DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

Local Exercise Program Is a Physical Attraction

Austin, Texas, has been working hard to educate its workforce about health risks and to encourage a healthier lifestyle. But a year and a half ago, with the mayor and city manager leading the charge, Austin saw an opportunity to go further and the city launched the P.E. department. From the beginning, the P.E. department was seen as a way to motivate ordinary employees—especially those who were completely inactive or overweight—to exercise by making it easy and fun.
Christine Shenot, Washington, D.C..
READ ARTICLE

Customer Service Is Just 3 Digits Away in San Antonio*

Lessons learned from instating a 311 call-center system.
Cory Fleming and Bryan Barnhouse, Washington, D.C..
READ ARTICLE

Hot Stuff About Swimming Pools 2006*

Communities describe their swimming pools and aquatic centers, in the fifth anniversary of PM's special section on swimming pools.
READ ARTICLE

Manufacturing Site Seekers Demand Well-Prepared Communities*

Local governments looking for revenue may find that making themselves attractive to manufacturing businesses is the best answer.
Adam Prager, Evanston, Illinois.
READ ARTICLE

Co-Existing with Coyotes in Vancouver (and Anywhere Else, for That Matter)

Coyotes are moving into our communities? How wild is it going to get?
Robert Boelens, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada..
READ ARTICLE

2006 ICMA Annual Awards

Ethics

- The Elected Official Exaggerates His Credentials
- Buying and Selling Bonds

Fast Facts

Understanding municipal clerks—Who are they? What do they think?

Profile

Ryan Heiar, Eagle Grove, Iowa

Intern Profile

Devon Williamson, Palo Alto, California

Performance Matters

Beginning to Define Performance Measurements for Transportation

FYI*

Navigating the Commercial-Project Occupancy Process

Read This Manager's Blog Entries

Wally Bobkiewicz, city manager, Santa Paula, California, and chair of the ICMA International Committee, represented ICMA on the Japan Local Government Center's annual study tour to Japan. He recorded details of the 2006 tour on the city's blog.
READ ARTICLE

*Premium content available only to ICMA members.

Learn about the benefits of joining ICMA.

Membership
Ethics
Priorities
Partners
Career Network
News
Events

Annual Conference
Professional Development
Credentialing
Leadership Development

Digital
PM Magazine
Blog

Sustainable Communities
Performance Analytics
Management Strategies

Projects
Services
Where We Work
CityLinks
Resources
News

Sign up for E-Newsletter
Join Now
Make a Gift

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

COVER STORY

Local Exercise Program Is a Physical Attraction

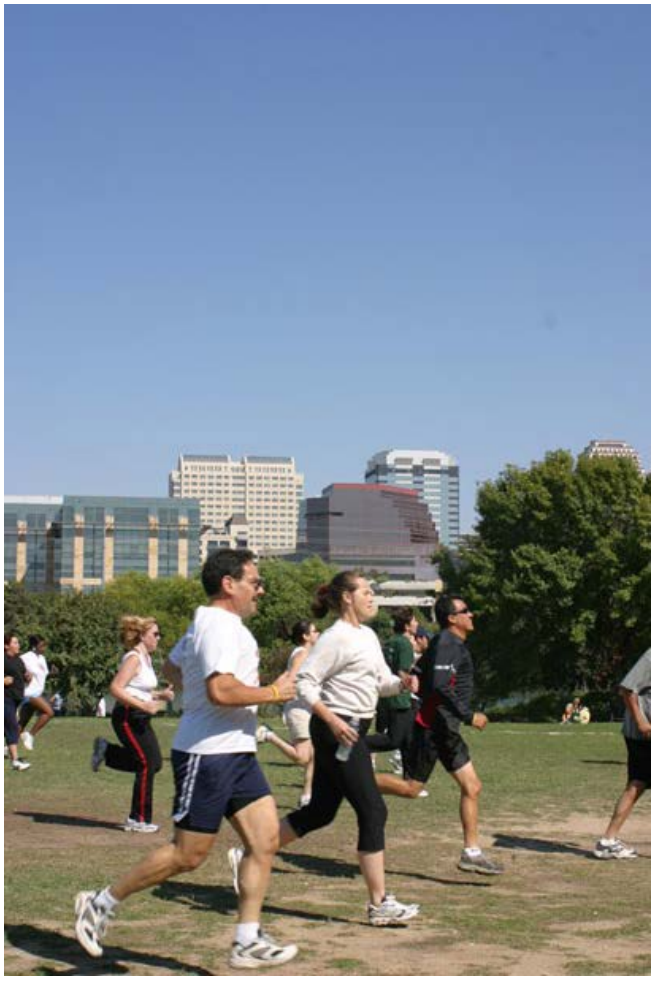
by Christine Shenot

Marrilee Ratcliffe had stopped getting regular exercise several years ago when she was in her late twenties. She'd gone from being an extremely busy student who biked to school and ran around all day to a nine-to-fiver who spent most of her time at a desk. She'd never been an athlete, and when she started her job with Austin Public Library in Texas, she no longer had much activity built into her daily routine.

But in September 2005, Ratcliffe read on the city's intranet site about a new fitness program for Austin city employees. The pitch was compelling: by committing just one hour a week for training, she could prepare to run Austin's Trail of Lights 5K, an annual holiday running event in December. The city would cover the entry fee and allow her to use one hour a week of flextime to train. The city's private partner, RunTex, would provide the training.

The offer was too good to resist. Ratcliffe joined the new program, called the City of Austin P.E. Department. Since running that 5K last December, she's been going to the gym a few times a week, and she's become much more conscious of what she eats. She also looks for ways to build activity into her day, even if it's just taking the stairs instead of an elevator. She credits the program, which she repeated this fall, with making it easy to get back into a more active lifestyle.

"It was a non-intimidating way to get started," she says, recalling the variety of fitness levels of participants and the casual air of the program. "There were people at every level." Some in her group were serious runners while many others, like Ratcliffe, walked and ran intermittently. There were also people who were extremely out of shape, people who just walked.



"We could all encourage each other and be part of the same group while doing different things," she notes.

The story of a once fit young adult becoming more sedentary over the years is a familiar one. Much of it has to do with urban and suburban design in this country. In most metropolitan areas, people have little opportunity-or reason-to walk as part of their daily routine. Driving is the norm, and many jobs involve sitting at a desk all day.

But with two-thirds of all Americans now considered to be overweight, the trend has started to raise alarms. When the New England Journal of Medicine published a study in August 2006 showing that being overweight in middle age translates to an increased risk of death, the headlines got baby boomers' attention across the country.

The National Cancer Institute, working with AARP and using mailed questionnaires and death records, followed the health status of more than half a million Americans from 1995 to 2005. Nobody seemed surprised when the study showed that obese participants faced a higher mortality risk. It fit what health experts have been saying about the 30 percent of Americans who are considered obese, which puts them at greater risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and other serious health problems.

What did get people's attention was the news that even those who'd been only moderately overweight at age 50 and were otherwise healthy and had never smoked faced a 20 percent to 40 percent increased risk of premature death.

The study added to a growing body of evidence that weight gain has become one of the nation's chief health threats. Public health experts cite increasingly unhealthy diets and inactive lifestyles as two of the chief causes, and many employers are responding by promoting wellness through exercise and healthy eating programs. Some also offer employees a variety of preventive care services and incentives to use them.

In Austin, the city has taken similar proactive steps with its 11,000-plus full-time employees through an acclaimed wellness program called HealthPlus, which offers such services as blood and bone-density screenings, health risk assessments, and programs to help people quit smoking and manage their weight. The city has been working hard to educate its workforce about health risks and to encourage a healthier lifestyle, and HealthPlus has reached several thousand employees with its Healthy Living seminars on a variety of topics.

But a year and a half ago, with the mayor and city manager leading the charge, Austin saw an opportunity to go further.

BACK TO THE BASICS

In September 2005, after Austin Mayor Will Wynn declared the goal of making Austin the fittest city in the nation, the city launched the P.E. department. Wynn, an avid runner who is also known for riding a bike to work, says he felt a

"moral obligation" to do something at the local level about the nation's poor health trends. "I will never be able to do anything about the cost of medical procedures or the cost of prescription drugs," he says. "But I can have an impact on the need for medical care."

