Sustaining Citizen-Driven Performance Improvement:
Models for Adoption and Issues of Sustainability

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Introduction:

Measuring performance of government draws a considerable amount of attention from professional associations, scholars and practitioners. Pioneering organizations such as the American Society for Public Administration, the Government Financial Officers Association, the International City/County Managers Association, and the Urban Institute have been instrumental in developing performance measurement as a managerial tool through technical assistance, training and education. For decades now, active research and practice by scholars and practitioners in this area has suggested elements and methods for measuring and improving the performance of government.

Two approaches to measuring and improving government performance are evident in the literature. First, there are those that emphasize the purpose, techniques and utility of performance measurement as a tool for increasing productivity (Behn, 2003; Hatry 1999; Halachmi 2002a; Halachmi 2002b). Research relevant to these emphases highlights the current state of practice and organizational obstacles that impact the degree to which performance measurement systems are employed (Behn, 2002; Berman and Wang, 2000; Holzer and Yang, 2004; Poister and Streib, 1999). Overall, emphasis is placed on the organizational benefits of measuring performance and basing decisions on performance data.

The second approach to measuring performance is addressed by a body of literature providing the argument that citizen inclusion in measuring the performance of government adds value to the process and better informs policy decisions. Citizen participation in the formulation of socially relevant measures, data collection, and presentation of results helps managers and elected officials design and measure services that *matter* to a community (Callahan, 2004; Smith and Huntsman, 1997; Ventriss, 1989).

Research shows that there are tangible benefits to the inclusion of citizens in the performance of government. In an analysis of four large-scale trials of the practice of deliberative democracy, Weeks (2000) illustrates that broad public participation and informed public judgment create opportunities for deliberation and informed decision making for citizens, elected officials and managers alike. More importantly, involved citizens become more informed and eager to dedicate their intellectual energy in pursuit of a solution. Roberts' (1997) examination of management approaches reveals that public deliberation is useful in reducing a school budget and crafting state education policy. Furthermore, utilizing a national survey of chief administrative officers in U.S. cities with populations greater than 50,000, Wang (2001) finds that collaboration between elected officials, public managers and citizens is associated with meeting public needs, building consensus, and improving public trust in government.

Although there are documented advantages to citizen participation, there are some significant challenges for implementation. Citizens, for example, are often cynical, distrustful and are primarily comfortable participating with government from a distance (e.g., letter writing campaigns or petitions) (Berman, 1997; Callahan, 2004; King, 2002). Citizen participation requires

managers to adopt mechanisms and strategies capable of balancing day-to-day operations and meaningful interaction with the external environment in order to prescribe solutions and remedies that address diverse needs (Roberts, 1997; King, Feltey, and Susel, 1998). These mechanisms are difficult to implement because the inclusion of citizens in the process of government often clashes with a specialized, routine-oriented, hierarchical, and impersonal bureaucracy (Callahan, 2004). Managers themselves need the training necessary to effectively survey and engage citizens, collect data and translate findings into meaningful statements to support informed deliberation. In many cases training employees for the skills necessary to support citizen participation is costly (Roberts, 1997; Weeks, 2000).

Regardless of these challenges, citizen-driven government performance initiatives are considered an integral element in the professional roles of current and future generations of public administrators (Nalbandian, 1999; Vigoda, 2002). This calls for a holistic analysis of the critical elements to promoting citizen participation, as well as strategies for sustaining such initiatives. Our goal in this article is to identify some of the most important factors associated with sustainability by focusing on the continued efforts of citizen-driven performance measurement initiatives funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Beyond an assessment of the advantages and challenges of implementing activities of this nature, we discuss strategies and obstacles to achieving sustainability. Our analysis brings a series of sustainability issues and questions to the forefront with some recommendations intended to facilitate widespread implementation of similar endeavors.

Citizen-Driven Government Performance Initiatives

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation supports projects that are geared toward connecting citizens to the assessment of government performance. The Sloan Foundation's *Performance Assessment of Municipal Governments* program is designed to encourage objective measurement efforts in municipal governments that document outcomes that matter to ordinary people. The performance assessment projects supported by this program have demonstrated that citizens can be involved in many aspects of government performance assessment, with positive results. Sloan Foundation projects have stimulated demand for citizen-based performance assessment, sustained collaboration between local governments and citizens, and encouraged widespread adoption of citizen-driven initiatives across jurisdictions.

