Citizen Engagement among Michigan Local Governments

Findings from the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

Presentation for the Winter 2013 MPP course on Public Management
April 3, 2013
Presentation Outline

- Overview of CLOSUP and the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)
- How local officials feel about citizen engagement
- How local jurisdictions practice citizen engagement
- An example of a recent top-down attempt at linking citizen engagement and performance management: the creation of performance “Dashboards”
Background: An Overview of CLOSUP

- Founded at the Ford School of Public Policy in 2001

- Small research center with a core staff + additional research staff and faculty working on a wide variety of research projects, events, & courses

- Primary mission to conduct and support applied academic research that informs local, state, and urban policy issues, both in Michigan and beyond
Michigan ranks 7th in the number of general purpose local governments (1,856):
- 83 counties
- 256 villages
- 277 cities
- 1,240 townships.

These governments:
- spend about $26 billion per year
- employ about 150,000 people
- hold approximately $45 billion in debt (and billions more in unfunded retiree obligations).
Background:

The Development of the MPPS

- **Problem:** information gap in the policymaking process
  - Great deal of data available on Michigan’s citizens
  - Certain amount of data available on Michigan’s businesses
  - Lack of data on Michigan’s local governments and public officials

- **Solution:** new ongoing survey program focused on local government and local government leaders
Michigan Public Policy Survey: Overview

- **A Census Survey**
  - Targeted respondents are the chief elected and chief appointed official in every single Michigan county, city, township, and village.
  - Conducted twice per year (Spring and Fall).
  - Administered online for ~5/6 of the sample, via hardcopy questionnaire for ~1/6 of the sample.
  - 72% response rate by jurisdiction in the past 3 waves (!!).
  - Survey content developed in close partnership with MML, MTA, and MAC, and Advisory Committees of topic experts.
Michigan Public Policy Survey: Overview

- **Goals for the Survey Program**
  - Fill the critical information gap about challenges and opportunities at the local level.
  - Provide information to local leaders about peers across the state, spread best practices and grass-roots innovative solutions.
  - Provide a voice for local-level concerns to policymakers in Lansing, foundations, community organizations, etc.
  - Build a longitudinal data archive to allow tracking of fundamental changes.
MPPS Hard Copy Questionnaire

To start, please confirm...

Q1. What type of jurisdiction do you represent?
   - County
   - Township
   - City (If not a city in what county is it located?)

Q2. Thinking about business conditions in your community, do you think that during the next twelve months your community will have good times financially, or bad times financially?
   - Good Times
   - Bad Times
   - Neither
   - Don't Know

Q3. Thinking about the financial needs of your jurisdiction, would you say that your unit of government is less able or better able to meet its financial needs than it was in the past fiscal year?
   - Significantly Less Able
   - Somewhat Less Able
   - Neither Less Nor Better Able
   - Somewhat Better Able
   - Significantly Better Able
   - Don't Know

Q4. Comparing your jurisdiction's current fiscal year to the previous fiscal year, please consider the ways the following items have changed. Indicate whether—on your opinion—there has been a decrease, an increase, or no change from the previous fiscal year.
   - Revenues from property taxes
   - Revenues from fees for services, licenses, transfers, etc.
   - Amount of debt
   - Ability of your jurisdiction to repay its debt
   - Amount of federal aid to your jurisdiction
   - Amount of state aid to your jurisdiction
   - Tax disbursements
   - Population of your jurisdiction
   - Homelessness in your jurisdiction
   - Public safety needs
   - Infrastructure needs
   - Human service needs
   - Number of employees that work for your jurisdiction
   - Pay rates for your jurisdiction’s employees’ wages & salaries
   - Cost of your government’s employee pensions
   - Cost of your government’s employee healthcare benefits
   - Cost of your government’s employee health benefits

Q5. Now, thinking about the next fiscal year, please indicate which actions your jurisdiction has taken or is likely to take.
   - Increase property taxes
   - Change fees for services, licenses, transfers, etc.
   - Reliance on general fund balance
   - Reliance on “rainy day” funds
   - Amount of services provided
   - Actual public safety spending
   - Actual infrastructure spending
   - Actual human services spending
   - Funding for economic development programs
   - Sale of public assets (e.g., parks, buildings, etc)
   - Privatizing or contracting out of services
   - Number or scope of intergovernmental agreements or other cost-sharing plans with other governments
   - Jurisdiction’s workforce hiring
   - Jurisdiction’s workforce layoffs
   - Jurisdiction not filling vacant positions
   - Actual taxes
   - Employee pay raises
   - Employees’ share of premiums, deductibles, and/or costs on health insurance
   - Employees’ share of contributions
   - Employees’ share of contribution
   - Retirement funds
   - Retirees’ share of premiums, deductibles, and/or costs on health insurance

Now we have a few questions about your jurisdiction’s budgeting processes.