Hearkening back to a time when physical activity was a routine part of most Americans' school day, Paul Carrozza, a local entrepreneur, originated the P.E. program concept. Carrozza, founder of RunTex, a popular running specialty store that sells shoes, clothing, and accessories, has helped define Austin's running world. He established a nonprofit foundation for running and a business that produces more than 120 running and walking events a year. He also founded RunTex University, which provides education and training.

Carrozza has developed corporate fitness programs for companies such as Dell Computer Corporation. He is a big believer in the idea that the way to get people started with fitness is by offering them a choice of events they can train for that are appropriate for their fitness level. The rest is pretty straightforward: line them up with a coach and a group that has similar goals and abilities, equip them with the right gear, and build a little training time into their workweek. "An appropriate level of investment is an hour a week," he says.

Austin City Manager Toby Futrell did just that when the city kicked off its first P.E. session last year. She publicized the program on the city's intranet site and offered to let employees use one hour of flextime each week to train. Carrozza agreed to provide RunTex coaches who would conduct free, one-hour training sessions to help participants prepare for the event. They initially hoped to attract 100 participants, but about 300 employees registered.

The P.E. training groups met at various times throughout the week-early in the morning, at midday, or at the end of the workday-for the 12 weeks leading up to the 5K. Sometimes participants spent the hour doing a walk or a jog; other days they did drills and received training about stretching exercises, diet, and injury prevention. Each week, they got a schedule that included tips on training they could do in their free time.

Austin provides flextime so city employees can exercise during the workday.

From the beginning, the P.E. department was seen as a way to motivate ordinary employees-especially those who were completely inactive or overweight-to exercise by making it easy and fun. In September of this year, the city held a partylike registration, with music, food, and door prizes, for its second fall session. And employees now have access to a shower and locker facilities at city hall.

Participants are encouraged to set their own goals, and the flextime enables them to build the training into their workweek. The city's effort to make the P.E. department comfortable for anyone to join is, by most accounts, succeeding. Ratcliffe appreciates the casual air of the program and the fact that it works for any fitness level.

"The program is really flexible, and that's been part of its success," she says, noting that she often found herself going to more than one session a week. Although she started out hoping to lose some weight, she says, "That's sort of an afterthought now. It's more the energy, the mental clarity I get. It feels like a treat."

Austin has surveyed P.E. department participants to find out what they're getting out of the program. Most participants considered themselves to be occasional or sporadic exercisers, at best, and many described themselves as overweight. Nearly all respondents said the program improved their physical and mental health. Many also noted that it has relieved stress at work and improved their morale.

Futrell describes the feedback-surveys as well as e-mail-she has gotten from participants as "off the charts" positive. If this fall's higher participation levels are any indicator, the word-of-mouth advertising has been strong. About 340 employees registered for the P.E. department in September 2006.

TRACKING THE FISCAL IMPACT

For all of the goodwill Austin is building with employees who have joined the P.E. department, the city has been able to offer the program at minimal cost. In addition to covering employees' event fees ($22 per person in 2005) and providing each participant with a T-shirt, the city has thrown in a few extra incentives, such as a drawing for an iPod for those employees who complete 11 out of their 12 training sessions.

But much of what the city is doing falls under what Futrell describes as "intangibles." P.E. department participants have

been recognized in the city's human resources newsletter, for example, and on its intranet site. "It's all about encouragement and celebration," Futrell says, noting the partylike atmosphere of registration day and the final events.

Carrozza adds that giving employees an hour a week they can take as flextime for training is critical. The big challenge he sees in getting people who are out of shape to exercise is just getting them started, so launching a program that incorporates the routine in their workweek really helps. "This isn't an expensive proposition," he says. "It actually takes more time than money."

The potential fiscal impact of the program is likely to be positive, according to the mayor and the city manager. They expect Austin to post a net savings from the program over time because of the potential impact on the city's health-care costs, which are growing rapidly. For the fiscal year that began October 1, 2006, Austin budgeted $79.4 million for health-care coverage, or about $7,000 for every full-time employee.

Late in the summer of 2006, the city did its first cost-benefit analysis of the P.E. department; it looked at health-care claims filed and sick time taken by participants before and after they completed the training. The initial findings were positive.

The city analyzed the impact on health-care claims by comparing the costs of claims filed by P.E. participants for a period of time prior to the P.E. sessions with those of a comparable period of time that began with the P.E. sessions. The upshot of this before-and-after analysis: the city saw a $40,400 reduction in claims costs for P.E. department employees, at a time when claims costs for its entire workforce rose. Likewise, the city saw a decline in the sick time they used. On average, each of the P.E. department participants used 3.58 fewer hours of sick time during and after the program than they had before.

Futrell cautions that it remains to be seen whether P.E. participants maintain a fitter lifestyle. She says the city will work to boost participation in the program, and it will track medical claims and sick leave over time to measure the true fiscal impacts. But her hope is that Austin will see ongoing reductions in participants' health-care costs and use of sick time, which would build the case for a greater investment in additional programs. "I believe we'll be able to see a hard financial benefit back to the city," Futrell says.

MAKING HEALTH A PRIORITY

Futrell credits Mayor Wynn and his passion for the issue as one of the reasons the city is devoting more resources and attention to health. Beyond the city manager's office, his enthusiasm has extended to the fire department, which started a rowing club, and the police department, which has a fast-growing runners' club-now up to nearly 500 members-in which members run in various events to raise funds for charities.

In October 2004, Wynn created the Mayor's Fitness Council (Web site, http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/fitness) to work with businesses, community groups, churches, schools, and health leaders to increase physical activity and improve nutrition throughout the city. The council has developed a tool called the Austin Fitness Index, which organizations can use to monitor their progress toward various health goals. This year it launched a Web site and a program to certify businesses and other large organizations as Fitness Council Partners in the effort.

Strong support from top elected officials is the first of three factors critical to success in any wellness effort, according to Futrell.

Second, the programs also have to be fun and "centered around celebration and encouragement," she says, or employees just won't be drawn to them. Futrell also says a third factor critical to her own success is having a dedicated staff "champion" to focus on the effort and keep it moving. Sheree Bailey, one of her executive assistants, is the P.E. department director.

"The trick," Futrell says, "is showing that it matters to me, that it matters to us in the city, and we're willing to invest in it."

If elected officials are not yet attuned to the issue or ready to champion it, Futrell recommends spending time to educate them about health-care trends to build that top-down support. Wynn concurs, noting that the strongest case he can make for investing in wellness and fitness with any skeptics in Austin is to point to the nearly $80 million a year the city budgeted to spend in the current fiscal year to provide employee health-care coverage.

Detailing the cost of health-care benefits is the best starting point for any local government manager who wants to increase the focus on employee wellness, he says. "That number is really, really big. When they call up that number, their bosses and taxpayers will be shocked."

There is another reason local governments can and should be proactive with health and wellness initiatives for their employees. Because they typically rank among their region's most high-profile employers and because they have long played a major role in promoting public health, local governments can serve as models for other employers and large organizations, Futrell says.

"In Austin, the city is the second largest employer," she says, adding that cities and counties can do a lot to educate people about health. "It's taking a very traditional and fundamental function of government and repackaging it for the modern world and the modern workforce."

Christine Shenot is project manager, Livable Communities Team, ICMA, Washington, D.C.

(cshenot@icma.org).

It's for the Kids

Ten years ago, 6,800 children in Austin, Texas, logged the final mile to complete their first marathon. Over several months, these "marathon kids" had run or walked 26.2 miles in quarter-mile increments in a fitness initiative that has since spread to Dallas, Houston, the Texas Rio Grande Valley, and Los Angeles.

Today, Marathon Kids is on the verge of becoming national in scope. Kay Morris, the Austin-based public relations executive who started the program, expects about 137,000 school children in Texas and Southern California to chalk up a marathon in the current session, running segments at school and in their own neighborhoods with their parents. She expects to launch Marathon Kids next fall in Baltimore, Maryland, and after that in Fort Defiance, Arizona, a major population center for the Navajo Nation, and Jefferson Parish, Louisiana.

The fast growing program, which typically runs from October through February or March, teaches kindergarten through fifth-grade students about fitness and nutrition. With a commitment to serving low-income children who are particularly vulnerable to obesity and diabetes, it relies entirely on corporate sponsorships and grants from foundations. "We're going to where cities have the most need," Morris says.

