municipalities, with responsibility for performance planning and reporting as well as a number of outside parties (e.g. accounting firms who work with municipalities and have a strong interest in this area). It was clear from the beginning that, rather than simply follow the set agenda, the audience wanted to be interactive and focus on the questions that they felt were most appropriate to discuss. There was frequent interaction, which improved the overall value of the session in terms of meeting user needs.

Some Key Issues That Were Raised

Over the course of Day 1, there were a number of key questions raised by the presenters and the audience. Some significant highlights of these would be as follows:

1. What is the value of performance measurement and reporting and is it worth the cost?
2. Is the provision of performance information to the public, in itself, all that is necessary to engage the citizenry in the business of municipal councils?
3. Just what information is the public looking for and how do you get it to them?
4. What is the best way to ask the public what they need?
5. Can you ever take the politics out of performance reporting?
6. How long does it take to create an effective engagement strategy and will the same strategy work for every one?
7. How do you deal with the media, considering that they often focus mostly on the negative performance of an organization rather than the positive?
8. Is the use of Benchmarking information effective, and could BC municipalities take advantage of the OMBI information and approach?

These are only a few of the questions raised and the items discussed. Again there was a very open and frank exchange of views as well as a sharing of ideas. While there were no quick fixes, it was recognized that this is important work and that there were lessons to be learned from others that had done work in this area, such as the Province of British Columbia and OMBI.

Some Preliminary Conclusions

While one always needs to be careful in drawing conclusions, there did seem to be a consensus emerging on a number of key points. Some of these appeared to be that:

1. Citizen engagement through performance measurement and reporting is not easy and takes time, but it is better than the alternative of making choices and priorities without such information. Measuring and reporting on performance provides information to citizens, council, management and staff on how effectively the municipality is using its resources to achieve the

goals and objectives set out. Such activities also stimulate dialogue to allow the municipality to adjust its activities to ensure they are adding value.

2. While performance reports are only one part of a broader citizen engagement strategy, they may stimulate user interest in other areas of citizen engagement. Municipalities need to do this in the context of the other consultations that are done, such as an existing citizen budget or municipal service advisory committee. A rising tide of consultation and public input will help float all boats including the performance measurement and reporting one. In order for performance reports to be relevant to the intended audience, reports generally include information on the following:
 - a. Tell us what you do.
 - b. Why you do it?
 - c. Who told you to?
 - d. Show us that you're doing what you said you would do.
 - e. Prove it.
 - f. What are your future plans?
3. There is general consensus that the public is suffering “information overload” via the Internet, indicating other avenues of distributing performance information are required.
4. There appears to be merit in the potential use of focus groups to get direct input from the public on what they would like to see. Again, there is a caution here in that one report or one strategy may not meet all user needs. Multiple reporting formats need to be balanced with resources required to develop these reports.
5. Municipalities cannot fully get the politics out of performance reporting. The advantage that municipalities appear to have over Ministries is that there seems to be less politics at the council level, so that there is a greater chance of a fair and balanced discussion of performance information, even when not all news is positive. Auditors may be able to play a role in improving performance reports. The value of conducting audits in a municipal setting is currently too low to justify undertaking the significant effort required. There is currently no standardized audit report format as no two performance reports are the same (in format or content). This makes it hard to measure progress over time or to make comparisons across municipalities. Although audit assessments will help to improve public trust

and confidence in performance reports, this process does not appear to be resource effective at this time.

6. There is a need to have both an elected official and municipal staff on board with the initiative. A champion would greatly assist, given the ups and downs that will occur. Also there is a need to communicate clearly with staff what this is all about and to provide the right incentives for their buy in. Effectively using Performance measurement and reporting information for citizen engagement has significant potential but will take time-It is a marathon not a 100 yard dash. A strong process is essential to ensuring the right strategic direction is achieved and is cascaded throughout the organization; subsequently, the right Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be established.
7. Municipalities will never be able to manage the media. Therefore, they may need to find ways to get their balanced performance reporting story out ahead of the media reports. The suggestion was made to further develop relationships with the media to enable the municipality to proactively communicate a balanced picture of performance information.
8. Although it is important to note that no one reporting model/strategy will necessarily apply to everyone, there is merit in municipalities working together, as it has been the case with OMBI's initiative in Ontario. Such benchmarking efforts can assist municipalities in understanding how their service levels compare given their unique environment. Information can be presented in such a way that explains the differences in performance results relating to different municipal settings and operations.

Municipalities' Possible Next Steps

There clearly is strength in numbers, particularly when it comes to sharing information and ideas. The municipalities could consider the following next steps:

- Forming a formal or informal group to pursue citizen engagement through performance reporting collectively. This does not mean each doing the same thing, but working together and learning from one another.
- Municipalities should also consider tying into the OMBI and take advantage of the information and work that this group has done to date. The core municipalities we met with could invite others into this strategy, perhaps under the umbrella of the Union of BC Municipalities.

- It may be worth approaching the Provincial Inspector of Municipalities, *Mr Dale Wall*, for his support, particularly given it was the province that asked municipalities to report on performance under the Community Charter and that the province, itself, is trying to do many of the same things.
- It would seem appropriate also, at some point in the near future, to get the municipal councillors involved with the assistance of *Ken Stewart*.
- Municipalities should ensure they have strong strategic planning and performance measurement process in place. Direction should be provided from Council and cascaded throughout the organizations to ensure the appropriate priorities are actioned and the appropriate KPIs are developed.