Q26. Does your jurisdiction use multi-year financial projections when developing its budget?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know

Q27. Some local jurisdictions are moving to formal multi-year budgeting, rather than the traditional single-year budgeting. Others are not. Do you plan to adopt single-year budgeting or multi-year budgeting?
   - Single Year
   - Two-Year
   - Three-Year
   - Other (please specify)
   - Don’t Know

Q28. If you selected “single-year” in Q27, how likely is it that your jurisdiction will adopt formal multi-year budgeting in the next 12 months?
   - Very Likely
   - Somewhat Likely
   - Neither Likely Nor Unlikely
   - Somewhat Unlikely
   - Very Unlikely
   - Don’t Know

Q29. How different local jurisdictions manage their unreserved general fund balances in different ways depending on their specific circumstances. Given these differences, we are interested in tracking changes in these balances over time. Approximately what was your jurisdiction’s unreserved general fund balance as a percentage of general fund expenditures at the end of the last fiscal year?
   - 0% or less
   - 0.5-2%
   - 5-10%
   - 11-15%
   - 16-20%
   - 21-25%
   - 26-30%
   - Over 30%
   - Don’t Know

Q30. Thinking about your jurisdiction’s fiscal needs, overall, do you consider your jurisdiction's unreserved general fund balance to be too high, about right, or too low?
   - Too High
   - About Right
   - Too Low
   - Don’t Know

Q31. In your opinion, is your jurisdiction's cash flow and its ability to pay bills in a timely manner a significant fiscal problem, somewhat of a problem, not much of a problem, or not a problem at all?
   - A significant problem
   - Somewhat of a problem
   - Not much of a problem
   - Not a problem at all
   - Don’t Know

Q32. Some local jurisdictions have cut services recently, while others have not. We want to get an overall sense of the level of satisfaction with the package of services your jurisdiction offers today. In your view, how satisfied would you say the following people or groups are with your jurisdiction's current package of services?
   - The majority of your jurisdiction’s citizens are...
   - The majority of your jurisdiction’s council/board are...
   - The majority of business leaders in your community are...
   - Your personal satisfaction with the services provided...
   - Don’t Know

Q33. We are interested in views about the trade-off between services and taxes. Thinking about particular services your jurisdiction may currently offer, if your jurisdiction’s citizens were facing significant service cuts, in your opinion, what would they choose? Would the majority of citizens be more likely to choose higher taxes to avoid these service cuts or would they choose cuts in public services to avoid higher taxes? Please respond for each of the following services. (If your jurisdiction does not provide a particular service below, please select “Not Applicable” for that service)

Q34. Michigan’s local jurisdictions currently have constraints on certain kinds of revenue growth (for example, the Headline Amendment and Proposal A). Thinking about the revenue caps facing your jurisdiction, if the economy improves over the coming years, do you agree or disagree that the current system of funding local government will provide adequate funding to...

Q35. Some people think the current system for funding local government in Michigan needs significant reform, while others disagree. What about you? Would you agree or disagree that the system for funding local government in Michigan needs significant reform?

Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Neither Agree Nor Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
Don’t Know
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“Recognize that the outcomes you want come about when citizens and government work together to achieve them… when they are coproduced.”

- Mark Funkhouser

“We have a new supervisor coming in who ran on the idea of open government. He plans to try to get the citizens more involved in decision making.”

- Township clerk
What is citizen engagement?

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum:

INFORM  CONSULT  INVOLVE  COLLABORATE

EMPOWER
What is the proper role for citizen engagement in local policymaking?

Respondent believes the proper role is...
- Keep citizens informed: 17%
- Citizens provide input: 64%
- Citizens identify policy options: 7%
- Citizens recommend decisions: 9%
- Citizens make decisions: 1%

Local Board believes the proper role is...
- Keep citizens informed: 22%
- Citizens provide input: 64%
- Citizens identify policy options: 3%
- Citizens recommend decisions: 7%
What is the proper role for citizen engagement in local policymaking?