FOR HEALTH'S SAKE

At a time when a growing number of public schools are eliminating physical education and nearly one out of five children is overweight, Marathon Kids aims to raise kids' awareness of the importance of exercise and healthy eating. Students who participate in the program keep running logs and fuel logs over a period of five or six months. Every time they run or walk, they record their progress by coloring in quarter-mile increments in the running logs. Morris introduced the fuel logs a couple of years ago. Kids color in those pages when they eat the recommended five fruits and vegetables a day, with the goal of hitting the five-a-day target 26.2 days a month.

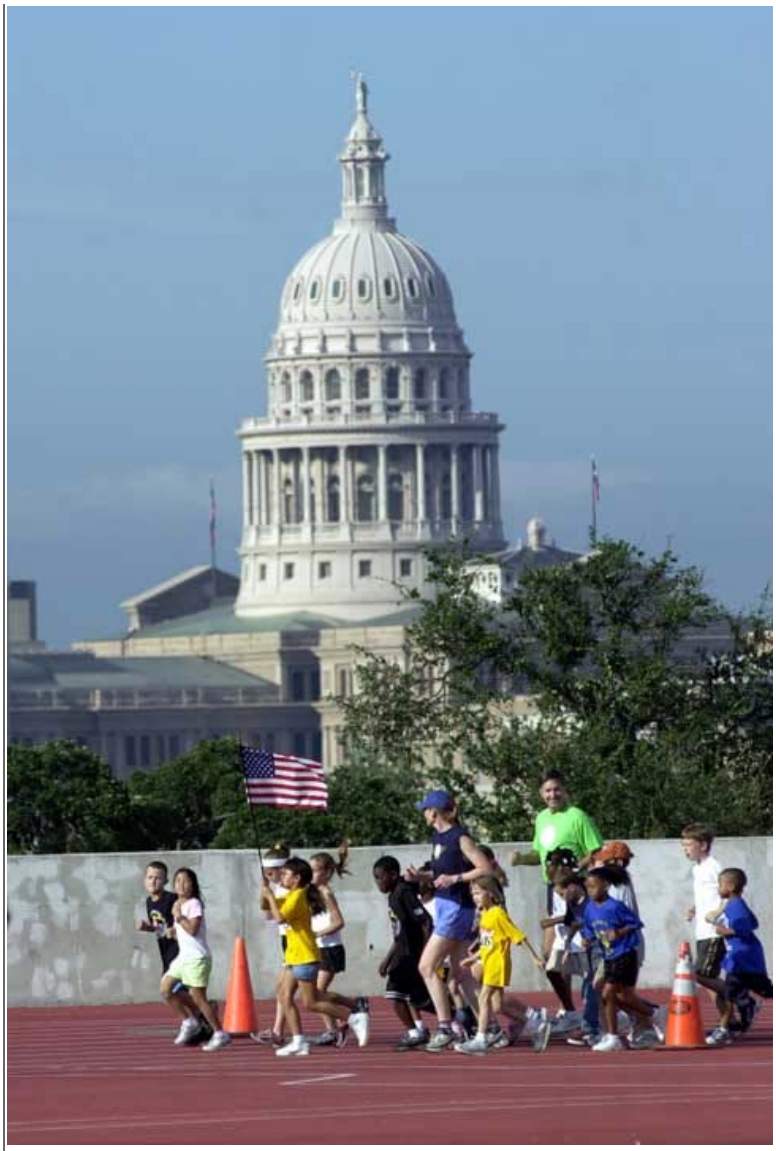
"We're slowly introducing to parents the idea that this has to be habit," Morris says. "We're all about habits."

Morris has built the Austin program to the point where this year about 43,000 kids have registered to participate in Central Texas. In recent years, she took Marathon Kids to the state's two largest cities, as well as Harlingen and other communities in the Rio Grande Valley stretching across southern Texas. And this fall, Marathon Kids made its debut in Los Angeles.

In addition to a Marathon Kids water bottle and T-shirt, children who complete their final mile get a Marathon Kids medal. One of Morris's key goals in the program is to hold a kick-off event and final mile celebration-where they get the medal-at a local college or university campus. "It's important to us to place into their imagination the idea that some day they could go to college," she says.

The program's growth prospects have turned out to be one of the biggest challenges, with more cities expressing interest every year. Morris has even gotten inquiries from overseas, including one from Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. The program sets some strict requirements before launching in a new location. In addition to looking for strong local support from schools, teachers, and often elected officials and the police department, Marathon Kids is never launched in a new location until the community has lined up the necessary sponsorship to cover its costs.

"We make sure we've got the funding in place so we can keep it free," Morris says. "Everyone is real committed to the children and to doing something that will sustain itself."



Austin, Texas, Mayor Will Wynn and local students pass by the state capitol in the Marathon Kids kick-off event.

YEAR ROUND

Over time, Marathon Kids has broadened its efforts to ensure that exercise and healthy eating become part of a year-round agenda. The program is working with local YMCA branches and Boys and Girls Clubs to get "safe loops" set up on their facilities in urban neighborhoods, so that parents and kids have a track they can use in a safe place. Morris says the program also is lobbying school districts to keep school yards open after hours.

The latest twist addresses yet another challenge that many urban neighborhoods face-the lack of access to fresh nutritious foods. Marathon Kids has started working with community garden groups to enlist them in helping elementary schools start and maintain community gardens in the school yard. In addition to learning about gardening, students get a chance to eat fresh produce that they've grown themselves at school.

This year in Austin, the foundation partnered with Austin's Sustainable Food Center to help participating elementary schools start and maintain "Marathon Kids 5-a-Day Schoolyard Food Gardens." Schools that maintain a garden for six months will get a colorful wooden sign and recognition at the final mile celebration in February.

Similar gardening alliances are being set up in other Marathon Kids cities. The Marathon Kids Web site at www.marathonkids.com includes a link for the Recipe Korner, where kids find out how to make trail mix, berry good icy pops, or breakfast rounds made with English muffins, peanut butter, apples, brown sugar, butter, and cinnamon.

Marathon Kids has been getting high-profile support from local government officials, including Austin Mayor Will Wynn, who has run the final mile and kick-off events with kids in Austin. Wynn also talks about the Marathon Kids mileage and fuel logs that he keeps on the refrigerator at home for his own two daughters. Morris notes that local governments can do a lot to help publicize the

program, and she sees a major role for local parks and recreation and county health departments.

Austin's City Manager Toby Futrell says that Marathon Kids has been promoted in the city's new P.E. Department fitness initiative for its employees. She sees real benefits in a program that gets families to exercise together, noting that two of her top managers have children who've participated in the program.

"The energy that happens from Marathon Kids comes straight from those children," she said, adding that parents find they can't get out of a commitment they've made to run or walk with their kids. "You hear the stories everywhere. There's no skipping it."

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

FEATURE

Customer Service Is Just 3 Digits Away in San Antonio

by Cory Fleming and Bryan Barnhouse

Local governments exist to serve the needs of their residents, but determining the needs of these customers is not a simple task, whether in a community of a few thousand people or in a city with millions of residents. Defining and providing excellent customer service in local government also differs from these processes regarding customer service in the business community.

Local governments must provide equitable services to all residents, whereas businesses can vary their service levels based on a customer's ability to pay. So, how do local governments determine customer needs and offer better customer service to their residents?

One way is for localities to reach out to their citizens, providing different communication channels through which residents can report their needs. One new technology, 311 call-center systems, can significantly aid cities and counties by opening such a channel. By establishing an easy-to-use, central number-311-for receiving customer input and requests, local governments can track which services are needed and where. Data collected through such an effort build a foundation for the local government to better understand and respond to community needs, thereby improving its overall customer service.

Antonio Bosmans (center), director of San Antonio's Customer Service/311 Department, with customer service representatives (CSRs) from the 311 Call Center. The CSRs handle more than 88,000 calls a month from San Antonio citizens.

With funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, ICMA is undertaking a national study of 311 and related customer service technologies to explore the benefits of and barriers to local governments' adopting such feedback systems for enhancing customer service and pinpointing indicators of successful system implementation. ICMA studied the customer service/311 department in San Antonio, Texas, as the first in a series of five in-depth case studies, which will explore current practices and successful implementation of coordinated 311 systems for customer service.

This article is based on a detailed case-study report on San Antonio's 311 system, part of the series *Call 311: Connecting Citizens to Local Government*, which can be downloaded at no cost at http://www.icma.org/311study.

SYSTEM FUNCTIONALITY AND MAJOR FEATURES

San Antonio created its 311 system by building on legacy systems already in use within the local government. Four departments-environmental services, public works, animal care, and code compliance-partnered with the 311 call center on the intake of service requests from citizens.

