Local Government Trends in Citizen Engagement:

Township Results from the Fall 2012 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

Presentation by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) for the Michigan Townships Association Annual Educational Conference January 24, 2013
Presentation Outline

- Overview of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)
- Summary of findings on citizen engagement among Michigan township governments
- Brief look at technology and citizen engagement
What is CLOSUP?

- A small research center founded at the Ford School of Public Policy in 2001

- Primary mission to conduct and support applied academic research that informs local, state, and urban policy issues, both in Michigan and beyond
What is the MPPS?

- **A Census Survey**
  - Targeted respondents are the chief elected and chief appointed official in every Michigan county, city, township, and village
  - Conducted twice per year
  - Administered online and via hardcopy questionnaire
  - 72% of jurisdictions statewide responded in each of the past three waves
  - Survey content developed in close partnership with MML, MTA, and MAC, and Advisory Committees of topic experts
What does the MPPS aim to do?

- Provide information to local leaders about peers across the state, spread best practices and grass-roots innovative solutions.

- Help inform policy discussions among state and local policymakers with information about challenges at the local level that is not available from any other source.

- Build a longitudinal data archive to allow tracking of fundamental changes.

- Foster academic research and teaching on local government issues.
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- Overview of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)
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- Brief look at technology and citizen engagement
What did the Fall 2012 survey cover?

- What do local governments do to engage citizens? How effective are those actions?
- What are the outcomes?
- What do they plan to do in the future? Do they need help doing it?
How many townships responded?

915 townships total (74% of all statewide)

By population size:
- 334 townships <1500
- 409 townships 1500-5000
- 84 township 5001-10,000
- 66 townships 10,001-30,000
- 22 townships >30,000

By region:
- 112 in the Upper Peninsula
- 177 in the Northern LP
- 176 in the Central West
- 175 in the Central East
- 149 in the Southwest
- 126 in the Southeast
“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.”
What is citizen engagement?

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum:

INFORM  CONSULT  INVOLVE  COLLABORATE  EMPOWER
What is the proper role for citizen engagement in township policymaking?

- Respondent believes the proper role is...
  - Keep citizens informed: 17%
  - Citizens provide input: 63%
  - Citizens identify policy options: 7%
  - Citizens recommend decisions: 10%
  - Citizens make decisions: 1%

- Township Board believes the proper role is...
  - Keep citizens informed: 23%
  - Citizens provide input: 62%
  - Citizens identify policy options: 4%
  - Citizens recommend decisions: 7%
What is the proper role for citizen engagement in township policymaking?
“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.”
How engaged are township residents overall?

Opportunities for Engagement:

- A great deal: 52%
- Somewhat: 45%
- Little, if any: 3%

Levels of Engagement:

- Very engaged: 3%
- Somewhat engaged: 31%
- Not very engaged: 10%
- Not at all engaged: 56%
Do townships offer opportunities for engagement?
- townships by population size -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population &lt;1,500</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population 1,500-5,000</td>
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How engaged are township residents?
- townships by population size -

![Bar chart showing engagement levels across different population sizes]

- Population <1,500: 9% very engaged, 53% somewhat engaged, 33% not very engaged, 5% not at all engaged
- Population 1,500-5,000: 10% very engaged, 58% somewhat engaged, 30% not very engaged, 2% not at all engaged
- Population 5,001-10,000: 8% very engaged, 54% somewhat engaged, 33% not very engaged, 5% not at all engaged
- Population 10,001-30,000: 19% very engaged, 55% somewhat engaged, 23% not very engaged, 3% not at all engaged
- Population >30,000: 9% very engaged, 78% somewhat engaged, 13% not very engaged, 2% not at all engaged
How engaged are township residents?
- townships compared with other jurisdiction types-

- 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%
Do townships specifically reach out to groups not typically engaged?
- townships by population size -

- Population <1,500: 16% Yes, 62% No, 22% Don't know
- Population 1,500-5,000: 20% Yes, 61% No, 19% Don't know
- Population 5,001-10,000: 18% Yes, 64% No, 18% Don't know
- Population 10,001-30,000: 35% Yes, 48% No, 17% Don't know
- Population >30,000: 41% Yes, 32% No, 27% Don't know
What approaches do townships use to engage citizens?

- most frequent responses -

- Notices in newspapers: 84%
- Public comment opportunities at Township Board main meetings: 78%
- Public comment at other Township meetings: 65%
- Township website: 57%
- Informal one-on-one discussions with citizens: 55%
- Hard copy newsletters: 50%
What approaches do townships use to engage citizens?  
- most frequent responses -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Percentage of Approaches</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
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<td>Township website</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>76%</td>
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<td>Hard copy newsletters</td>
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What approaches do townships use to engage citizens?

