
CHAPTER 12. GOVERNANCE STRATEGY

SERVICE MISSION

Provide an efficient system of city government that is honest, accessible, and inclusive. Ensure Des Moines cooperates with other metropolitan governments for the betterment of the city and the metropolitan area.

There are 10 Governance Strategy goals:

1. Cooperate with metropolitan governments to provide efficient services for the metropolitan community.
2. Demonstrate the city's long-term commitment to housing by cooperating in the development of a regional strategic housing plan in coordination with a citizen task force.
3. Diversify the metropolitan area's revenue base.
4. Work with metropolitan governments to ensure the continued economic health of the metropolitan community.
5. Work with metropolitan governments to ensure the costs and benefits of cultural and tax-exempt properties and that facilities are shared by all residents.
6. Cooperate on regional issues such as transportation, recreational trails, and

growth to benefit all metropolitan cities.

7. Ensure efficiency and economy in providing city services.
8. Continue strategic planning efforts.
9. Expand resident involvement in the decisions that affect the community.
10. Ensure that all citizens receive responsible and respectful treatment in matters of governance from City Government officers, employees and board members, including, but not limited to, providing thorough and complete information, issuing permits, reviewing projects, and inspecting properties.

RESULTS

The questions for this section focused on the accessibility and inclusiveness of Des Moines government to its citizens. To this extent, questions were asked about the city’s policy development, the application of taxes to public services, and an assessment of the means citizens have to learn about city government.

Respondent opinions varied about how often they relied on selected information sources to learn about Des Moines city government (Table 12-1). They most often relied on television (65%) and newspapers (62%) to provide information about city government. Des Moines has one major newspaper, the *Des Moines Register*, and five local television stations: KDSM, WOI, WHO, KCCI, and KDIN.

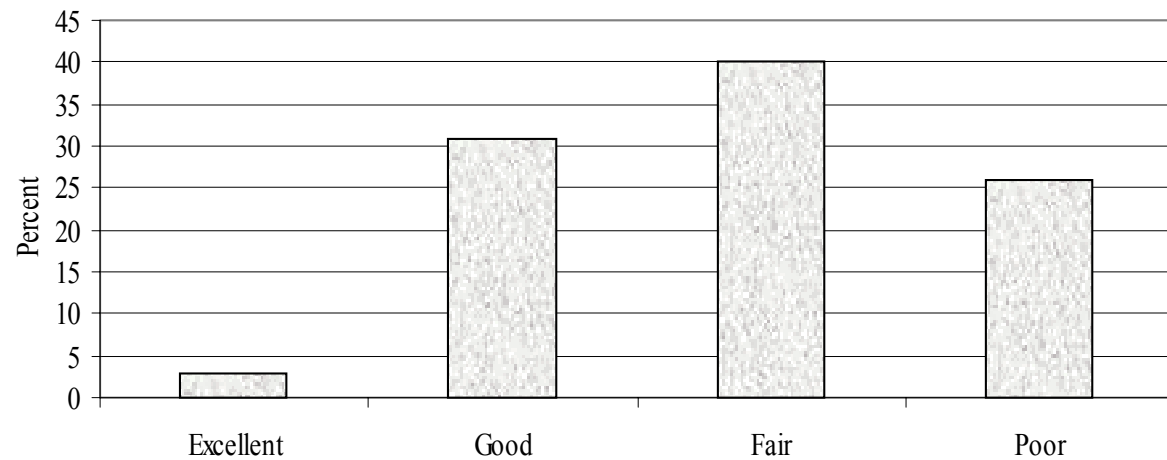
Fewer respondents relied on other information sources, such as from city employees (30%) and elected officials (42%), the Internet (32%) and magazines (27%).

Generally respondents felt that city government provided opportunities to be involved with the formulation and development of public policy (Figure 12-1). The majority thought the opportunities were fair or good.

Table 12-1. Reliance on Sources of Information about City Government

	A Great Deal	Somewhat	Not at All
Television	65	31	4
Newspapers	62	31	7
Radio	30	49	21
Friends, neighbors, or co-workers	17	61	22
Internet/on-line services	7	25	68
City employees	6	24	70
Elected officials	6	36	58
Magazines	4	23	73

Figure 12-1. Opportunities for Citizens to be Involved with Public Policy Development



Several public policy issues were presented to respondents to learn about their perceptions of how serious a problem each one was to the city. As shown in Table 12-2, respondents rated city finances as a serious problem or somewhat of a problem (93%). About one-third of the respondents reported immigration, jobs and the economy, and poverty reduction as serious problems. A large percentage of the respondents also saw these issues as somewhat of a problem.

Several of the issues were noted as “somewhat of a problem,” including crime

and public safety, transportation and traffic congestion, population growth and development, housing cost and availability, and weatherization for low-income persons. Interestingly, three of four respondents indicated that neither the supply of electrical power nor heating fuel was a problem.

