
INTRODUCTION

The City of Des Moines is in the process of a multi-year performance measurement program. This program was designed to gauge citizen expectations and satisfaction with governmental services. There are four components to the program:

1. Departmental Performance Measures
2. Enrollment in the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Center for Performance Measurement
3. Conducting a City-Wide Citizen Satisfaction Survey
4. Involvement in Iowa's citizen-initiated performance assessment (CIPA) project sponsored by the Sloan Foundation.

Departmental Performance Measures are determined by each of the departments, who select and track measures they identify as the most important to the success of their department. The ICMA provides a way for local governments to share data about their departments and programs, benchmark their work compared to similar jurisdictions, and, as a consequence, improve service delivery through the application of best management practices and efficient use of resources. The

fourth component, CIPA, will help the city establish performance measures that are developed and agreed upon by Des Moines citizenry, elected officials, and city staff. These measures will be developed for specific service areas.

The third component, the City-Wide Citizen Satisfaction Survey, is the subject of this report. The City of Des Moines entered into an agreement with Iowa State University's Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE) in 2001 to develop a City-Wide Citizen Satisfaction Survey based on the city's Strategic Plan, *Today and Tomorrow, 1995 and Beyond* (updated in 1998). This survey was developed to reflect the priorities of the Strategic Plan and to measure the expectations and satisfaction of citizens with Des Moines government services.

The rest of this Introduction describes the city's Strategic Plan, the report's methodology, scope, and limitations, and provides a summary profile of the surveyed respondents. Chapters 1 through 12 provide the city's priorities according to the Strategic Plan Issue Areas and survey results for each Issue Area. The Issue

DES MOINES STRATEGIC PLAN

Areas are—Financial Strategy; Economic Development; Growth Strategy; Infrastructure Strategy; Public Safety Strategy; Neighborhood Revitalization; Housing Strategy; Downtown Strategy; Education Strategy; Parks, Recreation, and Culture; Transportation Strategy; and Governance Strategy.

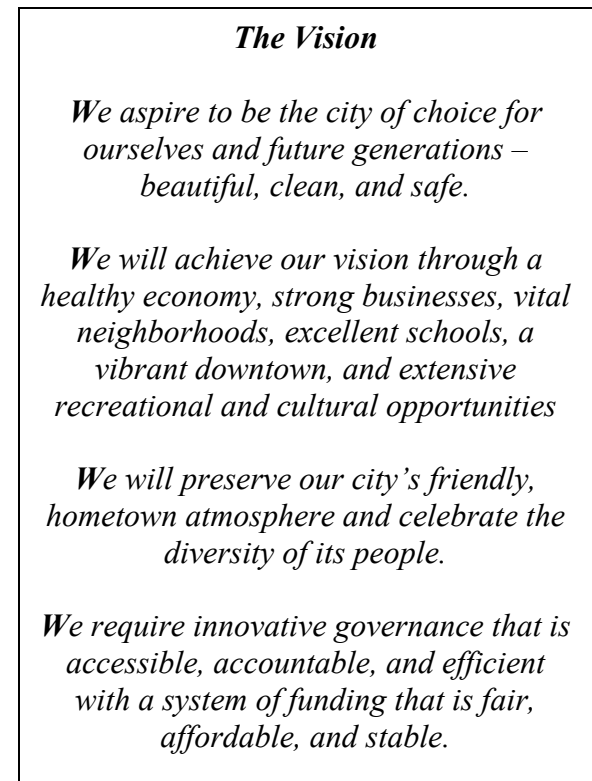
Two appendices are also included. The first details the methodology of the survey and contains a copy of each of the three surveys. The second appendix provides a more complete profile of survey respondents. A second volume details the survey items by selected demographic designations. These are listed as Appendices C-O.

In 1995, the City of Des Moines published *Today and Tomorrow, 1995 and Beyond*. This document outlines the Citywide Strategic Plan designed to provide direction for Des Moines' present and future growth. The Plan, which is inclusive in scope and broad in geography, also serves to provide guidance to the City Council, City Boards and Commissions, and City staff in decisions affecting citizens, the City, and Des Moines city finances. Finally, the Plan is a policy document that reflects the recommendations of the Citywide Strategic

Planning Committee—a Committee representing a wide variety of public interests whose common goal is to protect, preserve, and promote Des Moines as a viable, livable, and economically successful city for its residents.

The Strategic Planning Committee penned the *Vision Statement* as shown in Figure I-1. To carry out the goals of the *Vision* the Committee organized their work into 12

Figure I-1. Des Moines Vision Statement



Issue Areas, each holding its own vision, goals, and action plans. No Issue Area exists in isolation, and overlap between issue areas does occur; the intent of which is to emphasize an action's importance to an Issue Area's overall strategy.