Before establishing the new 311 system, each department maintained its own call center, work-order management system, and relational database. Department employees were familiar with operating these systems and satisfied with their performance. City management believed, however, that centralizing access to these services by unifying the four call-center functions would improve customer service by lessening drop-call rates, reducing wait times, and serving as a feedback loop to improve accountability.

The challenge in establishing the call center was to create an overlay application that could work with each of these four systems, taking in new data from calls made to the city and then transferring these data into the existing systems. The solution required each department's system to be linked to a central computer and telephone network.

The city's information technology services department (ITSD) took the lead in programming the computer and phone systems into an integrated network. ITSD "worked to identify which city services and departments would have calls routed to the 311 call center. The purpose was to set up a system where the 311 call takers could help the citizens with the information and solve their problems on the first call. If not, then the call takers should be able to transfer the calls out to the different departments," said Jose Medina, a member of ITSD.

While the 311 customer service representatives (CSRs) are trained to serve as comprehensive information resources for the city, they cannot be intimately familiar with the workings of all departments. One of the key features built into San Antonio's system provides a script from the departments for the services they deliver.

The script is a directory that 1) uses key numbers and words so that CSRs can look up additional information on a topic and 2) gives the CSR a set group of questions to ask the caller. These questions permit the customer service representatives to target more efficiently the caller's specific need and to relay this information to the appropriate department for work-order processing.

Other characteristics of the system allow for even better technological integration, service tracking, and system management. The system works with three other complementary features:

- ***Executive dashboard.*** This desktop tool allows managers and department directors to generate customized reports on service delivery.
- ***Business warehouse.*** The central data repository collects system data on incoming calls.
- ***Online citizen request form.*** While this request form is not directly connected with 311, the city Web site enables this mode of access for selected services within the departments of code compliance, public works, and environmental services.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

The 311 system opened a new channel for citizens to communicate their needs and wants to the city of San Antonio. Before implementation of the 311 system, citizens had to guess which department they should call with a service request. "Sometimes, they found themselves in a maze trying to find the right person to resolve a problem," said Liz Garcia with the code compliance department.

The 311 system serves as a central point at which to contact the city with a request and to know that the request will be addressed promptly. "Our residents have this city service available to them, and they know it works for them. People continue to use it, and it lets residents know they can get involved." Alyssa Muñoz, former chief of staff for Art Hall, City Council District 8.

The city has used several methods of conducting outreach and promoting interest in 311 among citizens. An organized public relations campaign was rolled out tentatively to manage the estimated level of initial interest in and hence citizen calls into 311. The director of 311 wanted to ensure that the center would be able to handle the call volume in order to meet the 311 objective of enhancing the efficiency and quality of customer service interactions.

The city council was briefed first and given information on the 311 system. Then, they started meeting with and handing out 311 brochures to their community representatives, neighborhood associations, and other constituent organizations to promote awareness of the system. Next, the director of customer service/311 began doing radio interviews. The strategic promotion of the 311 system avoided huge spikes in call volume and high lost-call rates.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND SERVICE PROVISION

By setting up the customer service/311 system, San Antonio began a series of changes that greatly contributed to the development of performance measurement and service-level agreements within the municipal government. Prior to 311, the four primary city departments had lost-call rates ranging from 25 to 35 percent. The 311 system set a goal of reducing the ratio of lost calls to 12 percent in its first year of operation.

Community Profile: Fast Facts on the City of San Antonio, Texas, and Its Customer Service / 311 Call Center	
Form of government	Council-manager
Council districts	11-10 by district, 1 at large
Population	1,202,223 (2005 American Community Survey)
Annual budget (citywide)	$1.7 billion

Call-center budget	$1.6 million
Call-center major components	▪ Physical location: downtown San Antonio, annex to City Hall ▪ Square footage: 3,400 ▪ T-1 lines: 2 ▪ Number of phones: 33 ▪ Number of computers: 33
Number of staff	38 full-time equivalents
Location within city government	Independent city department reporting directly to assistant city manager
Type of system	Custom-built, using four legacy systems
Notable system features and management tools	▪ Information-request retrieval system (IRRS) ▪ Business warehouse (executive dashboard and performance measures) ▪ Call management system
Citizen feedback mechanisms	▪ Customer satisfaction survey ▪ Written letter, e-mail, or phone call to department directors ▪ Monthly meetings with city council members

To achieve this goal, managers of the 311 call center examined their own internal operations and decided to set individual performance measures for the center's CSRs, who handle the incoming calls. CSRs are expected to routinely meet the following standards:

- Answer rate: 91 percent for incoming calls.
- Average number of calls: 20 calls per hour and 39,400 calls per year.
- Average talk time per call: 2 minutes or less.
- Average time offline per day: 1 hour or less.
- Daily productivity requirement: 7.25 hours.

In looking at the bigger picture of how San Antonio serves its customers, the city noted early on that making a service-level agreement (SLA) with each of the four major departments using the call center was highly desirable. SLAs commit a city department to respond to a service request within a specified time. Public works, for example, has committed itself to fixing potholes within 48 hours after a service request.

The fact that SLAs have been made with the city departments has enabled call-center staff to inform San Antonio citizens when they can expect to have their problems resolved. And because citizens have a time frame during which they can expect the problem to be solved, repeated service requests for the same problem are not as prevalent as they used to be. The result of the performance standards and service-level agreements is that the volume of calls from residents has risen significantly since the inception of the 311 call center (see above).

Average Monthly Call Volume			
	Monthly Volume	Percent of Calls Answered	Percent of Calls Lost
2000	44,663	88.80	11.2
2002	59,121	91.40	8.6
2004	83,912	90.70	9.3
2006 (as of July 2006)	88,049	94.01	5.9
Source: City of San Antonio Customer Service / 311 Department (2006).			

STAFF TRAINING

Another important element of the San Antonio 311 call center is staff training for the center's CSRs. As noted, the 311 CSRs are trained to serve as comprehensive information resources for the city. They must be familiar with all of the services offered by the four partner departments, as well as maintain a working knowledge of other city programs for referral purposes.

Not only are CSRs given intensive initial training—four to six weeks—when they are first hired, but they also receive ongoing training and information updates routinely. Supervisors coach CSRs on their performance and offer such incentives as free lunches or time off as rewards for outstanding work. The focus is on maintaining a positive work environment.

Case Study Findings on San Antonio's New System

SYSTEM FUNCTIONALITY AND MAJOR FEATURES

Finding 1. When working with existing legacy systems, the process of introducing 311 must be one of evolution, rather than revolution, with a planned buildout and continual system improvements.

Finding 2. Integration with local government processes and programs is critical for maximizing efficiencies and for the ultimate success of the system.

Finding 3. Expansion of the customer service/311 system, while desirable, needs to be thought through carefully because new features and services have the potential to create additional demand that could overwhelm the system.

Finding 4. Coordination between San Antonio's 311 call center and its emergency operations center (EOC)-for the purpose of providing situational awareness during evening and weekend hours, as well as citizen information during crisis situations-expands the city's ability to effectively respond to emergencies.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Finding 5. The customer service/311 system is a key tool for understanding the needs of citizens and an effective channel for fostering better communications with them.

Finding 6. The customer service/311 system provides a process for "closing the loop" to ensure that the city responds to service requests and documents the results of the local government response.

Finding 7. The customer service/311 system, by giving citizens convenient access to local government services, allows them the means to influence their local government in an easy manner.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND SERVICE PROVISION

Finding 8. Performance measures and service-level agreements commit local government departments to responding to citizen needs within a specified time, enhancing accountability for city and county programs and services.

Finding 9. Data collected through the customer service/311 system can aid local government departments in workload management and resource allocation by determining where demand is greatest.

Finding 10. The customer service/311 system allows policymakers and upper management to spend more time setting long-term policy for the community.

STAFF TRAINING

Finding 11. Continual training and retraining of staff members to keep them current on developments throughout the locality is a must.

Finding 12. Retaining departmental knowledge, by redeploying existing staff members to the new customer service/311 system and giving them cross-training opportunities, can ease the transition and ensure that citizens reach staff who have the breadth of knowledge to handle their requests.