Table 12-2. Policy Issue Concerns

	A Serious Problem	Somewhat of a Problem	Not a Problem
City finances	44	49	7
Immigration	35	39	26
Jobs and the economy	34	54	12
Poverty reduction	32	54	14
Population growth and development	26	55	20
Housing cost and availability	25	49	26
Weatherization for low-income persons	24	47	29
Transportation and traffic congestion	23	62	15
Crime and public safety	20	62	18
Supply of heating fuel	7	20	73
Supply of electrical power	6	19	75

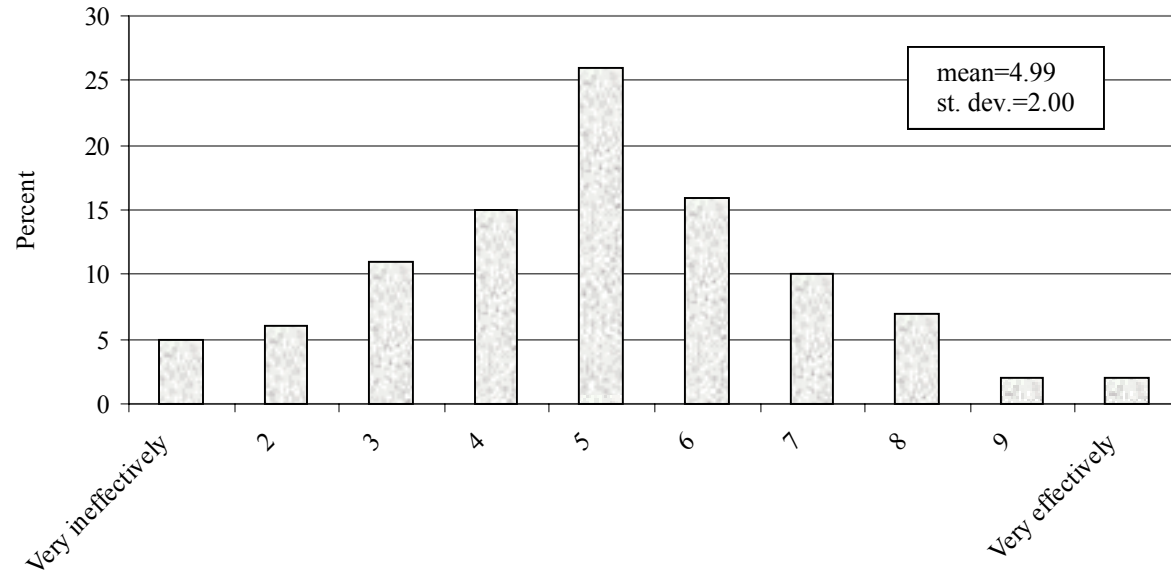
A large percentage of the respondents (70%) noted that city government leaders pay attention to what city residents think (Table 12-3). About one-third (31%) felt that leaders paid no attention to citizen input.

On average, respondents felt that the city was applying their tax dollars to services and programs effectively (Figure 12-2).

Table 12-3. Attention Given to Citizens by Government Leaders Regarding Policy Adoption

	Percent
A lot of attention	7
Some attention	63
No attention	31

Figure 12-2. Government Effectiveness of Tax Money Distribution for Services and Programs



COMMENTS

One-hundred-twenty-nine comments related to governance were received (Table 12-4). Many of the comments (48) were from respondents calling for the city’s leaders to include them, or citizens in general, in planning, policy development, and any other aspect of the city’s development. Comments included, “Respect the input and opinions of the citizens.” “Give citizens a chance to vote on big improvements.” “The city government just needs to talk and listen to

the people in the neighborhood.” The comment that “What good would it do to answer because the government does what it wants to do?” epitomizes the more serious and frustrated comments from citizens who feel that the city pays little or no attention to their input.

There were 27 comments about government and city officials. Although most of the comments called for a more honest, ethical, and responsible

Table 12-4. Governance Strategy Comment Categories

	N	Examples
Citizens	48	Listen to; empower; include; respond to; respect
Communication	12	More information on city services; accept email; return calls; more information on city meetings
City/suburb	4	Resolve tax and cost inequities
City council	7	Communicate with citizens; have neutral members; doing a bad job
Government/city officials	27	More honest, accountable, ethical; more responsible; too much government; weak government; remove officials
Leaders/leadership	17	Do a better job; be more fearless; be more responsible; don't listen to splinter groups
Other comments	15	Expand revenue base; DSM partnership ineffective; need Eastside leadership

government, a few participants were happy with the way the city is currently governed. The few comments received about the city council (7) asked that council members pay attention to their individual wards and act in a more effective way.

The comments about Des Moines' leaders and the city's leadership mostly asked that the leaders be more careful and responsible about how the city's revenue is expended. These participants also asked that the city's leaders pay more attention to the concerns

and needs of the general citizenry rather than listening to special interest groups.

Citizens want to be included and want to be involved in making budget decisions, particularly on big-ticket items such as the Events Center. Citizens want leaders with vision and a leadership with strong communication skills who will listen and take seriously the concerns and needs of the people.