- 24%: Citizens should have final say
- 61%: Officials should have final say
- 6%: Not applicable
- 9%: Don’t Know
How engaged do officials think their citizens are?
- by population size -

- Population <1,500
  - Very engaged: 8%
  - Somewhat engaged: 52%
  - Not very engaged: 35%
  - Not at all engaged: 5%

- Population 1,500-5,000
  - Very engaged: 9%
  - Somewhat engaged: 57%
  - Not very engaged: 31%
  - Not at all engaged: 2%

- Population 5,001-10,000
  - Very engaged: 13%
  - Somewhat engaged: 57%
  - Not very engaged: 27%
  - Not at all engaged: 3%

- Population 10,001-30,000
  - Very engaged: 21%
  - Somewhat engaged: 56%
  - Not very engaged: 21%
  - Not at all engaged: 1%

- Population >30,000
  - Very engaged: 15%
  - Somewhat engaged: 58%
  - Not very engaged: 26%
  - Not at all engaged: 1%
How engaged do officials think their citizens are?

- by jurisdiction type -

- Townships:
  - Very engaged: 10%
  - Somewhat engaged: 56%
  - Not very engaged: 31%
  - Not at all engaged: 3%

- Counties:
  - Very engaged: 15%
  - Somewhat engaged: 44%
  - Not very engaged: 39%
  - Not at all engaged: 2%

- Cities:
  - Very engaged: 16%
  - Somewhat engaged: 62%
  - Not very engaged: 21%
  - Not at all engaged: 1%

- Villages:
  - Very engaged: 6%
  - Somewhat engaged: 49%
  - Not very engaged: 41%
  - Not at all engaged: 4%
“The biggest problem is the disconnect between policymakers and the people.”
- Mark Funkhouser

“When talking with people either one on one or by phone I always invite them to our monthly meetings. Ask if they would be interested in being put on a list of people interested in serving on committees. Only the same two or three people ever attend our township meetings unless it is something directly associated with them personally. Once their issue is discussed they leave.”
-Village manager
Do local officials trust their citizens?
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- **County**: 6% Nearly Always, 36% Most of the Time, 39% Some of the Time, 14% Seldom, 4% Almost Never, 1% Don't Know
- **Township**: 11% Nearly Always, 44% Most of the Time, 31% Some of the Time, 9% Seldom, 3% Almost Never, 2% Don't Know
- **City**: 15% Nearly Always, 43% Most of the Time, 32% Some of the Time, 8% Seldom, 2% Almost Never, 1% Don't Know
- **Village**: 10% Nearly Always, 35% Most of the Time, 36% Some of the Time, 14% Seldom, 5% Almost Never, 1% Don't Know
Do local officials trust their citizens?

- Republicans: 42% Nearly Always, 33% Most of the Time, 10% Some of the Time, 10% Seldom, 2% Almost Never, 3% Don't Know
- Independents: 38% Nearly Always, 37% Most of the Time, 11% Some of the Time, 10% Seldom, 3% Almost Never, 3% Don't Know
- Democrats: 45% Nearly Always, 29% Most of the Time, 11% Some of the Time, 10% Seldom, 3% Almost Never, 3% Don't Know
- Male Officials: 46% Nearly Always, 29% Most of the Time, 9% Some of the Time, 3% Seldom, 3% Almost Never, 2% Don't Know
- Female Officials: 36% Nearly Always, 38% Most of the Time, 11% Some of the Time, 9% Seldom, 3% Almost Never, 3% Don't Know
Trust and the tone of discourse

- Officials and citizens constructive: 49% Most of the Time, 14% Nearly Always
- Officials and citizens divisive: 21% Most of the Time, 10% Nearly Always
- Among citizens themselves constructive: 49% Most of the Time, 21% Nearly Always
- Among citizens themselves divisive: 30% Most of the Time, 6% Nearly Always
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“Town Hall meetings are worthless. Who shows up? Who speaks up? It’s not representative.”
- Mark Funkhouser

“All commissioners attend city, village, township and special meetings. We have input and also listen to the citizens and this is very effective. I attend about 325 meetings a year.”
- County Board Chair
Do local officials say they offer opportunities for engagement?

- A great deal: 53%
- Somewhat: 44%
- Little, if any: 3%
Do local officials say they offer opportunities for engagement?
Do local governments specifically reach out to groups not typically engaged?
What approaches do Michigan governments use to engage citizens?

- most frequent responses -

- Notices in newspapers: 87%
- Public comment opportunities at Council/Board main meetings: 83%
- Public comment at other gov't meetings: 72%
- Gov't website: 68%
- Informal one-on-one discussions with citizens: 60%
- Hard copy newsletters: 54%
What approaches do Michigan governments use to engage citizens?

- most frequent responses -

- Notices in newspapers: 87% effective, 70%
- Public comment opportunities at Council/Board main meetings: 83% effective, 82%
- Public comment at other gov't meetings: 72% effective, 78%
- Gov't website: 68% effective, 76%
- Informal one-on-one discussions with citizens: 60% effective, 94%
- Hard copy newsletters: 54% effective, 81%
What approaches do Michigan governments use to engage citizens?

