

## Teaching Notes: Montclair, New Jersey

**Introduction:** This case allows students to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with involving citizens in the development of a performance measurement system for a mid-size municipality. Instructors may choose to focus on: the civic involvement; the creation of community goals; the design and development of appropriate measures of government performance; the design and methodology of citizen satisfaction surveys; the benefits of university/community partnerships.

**Synopsis:** In 1997, the Sloan Foundation provided funding to Rutgers University to coordinate a citizen-driven, performance measurement project in Montclair, New Jersey; a municipality of 38,000 economically and racially diverse residents, 12 miles west of Manhattan.

Montclair had a long history of citizen activism, but its activism was very issue-oriented. Groups formed around issues such as property taxes, education, leaf-blowers, and discrimination. Only one group was identified that addressed community-wide concerns and issues focusing on the quality of life in Montclair. The Rutgers Team worked very closely with this group, albeit with limited success. The township of Montclair did not have a performance measurement system in place when this program first began, but they were moving in that direction. They had recently implemented a program budgeting system that included input and output measures and the recently elected mayor and council had created a strategic plan for the community that included significant reference to the need to create appropriate measures of performance measurement.

This case presents the challenges and opportunities associated with the introduction of new approaches to doing business as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with meaningfully involving citizens in the decision making process.

**Discussion Questions:** Here are some questions that highlight key issues in the case and are likely to foster meaningful discussion among students might include:

1. Do you think it made sense for the Rutgers Team to create a new group of citizens to form the Citizen Advisory Committee on Government Performance? Why or why not? Would things have been different if they chose to work with an existing group?
2. What is the difference between objective (level of service, workload, incidents) and subjective (perception, citizen satisfaction) measures of performance? What happens when a community relies solely on subjective measures of performance? What happens when a community relies solely on objective measures of performance?
3. Gaining political support for public sector initiatives is often critical to a program's success? How did the Rutgers Team generate support among the elected officials? What concerns did the elected officials have and why do you think they had those concerns?

4. Montclair citizens and officials spent a weekend envisioning what they wanted the community to look like in 20 years. Do you think this is a good way to establish community goals? Why or why not?
5. What challenges are associated with asking department heads to work with citizens to create measures of performance for their departments? What suggestions do you have for developing positive relationships between citizens and department directors?

**Activities:** These are suggested classroom activities appropriate for small groups of students.

1. Ask each group to select three service delivery areas for the Township of Montclair or a municipality you would like them to study. Be sure that the delivery areas they select include services that are relatively easy to measure and services that are more difficult to measure. Services that are easier to measure might include: police, public works, parks; services that are more difficult to measure and might include: administrative aspects of finance department, health outcomes, manager's office. Ask the students to develop at least 4 to 5 output and outcome measures for each department. Once they develop the measures ask them to put them in rank order, with 1 being the measure that means most to the average citizen. Have them discuss, in their groups, their choice of measures and their ranking of relevance. Ask each group to develop a consensus on the two most relevant measures for each service delivery area and present their recommendations, and rationale, to the class.
2. Ask each group to critique the citizen satisfaction survey developed for the township of Montclair. Have them identify the questions they liked the most and the questions they liked the least. Ask the students to think about the demographics of the community and the methodology used. Do they think it was a good fit? What might they do differently to increase the response rate and to increase the response rate in minority neighborhoods. After discussing the pros and cons of the Montclair survey ask each group to develop a citizen satisfaction survey for a local community. It could be for the municipality where their school is located, or where they live. In addition to developing the survey instrument ask them to think about the methodology and data analysis. How does each group plan to disseminate the results to the community?
3. Based on the strategies presented in this case ask the students to develop an original performance measurement system. Divide the class in half and create two citizen advisory committees. Explain to the students that each advisory committee has received the charge from the mayors of their respective communities to develop a manageable/feasible performance measurement plan and they are to present that plan to the town/city council for approval. The plan each group develops should reflect the priorities of the community they represent and acknowledge the demographics of the community in terms of data collection, data reporting, and citizen involvement. The plan each advisory group develops

should be feasible, meaning it could be implemented, and detailed. Will committees build on an existing framework or start from scratch? Where do they begin and how do they begin? With who? Why? Anticipate how much time it will take to implement the plan. The resources needed to successfully implement the program. If they plan to engage citizens, how will they do that? Why? The written plan should be presented to the instructor as if the instructor were the mayor. Included with each plan should be examples of data collection tools, surveys, sample reporting formats, etc. Each advisory committee should present their plan to the class as if they were presenting their plan to the Mayor and council. The students not presenting the plan act as the Mayor and council; asking questions, raising concerns – political and otherwise. Students should be prepared to think on their feet. They should come prepared with handouts, PowerPoint presentation; whatever they think is needed and appropriate in gaining approval. The Mayor and council will vote to adopt, or shelve, the plan based on the written report and presentation. The presentation should take one hour.

4. This activity can be done on an individual basis or in small groups. Ask students to critique an existing performance measurement system and make recommendations for improvement. Students may select the communities they want to evaluate or instructors may assign communities. It's a good idea to identify communities that have a track record in performance measurement and ones that have a strong web presence so students have access to information. Ask students to: Describe in detail the system used to measure government performance. What type of data does the municipality collect? Who collects it? How often? Are measures collected for every function? How are measures reported? Are they tied to the budget? To performance assessments? To a strategic plan? Are citizens involved in the process? How? When? After describing the system, ask the students to evaluate it. Is this a good system? Why or Why not? What would they do differently? Ask them to present and discuss three specific recommendations for improvement.