Cory Fleming is senior project manager, ICMA, Westbook, Maine (cfleming@icma.org), and Bryan Barnhouse is project manager, ICMA, Washington, D.C. (bbarnhouse@icma.org). **The authors want to thank the individuals who participated in interviews for the study. They especially want to recognize the efforts of Antonio Bosmans, director, and Terri Salazar, special projects officer, San Antonio's customer service/311 department, for their help in coordinating interviews for the case study and verifying the data included in this article.**

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

FEATURE

Co-Existing with Coyotes in Vancouver (and Anywhere Else, for That Matter)

by Robert Boelens

Coyotes were first spotted in the Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, landscape in the late 1980s, having been attracted by the city's green space, access corridors, food supply, and rodent population. Their arrival was accompanied by a great deal of surprise, myth, and concern. Coyotes were seen hunting on golf courses, sunbathing in parks and backyards, and trotting along streets and alleys. Soon they began to appear as the topic of local radio talk shows and café and park conversations throughout the city. Their appearance was unexpected and they arrived without invitation, but it soon became clear that coyotes were in Vancouver to stay.

Vancouver's coyotes adapted to the urban lifestyle quickly and with ease, leading to an increase in the number of encounters and experiences with people. Some coyotes began to prey on outdoor cats, while others dined on food deliberately left out for them by humans. Public opinion, as on any topic, was divided. There were suggestions of a cull, a trapping and relocation program, a public education campaign, and doing nothing at all. The one constant among all the suggestions and concern was a demand for accurate and consistent coyote information—something that, at the time, just wasn't there.

Although coyotes had been known to live in regions within 80 to 100 kilometers (50 to 60 miles) of Vancouver since the 1930s, their appearance in city and suburban yards and main streets brought surprise. Residents were shocked to learn that the coyote was not the wolf-sized, nocturnal, pack-hunting carnivore that their first thoughts suggested but a 9 to16 kilogram (20 to 35 pound) master of adaptation that was perfectly comfortable and amazingly discreet living in close proximity to active human populations.

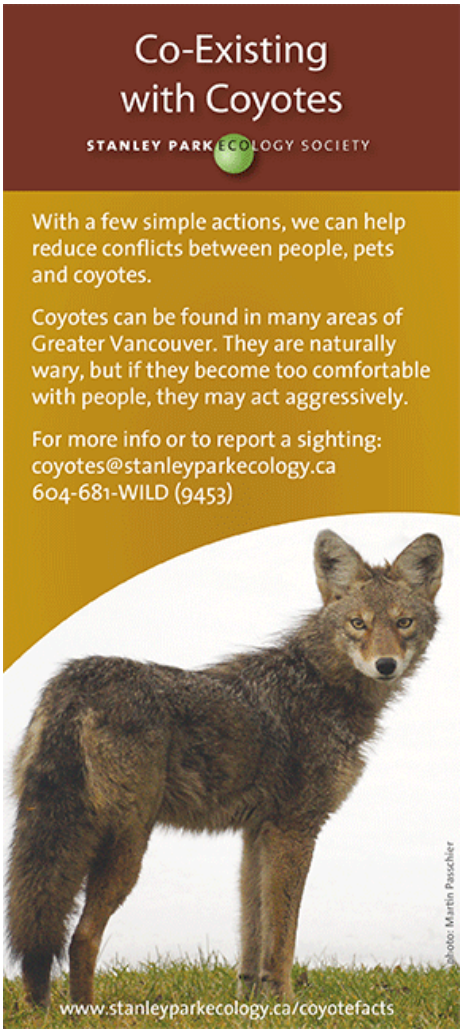
Attempts to live box-trap the first coyotes sighted in Vancouver for relocation proved a failure; the animals would sniff and circle but not one of them would enter the trap. At the dawn of the millennium, every neighborhood in urban Vancouver had been, at one time or another, visited by a coyote, with certain areas—usually bordering large natural parks or golf courses—becoming well known for coyote activity.

As the 1990s concluded, there were a growing number of reports of coyotes losing their instinctive fear of people, an increased number of outdoor cats reported missing, and in certain areas, incidents of small dogs being removed directly from their owner's leash. Three incidents of children being bitten occurred in 2000; each incident received immense media coverage and caused fragmented panic, clearly demonstrating the need for an organized and effective response.

In February 2001, after open consultation meetings with government, environmental agencies, animal-welfare agencies, and the public, the not-for-profit Stanley Park Ecology Society in cooperation with the Provincial Ministry of Environment and the City of Vancouver began the Co-Existing with Coyotes (CwC) public education program. Two subsequent biting incidents in July 2001 provided the CwC program with instant publicity and recognition. The demand for information was greater than ever before.

CWC'S DEFINITION OF CO-EXISTING

The CwC program aims to reduce conflict among people, pets, and coyotes by providing information to both targeted and general audiences as well as coordinating with organizations to provide a direct response to individual coyotes that are displaying aggressive or habituated behavior of concern. Stanley Park Ecology Society staff use reports from the public to track, and evaluate the level of habituation



of coyotes throughout Vancouver while providing advice on nonlethal coyote deterrents with solid success in neighborhoods throughout Vancouver.

In some cases, CwC recognizes that coexistence is not an option. Program staff work to identify and help coordinate the removal of any coyote that poses a risk to human safety, and they support the provincial management plan that calls for aggressive coyotes to be destroyed. In Vancouver, Conservation Officers from the Ministry of Environment have destroyed fewer than one over-habituated coyote per year on average since the beginning of the program.

CwC staff will attend to areas that have an increased concentration of coyote issues, providing pro-active non-lethal hazing (aggressive noise and action) response as well as advice and resources to train and stimulate residents to do the same. The service that staff members provide is simple yet effective, as coyotes consistently and quickly retreat and de-habituate to staff displaying loud and aggressive-appearing behavior.

The importance and level of the volume and hostility used when hazing coyotes cannot be overemphasized. Residents who are advised to chase a coyote out of the neighborhood with noisemakers as simple as a pop can with a few coins in it or waving an old broomstick recognize that the key to deterring a coyote is an aggressive appearing response and, know it is one that they themselves can provide.

Residents are encouraged to be both consistent and persistent when hazing problem coyotes. Generally, after one to three of these experiences, the sightings in the neighborhood sharply decrease or cease altogether, without appearing or starting in an adjoining area. If the pattern of increased sightings does continue, so do the use and frequency of nonlethal techniques as well as monitoring the coyote's behavioral changes for potential removal.

The majority of the program's daily operational work is, however, education based. It was recognized that the majority of conflicts could be prevented if residents became coyote aware, but the question remained: How do you inform them? The average Vancouver resident isn't particularly interested in a pause in a busy day to discuss or learn about urban coyotes or their management. But this changes when there is a coyote in the yard or on a field at the local school. Then residents become extremely interested.

WHAT DO I DO? WHOM DO I CALL?

The vast majority of the more than 10,000 people who have contacted Vancouver's coyote info line since it started in 2001, including local government managers, wanted two things. The first was to be able to tell someone what they had experienced, and the second was to be told what they should do about it. The coyote info line provides consistent and accurate information (something that was not occurring when multiple agencies were answering calls), advice, and situation-specific responses ranging from answering questions about natural history, to an appropriate reaction to a backyard coyote, to an immediate on-site response.

The coyote info line, which receives between 700 and 900 reports by phone and email per year, also serves to monitor the city for areas where individual animals are displaying behavior of concern. Other agencies, including various branches of city and provincial governments, police and fire departments, and animal welfare groups, have all been happy to refer coyote-based phone calls to a specific, designated line. Printed material is offered to each person who contacts the info line, along with the recommendation they distribute it to neighbors.

INFORMATION IN YOUR MAILBOX, AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL, AT THE VET'S OFFICE

The CwC brochure is a quick reference point for the general public to learn more about urban coyotes and how coexistence is possible. It informs the reader of the coyote attractants present in their neighborhood, how to prepare for a coyote encounter, how to keep pets safe, and the dangers of feeding a coyote; and it offers contact information for questions and specific concerns.

Printed material is sent to each community center, library, golf course, veterinary clinic, pet services business,

elementary school, and child-care facility in Vancouver. The program distributes 10,000 to 15,000 brochures each year. Posters and notes that report localized pet attacks, coyote feeding, and anonymous "coyote attractants on your property" are also made available to residents in both print and online.

More than 100 permanent, 60 by 75 centimeter (24 inches by 30 inches) metal signs are posted in golf courses, off-leash dog parks, and areas of frequent coyote activity. The signs provide guidance about encounter behavior, pet safety, coyote natural history, and identifying features as well as contact details for additional information.