This article presents an examination of the Sloan Foundation's efforts to support a range of organizations and activities that work to build government-citizen relationships, and thus contribute to overall government performance improvement and accountability.

We focus on a subset of Sloan-funded projects in the area of citizen assessment of municipal government as a starting point for highlighting some common themes and pressing issues of sustainability. Project selection was based on the level of information available on project websites, discussions and interviews with project leaders, and content from presentations given at "Sustaining Citizen-Driven Performance Projects: What are the Prospects?" (October 2004), a recent conference sponsored by the Sloan Foundation in Worcester, Massachusetts. For more information on other projects that are not included in this discussion visit the Sloan Foundation website: www.sloan.org. The full set of Sloan-funded projects appears in Appendix 1.

Three approaches characterize the inclusion of citizens in the Sloan funded assessments of government activities and services:

- Research and Dissemination: Organizations may conduct research and disseminate information on best practices, technical assistance for citizen participation in the performance assessment process, and funding opportunities to stimulate interest and demand.

- Educational Programming: Programs may be developed by, or in close association with, institutions of higher education. These models demonstrate that resources of colleges and universities (e.g. faculty expertise, student interns or volunteers, and use of facilities) can be useful means for supporting citizen driven initiatives.

- Advocacy and Nonprofits: Some programs emerge from advocacy and grassroots demand for improved government performance.

The following three matrices present the project purpose, preferred model of citizen participation, and strategies and obstacles of sustainability for each of these three approaches:

Matrix 1: Research and Dissemination Projects

	Purpose	Preferred Model of Citizen Participation	Sustainability: Strategies and Obstacles
Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB)	To fund activities that lead to an assessment of whether performance information possesses the necessary characteristics for effective external financial reporting.	Educational tools and technical assistance to legislators and their staff, municipal bond insurers, citizen groups, community organizations, research institutes, professors and students, and the general public.	Strategy: GASB is recommending the institutionalization of performance measurement with research and technical assistance. Obstacle: Moving beyond a recommended system -- garnering more support for *required* performance measurement systems.
Fund for the City of New York	To continue the development and implementation of methodologies that provide reliable, nonpartisan and objective citizen-based assessment of the effectiveness of New York City government agencies.	Funding local, county, state and special purpose governments to produce and disseminate annual performance reports that apply criteria recently suggested and announced by GASB.	Strategy: Partnering with GASB and the National Center for Civic Innovation for the demonstration grants. Obstacle: Ensuring that the funded governments institutionalize and practice the recommended GASB criteria.
National Civic League	To generate local demand for citizen-based performance measurement and reporting.	Work with national affiliate organizations to educate their membership through ongoing articles organizational newsletters, and training at national conferences.	Strategy: Fees for services, publication sales, and plans for fundraising. Obstacle: Generating interest in affiliated (local) organizations to identify the information needed/wanted from their local government.

Matrix 2: Educational Programming

	Purpose	Preferred Model of Citizen Participation	Sustainability: Strategies and Obstacles
Community Benchmarks Program, Syracuse University	To support and improve the performance and accountability of local governments, nonprofits and educational institutions through the development of comparative measures.	Stimulate learning among students, citizens and government as benchmarking is undertaken.	<u>Strategy</u>: Institutionalization of the program as part of the undergraduate research and activities of the Public Affairs Program. <u>Obstacles</u>: Addressing the complex needs of partner organizations with students at the undergraduate level.
Iowa League of Cities	Develop a partnership between Iowa State University, University of Iowa, and the Iowa League of Cities to implement citizen-based performance assessment in Iowa.	Work with Iowa cities to implement citizen – initiated performance assessments via city performance teams, public meetings and information technologies	<u>Strategy</u>: A synergized partnership between universities, elected officials, city managers and staff, and citizens. <u>Obstacles</u>: Sustaining the processes and partnerships beyond Sloan funding. -- Loss of key project contributors.
Certificate in Public Performance Measurement National Center for Public Productivity, Rutgers University – Newark	Deliver an online certificate in Public Performance Measurement.	Dissemination of teaching resources and educational programming to promote broad-based adoption of citizen-driven initiatives.	<u>Strategy</u>: Building partnerships with other Sloan funded initiatives and professional associations to deliver the online certificate. <u>Obstacles</u>: Marketing the certificate program and building a customer base.

