

**High Performance Partnerships
Citizen Participation
Meeting (May 6, 2004) Report**



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Introduction and Background

As part of the High Performance Partnerships (HiPP) project, Dakota County and the participating cities solicited input from a citizen panel at a May 6, 2004, public meeting at the Rosemount Community Center Auditorium. The panel of 83 Dakota County residents was presented with introductory information concerning the HiPP project. They were then asked to provide input in two ways—first, by responding to a series of multiple choice questions using Audience Participation Technology (APT); and secondly, by discussing the votes in verbal commentary. The focus of the discussion was general values and expectations pertaining to local government services.

Composition of Panel

The panelists were recruited by the participating cities and by Dakota County, with the county inviting representatives of the rural cities and towns. A total of 122 persons were invited to participate with a target of 100 participants. Eighty-three citizens actually participated.

The place of residence was collected from 78 of the 83 participants, whose distribution represents the county to a high degree. (The larger communities were slightly under-recruited in order to allow for a significant participation by the smaller communities.)

Table 1: Panel Composition—Place of Residence

Place of Residence	Percent of County Population	Percent Targeted for Recruitment	Percent Participating
First Ring Cities Lilydale, Mendota, Mendota Heights, South St. Paul, Sunfish Lake, West St. Paul	14.7%	15%	10%
Second Ring Cities Burnsville, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights	43.1%	41%	42%
Third Ring Cities Apple Valley, Farmington, Lakeville, Rosemount	32.5%	30%	40%
Rural Areas and Towns	4.4%	8%	3%
Free Standing Cities Hastings, Northfield	5.3%	6%	5%

- The panel skews slightly older than the county as a whole—the average panelist is approximately 50 years of age versus the countywide average of about 45 years.
- The panel skews toward a significantly higher household income than the county as a whole, with 60 percent of the panel earning \$75,000 per year or more versus 33 percent of households countywide. Middle income accurately represent the county as a whole, while lower income households are underrepresented.

- In terms of household type, married households (with or without children in the home) are overrepresented while all other household types are underrepresented. Single parents are particularly poorly represented in the panel.

APT Quantitative Results

The statistical results of the APT “voting” are attached as an Appendix to this report, but following are the highlights:

- 77 percent said that “my local government services are a bargain” or “priced just right.” Only 23 percent said that “local government services are slightly overpriced” or “too costly for what I receive.”

- Following up on the general topic of cost of government services, participants provided mixed signals concerning the cost of services:

--Respondents were given a series of paired choices and asked which of the two was more important. When asked to choose between quality and cost, 80 percent said that quality was more important. On efficiency and cost, 77 percent said efficiency was more important.

--However, when asked if the HiPP process should recommend collaborative projects “that will increase quality, even if it costs more,” 54 percent said no.

- Across several different questions on the subject, the quality of local government services was rated as the most important service attribute by far.
- 64 percent said that their local government provides about the right amount of services. 30 percent wanted more services, and six percent wanted fewer services.
- Respondents are favorable toward shared service delivery, but recognized that the appropriateness of a particular service delivery strategy would depend upon the service and circumstances.

--60 percent said of respondents said that “cooperation between (local units of) government was “a good idea.” 34 percent said it “depends on the circumstances.”

--When asked (conversely) whether services should be delivered directly by city employees, 38 percent said “it depends upon the service.” 37 percent said it was not very important or it doesn’t matter, while 25 percent said it was very or somewhat important.

--Respondents were given a list of nine local government services, and asked whether each was an appropriate candidate for shared delivery. A majority supported shared delivery of nine of the ten services. The highest level of support (95 percent) supported shared garbage collection and recycling, while police services (61 percent) received the lowest level of support among the nine services.

--Only 22 percent supported shared operation of the tenth category of services—city planning and development services.

Citizen Comments

Panelists were given the opportunity to ask questions and frequently were asked to explain their votes. Highlights from the discussion include the following.

- Panelists continually asked for clarification. What do we mean by quality? What do we mean by cooperation or collaboration? We, of course, were more interested in knowing what *they* meant in using these terms. So there was some level of frustration with the discussion from both sides. (We will try to provide a common basis for discussion in the focus groups.)

- The key issue that the panelists wanted to discuss and comment upon was the cost of services. As noted above, 77 percent said (in response to a multiple choice question) that local government services are “a bargain” or “priced just right.” Yet there were—not surprisingly, of course—several comments that government services do not provide value. That is, either the quality is “not very good” (according to one) or “we are overpaying.”

--Another paradox is in the respondent pointed out that some citizens have the means to pay a premium price for a premium quality service, while other citizens have lesser means to pay. And yet the lower income panelists typically supported “more services” more strongly than those with higher incomes.

--One respondent noted that, where government services are concerned, there is no “free market” to help establish what level of service citizens want and at what price. Therefore, it is difficult for government and citizens to arrive at the right balance of cost and quality.

--Some felt that accountability is very important—meaning that citizens have the opportunity to vote for those who are accountable for the quality and cost of services. Others felt that elections are a poor and inefficient substitute for a true “free market” mechanism to determine the right balance of cost and quality.

--Several respondents said that government products are of high quality—in fact, they are over-engineered, of higher quality than what is really needed. One respondent said, “I don’t need better service.”

- One respondent pointed out that there are different levels of partnership. Cooperation represents a fairly low level of intensity. Another respondent said that cooperation is always good.

--Collaboration, however, is more intensive, and represents both higher risks and higher reward.

- Several panelists said that cooperation may be difficult if different communities have different expectations, both in terms of the quality of service they desire and what they are willing to pay. Another said that a partnership requires common goals.

--One said that she would not support collaborating with neighboring communities on road maintenance, because those cities do not do as good a job as her city does.

- There was some disagreement about the approach to “core” services. Some felt that “core” services should be delivered by city employees. Others felt that “core” or “critical” services are too important not to continually improve and innovate.
- Several panelists mentioned a “geographical” dimension of service delivery. Different service models are needed for services the come to the citizen (at home, etc.) and those which the citizen goes somewhere to get.

--Measures of success might be different based on this dimension.

--For services that are location-dependent, the communities in which the service is offered will necessarily experience better service.

Next Steps

The citizen panelists will meet again in a series of eight small group discussions. At this time, specific opportunities for local government collaboration will be presented and discussed.