- less frequent responses -

- Internet discussion forums: 2%
- Cable broadcasts or online streaming of meetings: 6%
- Focus groups: 7%
- Social media: 7%
- Neighborhood-specific committees: 8%
- Open houses: 8%
- Neighborhood meetings: 8%
- Township performance dashboard: 9%
- Strategic planning or "visioning" sessions: 14%
- Community-wide "townhall" meetings: 15%
What approaches do townships use to engage citizens?
- less frequent responses -

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What has changed due to engagement efforts?

- Amount of citizen participation: 37% Somewhat Increased, 4% Greatly Increased
- Citizen trust: 35% Somewhat Increased, 12% Greatly Increased
- Quality of officials' decision-making: 43% Somewhat Increased, 17% Greatly Increased
- Officials' understanding of citizens' views: 47% Somewhat Increased, 17% Greatly Increased
- Officials' control over decision-making: 23% Somewhat Increased, 7% Greatly Increased
- Demands on township budget: 41% Somewhat Increased, 15% Greatly Increased
- Workload for township personnel: 42% Somewhat Increased, 24% Greatly Increased
“The township has a new wind farm being built at this time. It has been the planning stages for at least two years... There were a small group of residents who did not want the farm to be built so they were very verbal about the project and tried to put a stop to it. It resulted in very contentious meetings both at the Board of Trustees’ meetings and the Planning Commission meetings. This group tried to get the project stopped legally but when that failed, they have stopped being so involved in the meetings.”
Have townships recently faced specific issues that increased citizen engagement?
- townships by population size -

- Township issue increased citizen engagement in past few years
- No issues increased engagement in last few years
- Don't know

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>3%</td>
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Are officials satisfied with citizens’ engagement?

![Pie chart showing percentage of responses to the question regarding officials' satisfaction with citizens' engagement.]

- Very satisfied: 17%
- Somewhat satisfied: 42%
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 23%
- Somewhat dissatisfied: 14%
- Very dissatisfied: 3%
- Don't know: 1%
Are officials satisfied with citizens’ engagement?
- townships by population size -
Are officials satisfied with citizens’ engagement?
- townships compared to other jurisdiction types-

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<td>31%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<td>Villages</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</table>
What are townships’ plans for the next 12 months?

- Likely to expand engagement efforts: 28%
- No change likely: 60%
- Likely to reduce engagement efforts: 11%
- Don't know: 1%
What external assistance would be valuable?

- Information about best practices: 36%
- Training programs for jurisdiction personnel: 36%
- Regional efforts or leadership: 14%
- Financial assistance for citizen engagement efforts: 13%
- Training programs for citizens/external stakeholders: 10%
- Not interested in assistance / Not applicable: 18%
Presentation Outline

- Overview of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

- Summary of findings on citizen engagement among Michigan township governments

- Brief look at technology and citizen engagement
Do townships try to engage citizens through technology?
- townships by population size -
Do most townships have websites?
- townships by population size -
How do officials rate their township websites?

- Information on our website is generally kept up-to-date: 40% (43%)
- Our website makes it easy for citizens to find information they’re looking for: 45% (38%)
- Our website is sufficient for our citizens’ needs: 41% (21%)
- Citizens make considerable use of our website’s information and resources: 33% (13%)
- Our jurisdiction does not have the resources to adequately maintain our website: 18% (5%)
What do townships offer electronically?

- Enables citizens to email local officials directly: 79%
- Posts meeting minutes and decisions online: 67%
- Posts meeting agendas online: 46%
- Enables online requests for services: 35%
- Enables citizens to post comments online: 21%
- Enables online payment for taxes, services, fees, etc.: 20%
- Enables citizens to participate in a poll or survey: 18%
- Streams/posts video of township hearings or meetings: 7%
What do officials think discourages townships from using technology to engage citizens?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of technical expertise among township personnel</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of “high speed” Internet connections in community</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of funding</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest among citizens</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular leaders pushing adoption</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of technical skills among citizens</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance among township personnel</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues concerning compliance with the Open Meetings Act</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of privacy/security</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns that unrepresentative people would dominate</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
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Key Findings from MPPS Fall 2012
Citizen Engagement data for Townships

- 10% of townships say their citizens are very engaged, while 31% say their citizens aren’t very engaged.

- 52% of township officials believe they offer a great deal of engagement opportunities to citizens, 45% somewhat.

- Nearly half of all townships faced a particular issue this year that spurred greater citizen engagement.

- 70% of townships try to engage citizens through technology; 63% have jurisdiction websites, including all of those with over 10,000 residents.

- 59% of officials are satisfied with their townships’ citizen engagement.
Future MPPS survey content

- Types of questionnaire items? Other survey topics?
- Targeted analysis by subgroup or region?
- How should MPPS data and reports be distributed to reach the widest audience?

Contact us at: closup-mpps@umich.edu
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