Matrix 3: Advocacy and Nonprofits

	Purpose	Preferred Model of Citizen Participation	Sustainability: Strategies and Obstacles
Clean Air Council	To Determine whether a citizen-based performance assessment of public transportation in Philadelphia is needed and feasible and, if so, to design a strategy for implementation.	Focus groups with riders and non-riders to determine important indicators of quality services and develop strategies to include citizens in the public transportation's decision making process.	<u>Strategy</u>: Seeking funds via local foundations to support implementation of the final report and plan. <u>Obstacle</u>: Lack of interest of the transit authority in citizen-based performance assessment due to state budget deficits.
Inside Schools	The provision of an internet-based forum for citizen-based performance assessment of New York City public schools.	Public school parents, children's advocates, journalists and teachers visit schools, speak with parents and teachers, and comb the media to present an independent and authoritative view of New York City schools	<u>Strategy</u>: Working with dedicated volunteers. --Selling publications that are directly related to Inside Schools' efforts. <u>Obstacles</u>: Finding new volunteers and the support for fundraising activities.
Neighborhood Parks Council	To renew support and provide assistance for the institutionalization of Park Scan, a citizen-based performance assessment of neighborhood parks in San Francisco	Volunteers use technology to help the City, the general public, and park advocates communicate more effectively.	<u>Strategy</u>: Working with volunteers and other nonprofits in demonstrating measurable improvements in parks upkeep in the parks via Council efforts. <u>Obstacles</u>: The commitment of time and resources for creative fundraising initiatives. -- Working with city officials to acquire detailed performance data.
Neighborhood Capital Budget Program	To continue and institutionalize the performance measurement work of the Campaign for Better Transit in Chicago.	Organizing community and nonprofit groups and citizens via information dissemination and education activities that highlight the public's role in *public* works projects in the city of Chicago.	<u>Strategy</u>: Developing strong networks of community groups, neighborhood economic development organizations, and concerned residents dedicated to equitable and smart public investment in Chicago's neighborhoods. <u>Obstacles</u>: Raising funds to support organizational growth. -- Developing working relationships

			with elected officials and managers to encourage meaningful collaboration and accountability.
Straphangers Campaign	The campaign advocates for decent, safe and affordable transit in New York City.	--Citizen satisfaction surveys via neighborhood forums. --Dissemination of research results that report on the quality of public transportation services. --Advocacy for transparency in New York Cities system of Public Transportation.	Strategy: Support via the umbrella organization of New York Public Interest Research Group. Obstacles: Dedicating the time and resources to creative fundraising initiatives. --Building transparency of the Metropolitan Transit Authority.
Sustainable Seattle	To support and assist in the institutionalization of performance measurement to improve the quality of life in Seattle's neighborhoods.	Work with the University of Washington, the City of Seattle, and community groups to develop quality of life and sustainability indicators at the neighborhood scale.	Strategy: Promoting sustainable development at a local and regional scale through policy advocacy, education and civic action. Educational activities in middle and high schools. Obstacle: Seeking funds to extend efforts beyond the Seattle region.
Worcester Regional Research Bureau	To continue support for, and assist in, the institutionalization of citizen-based performance assessment in the City of Worcester, MA.	Engaging citizen volunteers and local college students to determine and measure key indicators of neighborhood environments that matter to residents.	Strategy: Continue to produce research that is directly connected to the concerns of citizens, elected officials and public managers. Obstacle: Securing funding within the Worcester region to support continued growth of the bureau. --Maintaining arms-length independence as the Bureau works with city departments to institutionalize citizen-initiated performance initiatives.