WHAT ABOUT MY KIDS? WHAT EVERY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT SHOULD KNOW

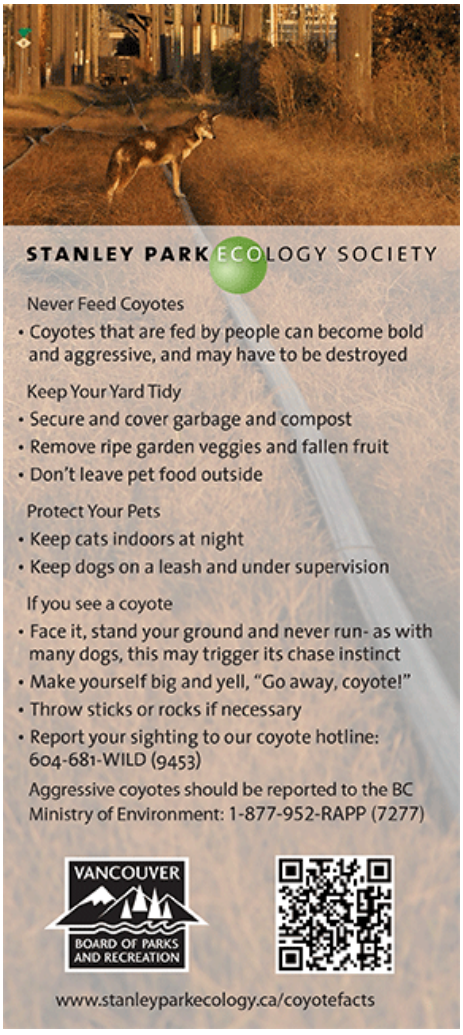
"Coyotes 101" is a kindergarten through grade seven, auditorium-style presentation designed to provide audiences with the skills to identify coyotes (big ears up; bushy tail down; white smile that is a bib-like patch of white fur), to recognize urban coyote attractants in their neighborhood, and to be familiar with coyote encounter behavior (do not run; try to appear BIG, BRAVE, and LOUD).

Coyotes 101 emphasizes the above objectives while it provides additional natural history information and engages the students and teachers in an informative, interactive, and entertaining manner. On average, 10,000 elementary school children participate in the program each year.

The ecology society also reaches public audiences of several thousand each year; staff attend community events and lead interpretive walks through the "coyote zone" (any requested neighborhood in greater Vancouver), highlighting how easy it is for urban coyotes to survive in the urban environment and how residents can and should respond.

COYOTES ONLINE, JUST CLICK HERE

One of the most successful and complimented resources CwC has created has been the compilation of most of the program materials on its website at http://stanleyparkecology.ca/conservation/co-existing-with-coyotes. CwC hosts a comprehensive collection of resources, including suggestions for coyote encounter behavior, pet safety tips, reducing neighborhood coyote attractants, blueprints for homemade deterrents, common questions, updated interactive maps based on reports, brochures in 11 languages, identification of coyote features, coyote natural history facts and sounds, and opportunities to ask specific or incident-related questions, report sightings, share opinions, and leave stories and comments.



COYOTE CONFLICTS IN VANCOUVER: BITERS AND FEEDERS

To date, the Vancouver coyote has yet to bite the hand that feeds it; tragically, it approaches children and bites them instead. Of the six Lower Mainland incidents in which a coyote has bitten a child, four of the involved animals had been deliberately fed by adults, and one was in an area where feeding occurred at the time of the biting. Essentially, the majority of coyotes that have bitten a child have been fed by an adult, a theme that is sadly consistent with coyote bites across the western half of North America. As of September 2012, the last time a child was bitten by a coyote in the greater Vancouver area was in 2009.

BYLAWS THAT WORK, AND WORKING WITH THOSE WHO ENFORCE THEM

A cooperative effort among involved agencies and government departments is essential, and in Vancouver's case, fortunately, it is the norm. When residents complain about coyotes attracted by the condition or rat habitat of a neighbor's neglected yard, the city bylaw office is quick to respond. The Untidy Premises Bylaw makes the property owner responsible to ensure that the residence and yard are maintained at a level similar to the rest of the neighborhood.

Failure to comply with the bylaw carries a penalty ranging between CDN $50 and $2,000. Virtually every urban city or municipality has similar regulations and each is prompt to enforce them. On other occasions, when coyote habitat (primarily overgrown or vacant lots) appeared on city-owned but undeveloped land, a work order for the removal of the bushes and maintenance of the property was promptly issued once the resident's concern came to the civic department's attention.

Prosecuting individuals who feed wildlife is a problem. Although Section 33.1 of the British Columbia Wildlife Act provides a minimum $345 ticket and a maximum $50,000 fine and a six-month prison sentence for anyone who "with the intent of attracting dangerous wildlife to any land or premises, provides, leaves or places in, or about the land or premises, food, food waste or any other substance that could attract dangerous wildlife to the land or premises"

(intentionally or unintentionally feeds coyotes), it is logistically difficult to enforce, as the people doing the feeding are discreet and difficult to identify.

Residents are thankful that the vast majority of their neighbors recognize the danger to their communities of feeding coyotes, and they react to news of feeding in their neighborhoods with shock and anger.

THE BOTTOM LINE (WELL, ALMOST)

The program has one staff member who cooperates with many more. Administrative support is provided by Stanley Park Ecology Society staff, and operational support is provided by a wide range of public agencies, private companies, and residents. The program operates on a budget of less than $50,000 per year and receives core funding from the city of Vancouver. It also survives on funds as available from grants, donations, program delivery, and sales of program resources to other municipalities which are also facing problems with coyotes.

CWC TURNS TWELVE

CwC has begun its twelfth year of operation and is recognized as having played a key role in reducing conflict between people and coyotes in Vancouver. The fact that only one child has been bitten by a coyote since August 2001 is a measured result of success, particularly when one considers there were five such incidents between April 2000 and July 2001.

The balanced approach that CwC brings has and continues to generate support from government and animal welfare agencies, school administrators, and members of public who have encountered an urban coyote. Most of Vancouver's residents have a coyote story of their own to tell. They have vivid recounts of their coyote encounter, often with varying levels of emotion and opinion, of the time they saw or heard one of this city's coyotes. Many of them now have a story of coexistence to tell as well.

Robert Boelens is now employed by the Provincial Government of British Columbia's Ministry of Forests and Range in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. He was an urban wildlife specialist, February 2001 to September 2006, Stanley Park Ecology Society, Vancouver, British Columbia. To find out more about Co-Existing with Coyotes, contact coyotes@stanleyparkecology.ca or call 604/681-9453.

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

FEATURE

Ethics

THE ELECTED OFFICIAL EXAGGERATES HIS CREDENTIALS

Q. The elected officials in this Sunbelt locality have worked closely with the faith community and the nonprofit sector to help raise funds for various social service needs. One of the elected officials has focused on raising funds for a homeless shelter that would provide free medical services and meals. When the county manager was hired, she noticed that this elected official was collecting funds for the shelter from the county office. The manager explained to him that it was not appropriate to collect these funds.

The same elected official then turned his attention to helping a friend set up a nonprofit to operate the shelter. Progress in setting up the nonprofit was slow, and one day, the elected official confided to the county manager that his friend had some problems. The elected official's friend had claimed to have a medical degree, a credential that is required to operate a medical clinic. The elected official learned, however, that the friend is a physician's assistant and does not have an M.D. The elected official said he also had learned that his friend had a criminal record for check fraud and might have taken some of the shelter donations for personal use.

Then, the other shoe dropped. The elected official admitted that he, too, had exaggerated his credentials, claiming to be a licensed clinical social worker even though he had not pursued any degrees beyond his B.A. in psychology. The elected official said he had overstated his credentials to bolster the fund-raising effort and never intended to offer any services at the clinic. The elected official already had contacted the county's public information officer to ask that the erroneous credential be removed from the county's Web site.

Now that the county manager knows that the elected official has listed a fake credential on the Web site, what action is appropriate? The county manager thinks the elected official should resign from office.

A. Because the county government routinely posts and corrects whatever the elected officials provide for the Web site, the county is following its usual practice in making the requested correction in the elected official's bio. Even though the county manager is tempted to tell the elected official that he should resign, that advice should come from the elected official's political advisers, not from the chief appointed official. If a county employee had falsified credentials, the county manager would have had the authority to take appropriate disciplinary steps. It is up to the citizens, however, not the county manager, to pass judgment on an elected official who makes false claims about his qualifications.