- less frequent responses -

- Internet discussion forums: 3%
- Neighborhood-specific committees: 9%
- Focus groups: 10%
- Open houses: 10%
- Neighborhood meetings: 11%
- Cable broadcasts or online streaming of meetings: 15%
- Community-wide "townhall" meetings: 17%
- Social media: 18%
- Strategic planning or "visioning" sessions: 21%
- Performance dashboard: 29%
What approaches do Michigan governments use to engage citizens? - less frequent responses -

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Approach</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
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What has changed due to engagement efforts?

- Amount of citizen participation: 39% (Somewhat increased), 4% (Greatly increased)
- Citizen trust: 36% (Somewhat increased), 12% (Greatly increased)
- Quality of officials' decision-making: 44% (Somewhat increased), 17% (Greatly increased)
- Officials' understanding of citizens' views: 48% (Somewhat increased), 16% (Greatly increased)
- Officials' control over decision-making: 25% (Somewhat increased), 7% (Greatly increased)
- Demands on township budget: 41% (Somewhat increased), 16% (Greatly increased)
- Workload for township personnel: 45% (Somewhat increased), 23% (Greatly increased)
Satisfaction with citizen engagement

Officials’ satisfaction:

- Very satisfied: 16%
- Somewhat satisfied: 42%
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 22%
- Somewhat dissatisfied: 15%
- Very dissatisfied: 1%
- Don’t know: 4%

Officials’ assessments of citizens’ satisfaction:

- Very satisfied: 12%
- Somewhat satisfied: 44%
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 25%
- Somewhat dissatisfied: 9%
- Very dissatisfied: 9%
- Don’t know: 1%
What are plans for the next 12 months?

- Likely to expand engagement efforts: 34%
- No change likely: 57%
- Likely to reduce engagement efforts: 9%
- Don't know: 1%
Do local governments try to engage citizens through technology?

- by population size -

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Do most local governments have websites? 
- by population size -

- Population <1,500: 48% Yes, 1% No, 52% Don't know
- Population 1,500-5,000: 21% Yes, 21% No, 1% Don't know
- Population 5,001-10,000: 3% Yes, 3% No, 97% Don't know
- Population 10,001-30,000: 100% Yes, 0% No, 0% Don't know
- Population >30,000: 100% Yes, 0% No, 0% Don't know

(CLOSUP Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy, University of Michigan, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy)
What do local governments offer electronically?

- Enables citizens to email local officials directly: 79%
- Posts meeting minutes and decisions online: 72%
- Posts meeting agendas online: 58%
- Enables online payment for taxes, services, fees, etc.: 39%
- Enables online requests for services: 35%
- Enables citizens to post comments online: 26%
- Enables citizens to participate in a poll or survey: 23%
- Streams/posts video of government meetings: 14%
Barriers to using technology for engaging citizens

- Lack of technical expertise among jurisdiction personnel: 43%
- Lack of funding: 36%
- Lack of “high speed” Internet connections in community: 30%
- Lack of interest among citizens: 28%
- Lack of technical skills among citizens: 25%
- No particular leaders pushing adoption: 24%
- Issues of privacy/security: 10%
- Issues concerning compliance with the Open Meetings Act: 8%
- Concerns that unrepresentative people would dominate: 7%
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(There would be a quote here about successful processes for engagement being organic and authentic, if only I took better notes.)

- Mark Funkhouser

“We have 2 churches in our Township. Once a year, Labor Day Weekend, we have a community service with lunch at our Senior Center. This is highly attended and the people interact and have a good time. Once a year we have a open house at our Nature Center and have snacks and a hay ride. We put up a suggestion box at that time. We get some very interesting ideas.”

-Township supervisor
How the state started incentivizing local “performance dashboards”

Constitutional Revenue Sharing ➔ Unchanged

Statutory Revenue Sharing ➔ EVIP
Most EVIP-eligible jurisdictions have created dashboards among eligible jurisdictions.
Few jurisdictions ineligible for EVIP have or plan to create dashboards

(among ineligible jurisdictions)
A core of local officials believe strongly in dashboards, but most have doubts about efficacy (among all jurisdictions).
Takeaways

- Local officials have conflicting feelings about citizen engagement.

- They are more likely to rate as effective engagement strategies that involve dialogue.

- They’re testing the waters with technological engagement efforts, particularly in larger jurisdictions.

- Survey research can help understand differences across key groups.
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