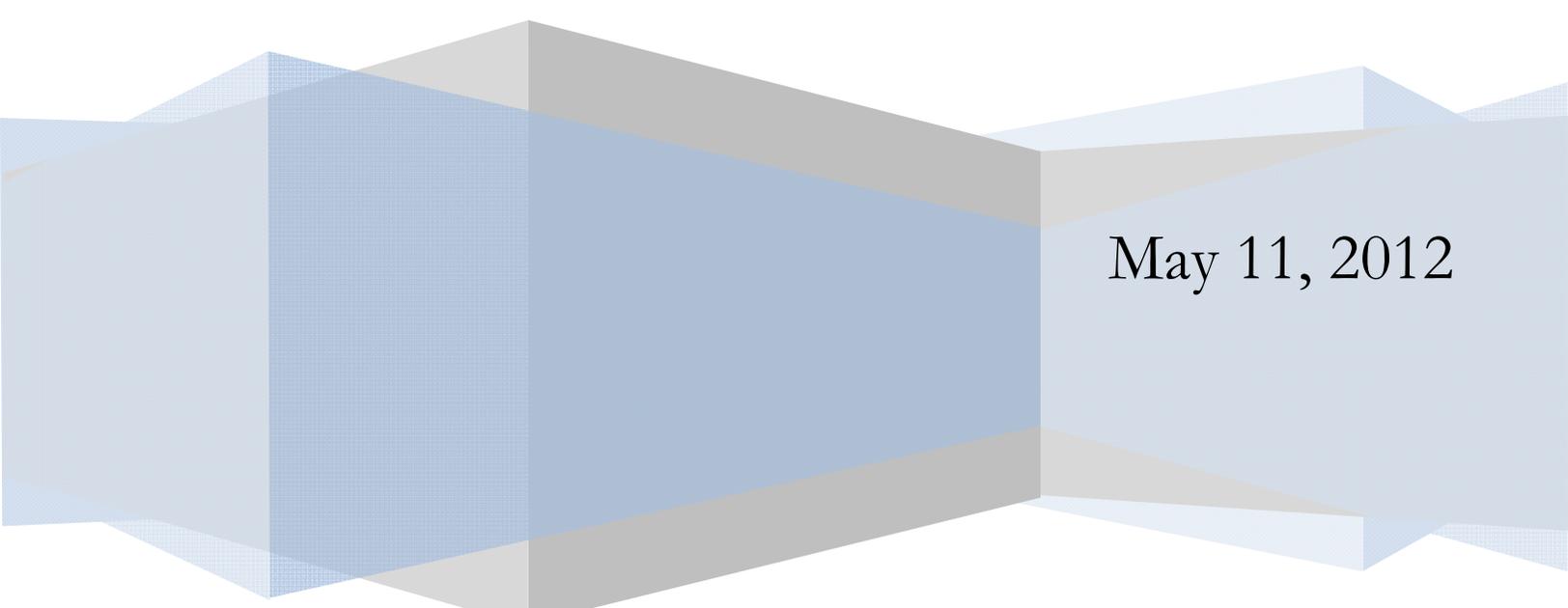


University of Kansas

Citizen Engagement

Analysis of Johnson County Budget Simulator

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Executive Summary

Johnson County, Kansas, engaged citizens by developing a budget simulator in development of the 2013 budget. The purpose of this report was to use academic literature to situate using a budget simulator to uncover citizen preference, and analyze Johnson County's initial budget simulator design and execution. We found that Johnson County made substantial strides in improving citizen participation and developed key recommendations to help refine Johnson County's admirable goal to use a budget simulator to engage citizens.

Johnson County's fiscal condition was found to be strong, but with potential to increase net unrestricted assets. However, in the face of a slow national economic recovery, and continuing financial constraints, Johnson County needed to make significant budget cuts and reorganize departments in order to balance the budget. The County decided to engage citizens early on in the budget process to find out their preferences for service delivery.

There are many avenues for citizen participation, each with unique advantages and disadvantages. Public hearings are typically found in the budgeting process, but are often conducted too late for citizen input to directly impact budgetary decisions. Research has shown the importance of both casting a wide net to capture diverse preferences and establishing the need for building two-way communication between citizens and local government. Preparation for citizen engagement includes three components:

- Setting goals and expectations,
- Strategically selecting the method of participation, and
- Understanding the conflicting contexts of citizen engagement.