BUYING AND SELLING BONDS

Q. The city's redevelopment agency (RDA) soon will issue its first-ever debt, and the city manager posed two questions about buying and selling bonds. Because the RDA has no track record, the city manager expects a low rating, possibly BBB or lower. The RDA can expect to pay a high interest rate on the debt, which is unfortunate for the RDA but potentially a great deal for individual investors.

As is common, the city manager also serves as the executive director for the RDA. Under these circumstances, is there any reason why the city manager should be prohibited or discouraged from purchasing bonds issued by the RDA, presuming the bond purchases are done in the open market and in competition with other bond buyers?

The city manager also asked if there would be any concerns about marketing the bond offering to his friends.

A. The city manager is not in a position to influence or manipulate the price of the bonds or the interest paid on them. So, there is no outright conflict of interest in buying the bonds. Some situations in the future, however, could create an appearance of a conflict of interest. What would happen, for example, if there were an opportunity to refinance the debt to achieve lower interest rates? If for some reason the RDA decided not to refinance, someone could argue that the city manager had had a personal interest in retaining the 8 percent return on his investment.

Similarly, someone might criticize the method the RDA chooses for the sale of the bonds and could use the

manager's personal investment as a way to discredit the RDA's approach. Just as ICMA recommends that managers avoid real estate investments in their own communities (other than their own homes), ICMA also recommends that the city manager make bond investments outside the jurisdiction that he serves.

Regarding the manager's role in marketing, it is traditional for managers to help their communities market their bonds. It is important that the city manager's personal efforts are coordinated with the firm that is handling the sale. The city manager should not send out promotional notices to friends before the firm starts marketing the bond sale.

In general, the city manager should look for public forums to inform residents, employees, and others that this opportunity is coming. For instance, it is appropriate to make announcements on cable-access stations or at city council meetings to ensure wide publicity.

For advice on the ICMA Code of Ethics, or to find out more on ethics training and technical assistance available to local governments, call the Ethics Center at ICMA at 202/962-3521, or visit the Web site at http://icma.org/ethics. Calls or e-mails can also be directed to ICMA's ethics advisers Martha Perego, 202/962-3668, mperego@icma.org, and Elizabeth Kellar, 202/962-3611, ekellar@icma.org.

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

COVER STORY

Fast Facts

UNDERSTANDING MUNICIPAL CLERKS-WHO ARE THEY? WHAT DO THEY THINK?

In a 2006 survey endorsed by the municipal clerks of Illinois, researchers at Western Kentucky University examined factors related to the job satisfaction levels of Illinois clerks in cities with populations of 2,500 or larger. In Illinois, municipal clerks may be elected or appointed; 67 percent of the survey's 170 respondents reported they held elected offices, while 33 percent had been appointed.

Survey respondents reported:

- Gender: 87 percent were female and 13 percent were male.
- Average age of clerks: 53 years.
- Tenure of clerks (time in position): 9.5 years.
- Highest level of education reported: high school or equivalent, 15 percent; some technical or business school, 11 percent; some college, 37 percent; associate's degree, 10 percent; bachelor's degree, 23 percent; master's degree, 3 percent; and doctorate, 1 percent.
- Average annual salaries (self-reported): elected, $32,105; appointed, $45,704.
- Opinions about benefits and pay: 79 percent of clerks agreed that they receive adequate and fair benefits; 22 percent agreed that they receive adequate and fair pay.
- Coworkers: 93 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they have good relations with their coworkers.
- Workload: While 66 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they have a reasonable workload, only 30 percent agreed or strongly agreed that their workload is predictable and routine.
- Job satisfaction (how well an employee likes the work): 92 percent reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their jobs. But when asked whether they would recommend to their own children to pursue a career in local government, the picture looks a little less rosy: only 53 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.
- Public perception: When asked about the public's perception of their city, 74 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their city's reputation is good.
- Trust in local leaders: 66 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they trust their city's leaders to look out for the best interests of city employees.

Source: Victoria Gordon, Jeffery L. Osgood Jr., and Jeremy Phillips, Center for Local Governments, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky. For a full report, contact Victoria Gordon at victoria.gordon@wku.edu.

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

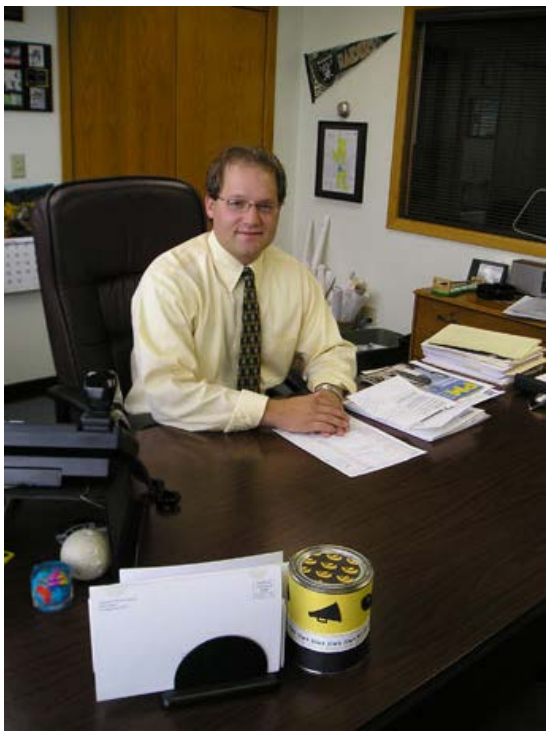
DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

DEPARTMENTS

Profile

For Ryan Heiar—Eagle Grove, Iowa's city manager—every day of work is different. But he didn't always want the job.

Growing up the son of Manchester, Iowa's city manager, he knew about the long hours away from home and the sometimes-angry phone calls his father received. "I always said there was no way I was ever going to be a city manager," said Heiar.



Ryan Heiar is city administrator of Eagle Grove, Iowa.

A public administration class Heiar took in college at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, changed his mind. "I started to get interested in it," he said. "I sat down and visited about it with my dad and decided that's what I wanted to do."

Straight out of college, he was hired to be city manager of Elkader, an eastern Iowa town of 1,500 people. There, he learned what the job was all about. But he and his wife, Stephanie, wanted to move closer to her family in Pocahontas. Eagle Grove was the answer.

Since accepting the Eagle Grove city administrator job four years ago, Heiar observed, he's been welcomed into the community with open arms. "Eagle Grove is a unique town, a special town," he said.

So what does a city administrator do? "The last three months have really been dedicated to the aquatic center," said Heiar. "I also work with the public and the city staff to address their concerns."

Heiar said he and other city officials recently finished the yearly budget process, which can be a difficult balancing act. "Right now is some of the toughest times for us," he commented. "With the rollback, we have less coming in, but our

expenses are increasing. There's concern for the future."

But Heiar has high hopes for the town. "We're progressive in Eagle Grove. One of our goals is to grow, but as with any small rural Iowa town, that's difficult." As he works on keeping Eagle Grove running, he noted, his position has helped him and his father to build a stronger bond. "We didn't know each other very well before."

His father, Dave Heiar, is now employed as the economic development director in Dubuque. "We talk weekly now, but when I first got the job, I was calling him every day. He told me when I started this that I should always put family first, and that's what I've done." Heiar said his family is happy living in Eagle Grove. The schools and activities are plentiful for his two children, Tanner, 5, and Ellie, 4 months. His wife, Stephanie, enjoys her job at Rotary Inn.

The only drawback to living in Wright County, Heiar admitted, is the long drive to Iowa City. Anyone who walks into Heiar's office in City Hall can see he's an avid Iowa Hawkeyes fan. But he said he's still able to make it to Iowa City to see some games each year.

So really, Eagle Grove is the perfect fit for Heiar. "I love my job. I get to do something different every day, and the people are just great."

—Sara Konrad
Staff Writer
Messenger News
Fort Dodge, Iowa

Reprinted with permission from the March 3, 2006, issue of the Messenger News, Fort Dodge, Iowa.

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

DEPARTMENTS

Intern Profile

INTERN PROFILE: DEVON WILLIAMSON AND PALO ALTO'S SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Devon Williamson participated in Palo Alto's internship program.

Palo Alto, California, offers an exciting range of summer internship opportunities to local undergraduate and graduate students. The city's program provides an insider's view into management-level work within local government. During the summer months, interns have the opportunity to work on a significant project, to network with professionals in local government, and to observe firsthand the efforts of the city to resolve complex issues of policy and governance. During the summer of 2006, Devon Williamson participated in the program and worked in the community services department (CSD).