Project Progress:

The Sloan-related cases in these matrices are, as a whole, significantly advanced approaches to sustainable performance measurement and improvement. Research institutions, colleges and universities, and non-governmental organizations engage in a series of activities that include and promote the participation of citizens in assessing and measuring the performance of government. This three-pronged approach providing support for universities and colleges to share intellectual resources, and advocacy groups working to build transparency and inlets for citizen–based performance assessment all reflect the Sloan Foundation's mission to promote public involvement so as to ensure that what is measured and reported is socially relevant and matters to citizens. Overall, citizen participation efforts include:

- conducting focus groups and other citizen surveys;

- involving citizens in evaluation of neighborhood and park conditions with the assistance of hand-held GPS units;

- organizing communities;

- and developing performance measures in conjunction with public managers and citizens.

Although the Sloan-funded projects represent a high degree of activity and innovation, over the last few decades many similar innovative projects have ceased to operate—indeed are barely remembered in their jurisdictions and survive only in the literature. For example, in the 1970s the Ford Foundation devoted substantial resources to local government productivity programs in jurisdictions such as Dallas, Detroit, Nassau County, New York City, Palo Alto, Phoenix and Tacoma. At least six of these eight ceased to function after foundation funding ended, and the other two—New York City and Phoenix—survived, but with tenuous links to the original funded projects.

In an excellent analysis of those projects, and in the context of a broader productivity "movement" at the time (the early 1970s), Hayes (1977) was pessimistic as to the extent to which such innovations had penetrated the local government sphere: "There are many reasons why the best practices do not spread more rapidly among state and local governments, but the most important reason is the peculiar isolation of these governments. They are isolated in the sense that program decisions are made in a local political market into which broader concepts of practice and performance have achieved only a limited penetration."

That myopia continues today, and the continuing problem is underscored by the failure to sustain government productivity and performance experiments not only by the Ford Foundation, but by other entities, such as the National Center (later Commission) on Productivity and Quality of Working Life, which "expired" in 1978; at the Federal level the Commission's efforts continued at a less aggressive context in the Office of Personnel Management, until those were dismantled under the Reagan administration.

Will the Sloan-funded projects—which are independent of the political vagaries of local and state government—achieve sustainability in the way that earlier foundation-funded and government-funded projects could not? That depends on at least six factors implied by the obstacles

identified in the matrices above. Across cases, then, it will be important, perhaps critical, to address the following problems in a frank, honest manner:

1. Cooperation from Public Partners.

Will government agencies willingly make available the data that independent "watchdog" or "advocacy" projects need? That is a question of full and willing transparency, without the necessity of legal action to wrench free the essential data. In the case of the Straphangers Campaign, for example, the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority has not always been forthcoming with data. Indeed, there has often been only grudging cooperation with a Campaign that attracts widespread press attention with its ratings of subway and bus lines— none of which are labeled as worth the full price of the subway or bus fare. The Neighborhood Parks Council projects have had similar problems of (non)cooperation with the Parks bureaucracies in San Francisco. If the bureaucracy, then, hold the "data cards," what incentive is there to make that information available to its critics?

2. Integrity.

Beyond cooperation, should government fund its critics, even if such criticism is helpful to the performance of public programs? That is, many performance measurement programs, especially those of a citizen-driven nature, have been supported by foundations, large and small. If that funding does not continue indefinitely (and by its nature foundation funding is seldom intended for permanent operating costs), is the only other alternative financial support from the legislature/city council or the bureaucracy? That concern with "corrupt" or self-serving tendencies by officeholders necessarily implies independence, and independence requires both financial means and a commitment to integrity. The Worcester Regional Research Bureau, for one, is loath to accept any such support for fear of tainting its well-deserved reputation for objective analysis. Throughout its twenty-five year history, the Bureau has established itself as a neutral and competent source of data intended to include citizens in tracking neighborhood conditions. It has gained a reputation as a highly credible source for research documenting local conditions, a reputation that has expanded to researching economic conditions, and quality of services provided by public institutions. Yet the Bureau's reputation hinges on its independence—something that is increasingly hard to maintain as funding opportunities are narrowing. Likewise local government officials are interested in working with the Bureau to develop an integrated system of performance measurement. In this case a dilemma emerges as funding needs and integrity are in the balance.