These are only some of the things that could be done to maintain the momentum that was building on Day 1.

Day 2, September 21, 2007

The focus of Day 2 was more specific to the District of Maple Ridge. The day began with a presentation of Maple Ridge's business planning process, given by *Paul Gill*, General Manager of Corporate and Financial Services. This process has been evolving over the past 11 years and provides a framework that utilizes public input for strategic planning, and links the strategic plan to both department business plans and employee action plans. Performance measures are identified and reported and citizens are surveyed every three years on strategic direction and customer satisfaction. The survey information is considered by Council during the following year's planning session.

Participants of the roundtable were then asked to engage in a simulated exercise that the District will ultimately take out to the public in the form of focus groups. As background information for the exercise, Maple Ridge staff member *Laura Benson* presented information aimed to give the audience an understanding of the District's Corporate Strategic Plan and specific focus areas identified by Council.

For each focus area, the audience was tasked with developing a common understanding of what success means in that area, then discussing what the District could do in order to demonstrate performance in that area. The end result was a listing of simulated public input that the District could expect to get from public focus groups that would provide the basis for enhancements to its public performance reporting.

The value for participants was in hearing about a process that has been successful for Maple Ridge, elements of which may be transferable to their own municipalities. Maple Ridge was able to test out a focus group exercise they intend on carrying out with the public and has received feedback from the exercise on ways to report on performance against strategic plan objectives.

Follow-up on the Roundtable: Continuing Discussions

The workshop has opened up a venue for further discussions between the participants on how to improve municipal performance measurement and reporting and has initiated further co-operation between different municipalities across Canada. For example, as a follow up to the event, *Ron Gibson* from OMBI has informed us that OBMI is currently assessing the transferability of its approach to other provinces, starting with Alberta, and has expressed an interest to share this experience with other interested municipalities, including those that participated in the roundtable.

In addition, Gibson has offered some suggestions to those interested in pursuing benchmarking and shared performance measurement projects. According to Gibson, those individuals or authorities should consider the following issues:

Who champions the initial impetus and helps sustain it?

Try to get support from people as high in your organization as possible. Enthusiasm is contagious and powerful, and authoritative enthusiasm is even more contagious.

Who can assimilate the early tasks into their current role?

You need determined and dedicated workers just as much as you need visionaries. Fortunately, performance and citizen satisfaction should be everybody's business. It would be helpful to find a mix of both corporate and program/service areas specialists as internal, 'everyday' champions.

What other municipalities might be interested in collaborating with you?

Find like-minded people in other municipalities. Look at the potential for practical synergies and pooling resources for municipalities with similar challenges. Get their high level officials/senior staff involved – further develop dialogue and a shared vision.

Can you translate the shared vision into a shared project charter?

Clarity is very important in maintaining good working relationships. Putting it down on paper forces you to clarify objectives, deliverables, roles, resources and critical success factors. Define terms in any corporate or inter-municipal multi-partner agreement. Different cultures give different meanings to the same words.

Who can provide additional outside funding/support early in the process?

In addition to an internal sourcing/pooling of municipal funds (to minimize risks), think in terms of seed capital, rather than long term support, and make sure the deliverables will justify self-funding down the road.

Can you develop a business case and high-level workplan appropriate to your funding requirements?

Secure consensual support and always consider the value of a small pilot before going big.

Why should departments and service areas want to participate in this?

Pay particular attention to communication, building trust and what that means in terms of establishing relationships. Institutionalize this in principles and protocols, while allowing flexibility to “raise the bar” as you mature.

Are you in it for the long haul? How will you ensure this?

Nothing kills a new initiative faster than a “flavour of the month” history. Make sure you are in it for the long haul. Sponsors and champions need to know that this involves culture change. The literature states that it can take several years or more to fully mature within an organization.

What are the measurable benefits?

Networking is a powerful benefit of working with other municipalities, but it won't sustain a project in and of itself. Keep a tight focus and make sure deliverables are clear, specific, and measurable: “Think Big. Start Small.”

Conclusion

The workshop was well-received by participants, who provided feedback stating the content was relevant and useful. There was a desire by participants to pursue further opportunities to work together, learn from each other, and enhance the level of public involvement in performance reporting. CCAF aims to continue facilitating cooperation among the participants through its future work on improvement in municipal performance reporting.

PIPPR Task Force Members

Ed Archer is a Principal in Public Sector Accounting with the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants.

Wilson Campbell is a project director at the Governmental Accounting Standards Board in the United States.

Katherine Graham is the Dean of the Faculty of Public Affairs and Management at Carleton University.

Susan Jennings is the Assistant Auditor General of BC, and the BC representative on the Performance Reporting Advisory Group of the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors.

Lee McCormack is the Executive Director of Results-based Management at the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

Graham Steele is the Member of the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia for Halifax Fairview.

Chris Waddell is the Carty Chair in Business and Financial Journalism at the Carleton University School of Journalism and Communication.