Each Issue Area is described in fairly broad terms, as many of the goals and strategic actions reflect ideas that are far-reaching. For example, there is no specific Issue Area on diversity. The *Vision Statement*, however, does refer to celebrating the diversity of its citizens as one of its values. As such, the value is included in all the strategic actions. Following is an outline of the basic content of each issue area.

In 1998, the Strategic Planning Commission updated the Strategic Plan. The organization of goals and strategic actions into the Issue Areas followed the original *Today and Tomorrow, 1995 and Beyond* plan. Generally, the 1998 updates expanded the role of government in such a way as to improve communication with citizens and improve the quality of life within Des Moines. The questions posed in this survey reflect the 1998 Plan update. Following are brief descriptions of each Issue Area. Specific goals and strategies for each are provided in relevant chapters.

Financial Strategy. The overall goal of the Issue Area is to diversify the city's revenue base. The Committee examined a large number of funding options and limited its recommendations to those having the best chance of success, emphasizing that many of the options are long-term.

Economic Development. To promote and move toward greater economic viability, the Committee recommended a proactive approach to sustain a healthy economy, promote entrepreneurial enterprises, cultivate sustainable growth, and increase employment opportunities.

Growth Strategy. The intent of this Issue Area is to promote balanced growth and to expand the City's tax base within city boundaries and through annexation.

Infrastructure Strategy. The Citywide Committee generally defined infrastructure as the streets, curbs, sidewalks, sewers, bridges, and city-owned buildings in Des Moines. Maintaining and/or improving upon the infrastructure to protect the city's substantial investment is anticipated to promote new growth in residential, commercial, and industrial areas.

Public Safety Strategy. The overall intent of this Issue Area is to provide high-quality police and fire protection throughout the city. Strengthening existing community partnerships and establishing new community partnerships to lessen crime and violence were listed as key goals.

Neighborhood Revitalization. For this Issue Area, the Committee searched for a balanced approach that not only emphasized the importance of revitalizing the downtown, but also stressed that the neighborhood revitalization effort be continued and expanded.

Housing Strategy. The two key aspects of housing are, first, to preserve and improve the city's supply of existing housing that is in reasonable shape, and second, to encourage high-quality new housing developments with competitive market appeal.

Downtown Strategy. The intent of this Issue Area is to develop the downtown as the world business center of choice through commerce, culture, and community.

Education Strategy. Goals identified seek to strengthen and promote the excellence of all the city's educational institutions through coordinated efforts with the

existing school system at all levels. Also included is the importance of recognizing the Des Moines Public Library System as the primary life-long learning institution and information resource for the community.

Parks, Recreation, and Culture. The Citywide Committee developed their recommendations in light of the 1995 Park and Open Space Comprehensive Master Plan, *Parklands: A Celebration of Des Moines' Community Spirit*. By doing so, the Committee focused more on the need for volunteerism in the upkeep and maintenance of parks, cooperative ventures, and infrastructure maintenance/improvement.

Transportation Strategy. The importance of transportation cannot be understated. Committee members noted that key to success is the development of a comprehensive highway system, exploring alternative transportation, and improving public transit. Also of importance was paving unpaved streets, helping to support air transit, and the construction of a citywide bicycle system.

Governance Strategy. The Citywide Committee stated their desire for an honest, ethical, and efficient government that

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

includes public leaders as well as city employees. Some of the ways to achieve honesty in governance included better education to the public about city issues and showing an honest effort in long-term commitments to concerns such as low-income housing, employment, and funding for public schools.

The City of Des Moines staff and the Polk County Assessor's office provided much of the background information needed to develop the survey instrument. In addition, city staff provided input and guidance to RISE during the development of the survey. The city was instrumental in the delivery of the survey to its citizens and of the completed surveys to RISE.

After much discussion, it was concluded that a mail survey was the best and most efficient and economical way to obtain the information requested by the city. In addition to the questions, space was provided for respondent comments.

The survey was designed specifically to solicit a sufficient amount of measurable information to assess city services in each of the 12 Issue Areas. As a result, 264 question-entries along with an open-ended question at the end were developed. Three survey instruments were developed, each

containing a set of questions about four of the 12 Issue Areas along with common demographic questions. Each survey was color-coded according to the Issue Areas and identified with a code number linking it to each of the four Wards. This made it possible to obtain a good sampling about each Issue Area from all four of the Wards, with a margin of error of ± 2 or 3 percentage points for the demographic data and ± 4 percentage points for each of the Issue Area questions.