3. Marketability

Are the services provided to citizens by the Sloan-funded projects "saleable" to those same citizens? As a free good they attract some attention and generate continuing interest. A common marketing argument, however, is that citizens/customers/clients place a greater value on services that they must pay for, no matter what the charge. Yet non-profits and universities have little experience with marketing such products, and even intensive marketing may not produce "profitable," and therefore sustainable, organizations. More importantly, such organizations are finding that diversification of revenue streams helps to prolong the life of programs and projects.

Shifting the delivery of services from recipients to customers presents a new horizon, an altogether different set of new considerations and challenges for product delivery. For example, Inside Schools recruits and works with volunteers to assess school quality and deliver helpful information to parents. Its energies are focused on publishing and marketing program literature. Likewise, the National Center for Public Productivity's delivery of an online certificate in *Public Performance Measurement* to public mangers and public servants, broadly defined, has presented a number of challenges in building a customer base. Moving from a purely educational focus to one that requires a marketing and outreach approach in the delivery of the certificate requires extensive outreach and promotional activities in conveying the value of the learning experience.

4. Organizational Politics

As Hayes (1977) suggests, local political agendas often trump rational programmatic efforts. For most of the Ford-funded projects, parochial political interests and changes in elected administrations were probably fatal conditions. Some of the Sloan-funded projects have also suffered from an insufficiency of political support, if not outright hostility—often masked as skepticism. And sometimes internal politics have intruded as well, as in the GASB case in which its governing board, oriented toward the traditional financial auditing function, could not envision requiring performance measures as part of local government audits—a requirement that would have significantly broadened the nature and mission of the organization.

5. Partnerships

Do the citizen-driven projects we are describing offer the possibility of win-win partnerships that will help ensure continued stability and operation? On this dimension the response might be more optimistic. For example, the online citizen-driven performance measurement training offered by the National Center for Public Productivity might indeed be more financially sustainable if marketed through the non-profit networks to which some of the other projects are linked: parks advocacy organizations, transit watchdog groups, etc. In one case a partnership between GASB and the Fund for the City of New York was formed to implement a demonstration grant program that encourages local, county, and state governments to publicly produce and disseminate annual performance reports. A key dimension of this initiative is the requirement of grantees to follow the suggested criteria for performance reporting by GASB. Likewise, many of the Sloan-funded projects are seeking ways to stimulate and foster such synergy under the umbrella of common interests.

6. Personnel Commitments

Project implementation and success is often dependent upon personnel. In some cases the Sloan-funded projects are led by innovators with long-term organizational commitments: the Fund for the City of New York, the Worcester Research Bureau, the National Center for Public Productivity, the Straphangers Campaign, etc. But others may be too dependent on personnel who move from university to university (as in the case of the Iowa League of Cities), or consultants with no organizational commitments beyond a project-specific contract. Unlike government organizations, which generally have a great deal of stability, project-based organizations are often self-limiting due to turnover. Others rely on volunteers and invest a high degree of energy in recruiting and sustaining their interest in the project.

Conclusion:

Finding ways to include citizens in government performance and improvement has and continues to be a concern of citizens and public officials. The "forgotten" government performance innovations of the 1970s and 1980s and current efforts promoting citizen participation suggest a need for strategies of sustainability. Our analysis of ongoing projects that work to include citizens in the assessment of government performance provide models for participation, raises some critical issues and questions with regard to sustainability. Questions as to whether there is or can be cooperation between citizen groups, nonprofit organizations, and government in pursuit of information exchange and meaningful interaction, are critical to building transparency and effective assessment of government performance by citizens. Other questions pertaining to integrity, organizational politics and personnel concerns, are all variables that contribute to the overall quality of citizen-driven undertakings. Marketability and generating interest in program efforts are perennial and vital factors for many organizations in need of multiple funding streams to sustain programs and projects. Furthermore, partnerships where like-minded organizations team up to enhance organizational breadth and scope offer opportunities for prolonging program objectives and potentially increasing revenue.

If we are reinventing the project wheel now in the 21st Century, at least we are doing so with an appreciation for refueling the vehicles of innovation. The foundation world is concerned with sustainability across a wide range of citizen interests. The Sloan Foundation is particularly concerned with the indefinite and independent self-support of a narrow range of performance improvement projects driven by an emphasis "on public involvement to ensure that what is measured and reported is what matters to citizens and that the data are not corrupted by the natural tendency of officeholders and government professionals to report favorable outcomes." Such sustainability at least promises to follow from the lessons learned and applied by the Sloan-funded projects.

