

ROLE 5: ASSIST ELECTED OFFICIALS OR CITIZENS

Practice 5d. Engage citizens: Engage citizens in determining performance goals, objectives, or measures.

Multnomah County, Oregon, Auditor (www.co.multnomah.or.us/auditor): In 1999, as part of a feasibility study on conducting service efforts and accountability (SEA) reporting in Multnomah County, the County Auditor's Office conducted eight citizen discussion groups to learn how much citizens knew about County government, what they would like to know, and how they personally assess government performance. The County Auditor reported on these discussion groups, and the rest of the feasibility study, in the January 2000 report *Service Efforts & Accomplishments Feasibility Study*. In the feasibility study report, the Auditor's Office estimated that about 220 staff-hours were spent organizing the eight discussion groups, and another 48 staff-hours were spent managing and leading the sessions. Fifty-two Multnomah County residents participated in the meetings. In soliciting participants, the Auditor's Office used names provided by Portland neighborhood associations, the Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee and Citizen Budget Advisory Committee, local Safety Action Teams, and active citizens around the county. The Auditor considered "engaged" citizens such as these to be the intended audience for SEA reports.

In the feasibility study report, the Auditor's Office noted that "our discussions with citizens revealed that there is a critical need to educate people about what the County does, how it is distinct from other local and regional governments, and what kinds of services it provides. Most citizens we talked with, while informed, were not able to immediately give an opinion on performance or know how they would assess performance without first requiring some description of services." The Auditor's Office conclusions about "what citizens want in a report" were included in the feasibility study report, and have been repeated in the introductions to the SEA reports later issued by the Auditor. As described in the County's SEA Report for Fiscal Year 2002 (on social and health services), county citizens most want an SEA report to:

- *"Report from the public's point of view.* Organize the information by function rather than department. Include services, regardless of size, which are of great interest to the public.
- *Describe goals and service populations.*
- *Show revenues, expenditures, and the amount of services purchased.* Include information on County spending priorities and the number of people served.
- *Include broad measures.* Provide figures on County progress toward state and local benchmarks and cross-departmental measures.
- *Show efficiency measures.* Include information at the County and department level on per capita costs of services.
- *Include trends and comparisons.* Show how the County has done over time and compared to other jurisdictions."

The report *Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting for Multnomah County: A Feasibility Study*, January 2000, and all current and past SEA reports dating back to 2001 (for FY 2000) are available from the County Auditor website (www.co.multnomah.or.us/auditor).