Williamson earned her bachelor's degree in architecture at Yale; her teaching credentials at San Francisco State University; and her master's degree in city planning at the University of California at Berkeley. This fall, she entered Stanford University in pursuit of a doctoral degree in education policy, focusing on the relation between cities and public schools.

During the past five years, Devon has worked with community-based organizations, public schools, and city planners at the local, state, and national levels. Her interests include urban revitalization, youth development, and the impact of housing policy and land use on education reform. Williamson applied to Palo Alto's internship program because she sought more experience in local government, and her projects gave her a window into the intricate map of city services and citizen needs.

Last summer, Devon helped the CSD define its core services. Using staff input, the department's strategic plan, and the California Park and Recreation Society's VIP Action Plan, she developed a set of core criteria to describe services

central to CSD's mission. She also mapped the many services offered by the department and prepared a model for evaluating those services in light of the core criteria.

Finally, Devon worked with the department's administrative team to prepare, distribute, and analyze a survey of the future needs of Palo Alto's aging baby-boomer population. As 30,000 baby boomers approach retirement age, a new era of senior-focused programming is imminent, and CSD is already adapting to the coming change.

Palo Alto's department encompasses five large and diverse divisions: open space, parks and golf, recreation and youth sciences, arts and culture, and human services. CSD has the distinct honor of managing many of the city's unique assets, including the Children's Theatre, the Junior Museum and Zoo, more than 22 acres of open space, the Art Center, and three community centers.

With its mandate to steward the city's environmental resources, enhance community interaction, and provide services to a diverse group of users with special attention to vulnerable populations, the CSD is one of the largest departments within Palo Alto and certainly one of the most vital.

—Khashayar "Cash" Alaee
Summer Internship Coordinator
Palo Alto, California
Khashayar.Alaee@CityofPaloAlto.org

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500

DECEMBER 2006 · VOLUME 88 · NUMBER 11

DEPARTMENTS

Performance Matters

BEGINNING TO DEFINE PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS FOR TRANSPORTATION

Measuring and documenting performance has important implications for sound management decision making and resource allocation. Performance measurements can help managers understand how well a program or system is working and where attention may be needed.

According to Theodore Poister, a professor of public administration at Georgia State University, performance measurements provide a basis for comparison over time that can indicate whether performance has improved, deteriorated, or simply remained static.[1] Although performance measurements do not alone demonstrate whether a program or system is producing the results desired, they can help focus attention on whether progress is being made toward achieving goals and objectives.

The challenge of using performance measurements is selecting appropriate data to collect and measure. Transportation professionals at all levels of government have struggled with this challenge for many years. The Transportation Research Board (TRB) reported: "The current state of the practice includes a wide and varied approach to performance measures, with more than 70 performance measures identified" in a 2003 analysis.[2] A more recent analysis conducted by a subcommittee of the National Transportation Operations Coalition (NTOC) identified nearly 200 unique measures.[3]

At issue is that indicators useful to transportation and civil engineers who build transportation systems are not necessarily meaningful to the driving public. Level of service, for example, is a frequently used indicator that refers to the ability of a transportation facility to serve the driving public and that describes its condition in terms of speed, travel time, reliability, convenience, and safety, among other factors.

While engineers want and need such information for their work, it confuses the traveling public. Another complicating factor is that the working definitions of performance measurements are not consistent or uniform. Travel time indicators can refer to, for example, average travel time, random travel time, travel time predictability, and travel time reliability.

In 2004-2005, a subcommittee of the NTOC was formed to explore and determine appropriate performance measures for transportation operations. NTOC is an alliance of national associations, practitioners, and private sector groups that represents the collective transportation interests of stakeholders at state, local, and regional levels. The NTOC subcommittee comprises representatives from:

- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).
- International City-County Management Association (ICMA).
- Transportation Research Board (TRB).
- Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO).
- American Public Works Association (APWA).
- Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE).

With support from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, the NTOC subcommittee instituted the Performance Measurement Initiative to research and recommend good measures for agencies to use in evaluating the effectiveness of transportation operations. In particular, the team wanted to begin to define a common set of performance measurements that could be used nationally to address three key issues: 1) nonrecurring congestion, 2) recurring congestion, and 3) systemwide performance. The group also hoped to "identify measurements that are useful and meaningful to the traveling public."[4]

Following an extensive review of current literature and a series of meetings, NOTC identified and defined an initial group of commonly acceptable and important measures among a range of jurisdictions and agencies. This set of

measurements was distributed to transportation officials nationally through an electronic survey to help better understand the current use and usefulness of the selected measurements. Based on the survey results, NOTC further refined the list to the recommended set of 12 measurements summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Performance Measurements for Transportation System Management and Operations

Measure	Definition	Sample units of measurement
Customer satisfaction.	A qualitative measure of customers' opinions related to the roadway management and operations services provided in a specified region.	Very satisfied. Somewhat satisfied. Neutral. Somewhat dissatisfied. Very dissatisfied. Don't know/not applicable.
Extent of congestion-spatial.	Miles of roadway within a predefined area and time period for which average travel times are 30 percent longer than unconstrained travel times.	Lane miles of congested conditions or percent of congested roadways. Calculated as a ratio = 100 percent x (congested lane miles)/(total lane miles).
Extent of congestion-temporal.	The time duration during which more than 20 percent of the roadway sections in a predefined area are congested as defined by the "extent of congestion-spatial" performance measure.	Hours of congestion.
Incident duration.	The time elapsed from the notification of an incident until all evidence of the incident has been removed from the incident scene.	Median minutes per incident.
Nonrecurring delay.	Vehicle delays in excess of recurring delay for the current time-of-day, day-of-week, and day-type.	Vehicle-hours.
Recurring delay.	Vehicle delays that are repeatable for the current time-of-day, day-of-week, and day-type.	Vehicle-hours.
Speed.	The average speed of vehicles measured in a single lane, for a single direction of flow, at a specific location on a roadway.	Miles per hour, feet per second, or kilometers per hour.
Throughput-person.	Number of persons including vehicle occupants, pedestrians, and bicyclists traversing a roadway section in one direction per unit time. May also be the number of persons traversing a screen line in one direction per unit time.	Persons per hour.
Throughput-vehicle.	Number of vehicles traversing a roadway section in one direction per unit time. May also be the number of vehicles traversing a screen line in one direction per unit time.	Vehicles per hour.
Travel time-link.	The average time required to traverse a section of roadway in a single direction.	Minutes per trip.
Travel time-reliability (buffer time).	The buffer time is the additional time that must be added to a trip (measured as defined by travel time-trip) to ensure that travelers making the trip will arrive at their destination at, or before, the intended time 95 percent of the time.	Minutes. This measure may also be expressed as a percent of total trip time or as an index.
Travel time-trip.	The average time required to travel from an origin to a destination on a trip that might include multiple modes of travel.	Minutes per trip.

The NTOC subcommittee felt these performance measurements could be used for internal management, external communications, and comparative measurement to identify leading practices that can be shared among transportation professionals.

These measurements do require further testing to evaluate their usefulness, completeness, and accuracy; however, local governments and other transportation officials can use them as a starting point to assess how well their transportation facilities are operating. Continued input from and refinement of the measurements by transportation professionals will help build greater knowledge of which performance measurements work best in real-world scenarios.

More specific information on each of the performance measurements, including definitions and instructions on how to measure the data needed, can be found in the *National Transportation Operations Coalition (NTOC) Performance Measurement Initiative Final Report* available online at www.icma.org.

[1]Theodore H. Poister, *Measuring Performance in Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

[2]Transportation Research Board of the National Academies, *Performance Measures of Operational Effectiveness for Highway Segments and Systems: A Synthesis of Highway Practice*, NCHRP Synthesis 311 (Washington, D.C.: Transportation Research Board, 2003), http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_syn_311.pdf#search=%22NCHRP%20Synthesis%20311%22.

[3]*National Transportation Operations Coalition (NTOC) Performance Measurement Initiative Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: National Transportation Operations Coalition, July 2005).

[4]Ibid.

—Barbara Yuhas
Program Manager
ICMA
Washington, D.C.

(202/289-4262) or e-mail bookstoremanager@icma.org.

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20002-4201 800-745-8780/202-962-3680 fax 202-962-3500