Survey participants were randomly selected using a stratified random sampling procedure (stratified by Ward, Figure I-2). This methodology resulted in the selection of 5,986 potential survey respondents, which equated to the selection of a sample of just under 1,500 potential respondents per Ward. The surveys were mailed to the sample in June of 2002. Adjusting for the non-deliverables (wrong address, person deceased, or moved), the total number of potential respondents was 5,866. Of the 5,866 surveys, 1,782 were returned, resulting in an overall 30 percent return rate.

Figure I-2. Des Moines Wards

Although the 30 percent return rate may seem rather low, the *number* of returns (1,782) resulted in a survey sample with a small margin of error (± 2 -3 percentage points) of matching responses that would have been obtained if all of the city's adult population were surveyed.¹ Sampling theory demonstrates that to attain a margin of error of no more than ± 3 percentage points, with 95 percent confidence, the sample must include at least 1,068 cases.² It should be noted that the ± 3 percentage point margin of error pertains specifically to the demographic profile of the respondents. Each issue area received enough completed surveys for a margin of error of approximately ± 4 percentage points.

Appendix A contains the explanation of the survey methodology.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE REPORT

This report provides the survey results of information collected from Des Moines city residents on city service delivery and effectiveness in connection with the 12 Issue Areas described in the *Des Moines Citywide Strategic Plan*, as described in the previous section. This report does not include information on all the activities and important programs of the City. Nor does it include information on the budget for each of the 12 Issue Areas. For example, general government services and administration, such as purchasing, personnel, and budgeting and finance, are not included. This information may be included in future years to establish spending trends.

While the report may offer insights on service results, it does not thoroughly analyze the causes of either negative or positive results. Some deviation can be explained simply, and in those cases, the deviations are explained. For those results that cannot be explained easily, it may be necessary to explore more detailed analysis for more accurate results. This report may help focus future analysis and research on the more serious performance concerns.

Nearly all of the survey questions carried a “Don’t know” option for respondents to mark if they were unsure or didn’t know about a service. Throughout most of this

report, this option has not been reported, as it was relatively small, (under 20 percentage points) and did not seem to mask identified trends and responses. The “Don’t know” responses, by number and/or percent, are reported when they exceed 20 percent or more. The importance of the “Don’t know” responses is that it can become difficult to make or draw an accurate conclusion about the results, as there just isn’t enough information to rely on. If anything, the information suggests the need to explore the topic more deeply. For more detail about the number and percentages of the “Don’t Know” responses for all surveyed questions, please refer to Appendices C-O.

Finally, each chapter of this report presents the opinions and comments of Des Moines citizens on the quality of services they pay for and receive. For some services, public opinion is a good indicator of quality and the impact the service is having on the city. For other services, public opinion provides only a general measure of effectiveness. In this report, we provide the measurable indicators of services and incorporate citizen comments for each issue. Although these comments are not measurable, they do provide good insight into resident expectations of, and satisfaction with, the city’s services.

The comments received from this survey are used to understand better what's important to the respondent, what's been left out or not addressed in the survey, or to bring a heightened awareness to a topic that may have been otherwise unknown, looked over, or not yet perceived as important to public officials. The comments do not substitute for any part of the survey and are not subject to any statistical analysis; rather they are presented to show interests and concerns of the respondents.

PROFILE

Overall, the respondents are a select group that in several respects does not typify the general adult population when compared to the 2000 census figures for Des Moines.² The respondents tended to be male, married, homeowners, older (45 years or more), and better educated (4-year college degree or more) than the general city population. However, the household income levels of the respondents were very close to those reported in the census.

Generally, respondents were from a two-income family and have lived in Des Moines for 20 years or more (this includes people who have lived in Des Moines all their lives). They also appear to be fairly well settled in Des Moines, as most respondents (63%) plan on staying in the city for 10 years or more. Respondents live

in Des Moines chiefly because of employment, but, just as important, they are here because of family and friends or just have been in Des Moines all their lives.

It is important to keep this respondent profile in mind when reading the report, as the responses depend on who's completing the survey. For example, in the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Chapter, very few residents reported that they were familiar enough to evaluate overall conditions of Des Moines' basketball and tennis courts and ball fields. Although this may be because these are not popular sports, it is more probable that these high-impact sports may be too demanding on the older bodies that typify survey respondents, and thus other means of recreation will tend to be used (i.e., walking, walking trails). A more detailed account of the respondents is provided in Appendix A.

¹Adult population for this survey includes those individuals who are 18 years and older. The 2000 Census for Des Moines identified 149,354 adults: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1(SF-1) 100-Percent Data. *Des Moines, Iowa*

²Dillman, Don A. 2000. *Mail and Internet Surveys—The Tailored Design Method*, 2nd edition. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.