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Appendix 1: Projects Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

Association of Government Accountants www.agacgfm.org/homepage.aspx
Purpose: To help the Association of government Accountants launch a Certificate of Excellence in Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting Program.

Baruch College www.baruch.cuny.edu/
Purpose: T o determine the feasibility of launching a Town Panel, an Internet-based panel survey of citizen satisfaction with their local government.

Clean Air Council www.cleanair.org/
Purpose: To Determine whether a citizen-based performance assessment of public transportation in Philadelphia is needed and feasible and, if so, to design a strategy for implementation.

College of the Holy Cross   www.holycross.edu/
Purpose: To enable College of the Holy Cross to establish two new courses focusing on citizen-based performance assessment.

Citizens League www.citizensleague.net/
Purpose: To study ways to ensure effective government performance assessment with citizen involvement.

Community Benchmarks Program, Syracuse University *www.maxwell.syr.edu/benchmarks/*
Purpose: To support and improve the performance and accountability of local governments, nonprofits and educational institutions via the development of comparative measures.

Connecticut Policy and Economic Council **www.cpec.org/**
Purpose: To renew support and assist in the institutionalization of an Internet-based service request system, citizen-based performance measurement, and performance reporting in Connecticut.

The City of Minnetonka *http://eminnetonka.com/*
Purpose: To fund the implementation of an on-line citizen request system for the City of Minnetonka, MN.

Fund for the City of New York *www.fcny.org/*
Purpose: To continue the development and implementation of methodologies that provide reliable, nonpartisan, objective, citizen-based assessment of the effectiveness of New York City government agencies.

Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) **www.gasb.org/**
Purpose: To fund activities that assess whether performance information possesses the necessary characteristics for effective financial reporting.

IIA Research Foundation *www.theiia.org/iia/index.cfm?doc_id=234*
Purpose: To strengthen auditor roles in state and local government performance measurement.

Inside Schools *www.insideschools.org*
Purpose: The provision of an internet-based forum for citizen-based performance assessment of and information about New York City public schools.

Iowa League of Cities *www.iowaleague.org/*
Purpose: To develop and sustain a partnership between the Iowa State University, University of Iowa, and the Iowa League of Cities to implement citizen-based performance assessment in Iowa.

National Center for Public Productivity, Rutgers University: *Certificate in Public Performance Measurement* *www.ncpp.us*
Purpose: Delivery of an online certificate in Public Performance Measurement: Citizen-Driven Government Improvement.

National Civic League *www.ncl.org/*
Purpose: To generate local demand for citizen-based performance measurement and reporting.

Neighborhood Capitol Budget Program *www.ncbg.org/*
Purpose: To continue and institutionalize the performance measurement work of the Campaign for Better Transit in Chicago.

Neighborhood Parks Council *www.sfneighborhoodparks.org/*
Purpose: To renew support for and assist in the institutionalization of Park Scan, citizen-based performance assessment of neighborhood parks in San Francisco.

New York State Office of the State Controller www.cpec.org/
Purpose: To help the Office of the State Comptroller introduce citizen-based performance assessment in New York State local governments.

Radford University www.radford.edu/~bac/gnac/
Purpose: To enable the Governmental and Nonprofit Assistance Center of Radford University to identify performance measures that would provide meaningful comparisons among Virginia's local and county governments and to make them available on the Center's website.

Straphangers Campaign www.straphangers.org
Purpose: Advocacy for decent, safe and affordable transit in New York City.

Sustainable Seattle www.sustainableseattle.org/
Purpose: Support and assistance for the institutionalization of performance measurement to improve the quality of life in Seattle's neighborhoods.

Texas A&M University www.tamu.edu/
Purpose: Working to facilitate performance measurement and citizen participation in Special Districts.

The Urban Institute www.urban.org/
Purpose: To create and institutionalize a local government performance program in 38 localities in cooperation in 38 localities in cooperation with the International City/County Managers Association and the National Civic League.

Worcester Regional Research Bureau www.wrrb.org/
Purpose: To continue support for and assist in the institutionalization of citizen-based performance assessment in the City of Worcester, MA.