Johnson County Commissioners established a committee to guide citizen engagement, and staff contracting with Consensus KC to tap local expertise. In addition to the budget simulator, Johnson

County also held focus groups in order to get citizen feedback and support their effort to elicit citizen preference on specific service levels and priorities.

Citizen engagement can be evaluated according to six criteria established by Ebdon and Franklin (2004). We found that Johnson County did well to solicit representative input by establishing focus groups in each council district and targeting the youth perspective. However, the data resulting from the budget simulator was not representative of the socio-economic distribution of Johnson County. By using

Evaluation Criteria for Citizen Engagement (Ebdon & Franklin 2004)

- Input is representative of the community
- Opportunity is available for large numbers of citizens to participate
- Input occurs early in the process
- Sincere preference / willingness revealed
- Participation includes two-way communication between public and government officials
- Input is considered in decisions

the internet to disseminate the budget simulator, Johnson County provided an opportunity for a large number of citizens to participate. By conducting focus groups early in the process, results were presented at the final budget retreat to inform decision making; however if the process began earlier the focus groups could inform the budget simulator process. Eliciting sincere preferences and willingness to pay is at the core of engaging citizens, and Johnson County should consider updating the budget simulator by adding a clear option to raise taxes to pay for city services. Tapping social media and developing a dedicated website can help Johnson County build on the foundation of two-way communication established with the budget simulator. Finally, Johnson County should clearly tie the fruits of citizen engagement with budgetary decisions.

The data from Johnson County’s budget simulator was not representative of the population found in the United States Census. Citizens with a household income under \$50,000 per year were

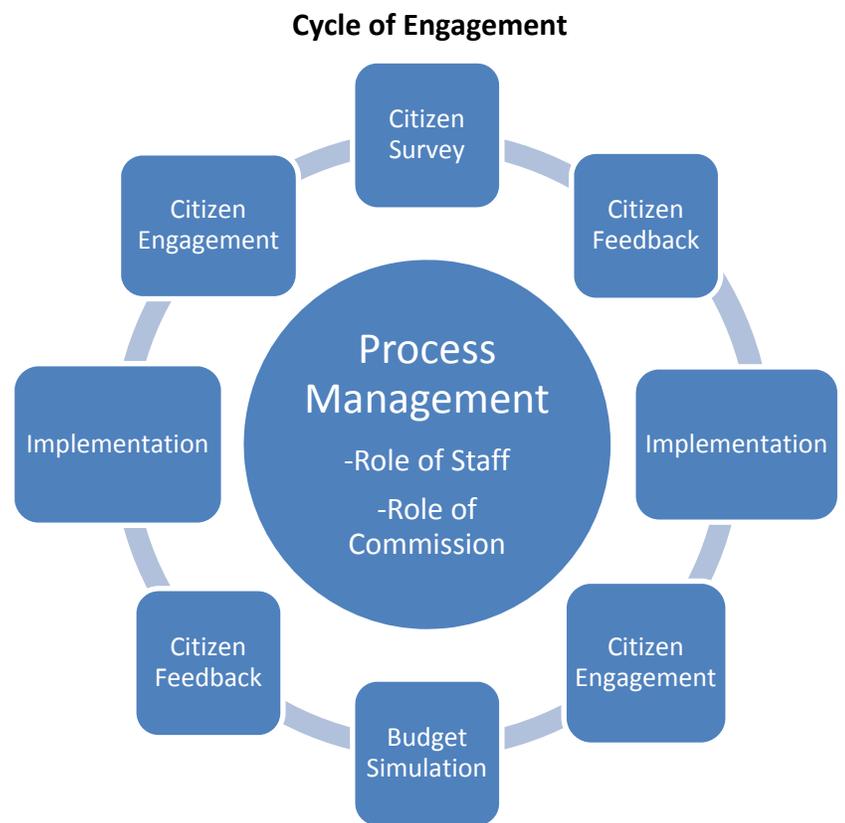
underrepresented in the sample while citizens with a household income over \$50,000 per year were overrepresented. Post-stratification weighting was conducted to improve the validity of the data. Citizens seemed most willing to cut general government services and most willing to maintain health and human services.

In conclusion, Johnson County has an opportunity to build upon initial success of the budget simulator. We recommend that Johnson County create a cycle of citizen engagement, create a pre- and post-marketing and communication plan, and create a sampling plan.

Citizen engagement should be a cyclical process and the County’s citizen engagement efforts should be integrated into a cycle of engagement as it is possible. The County can use smaller-scale citizen participation methods such as focus groups to provide feedback on new citizen engagement tools before they are launched to the public.

The marketing and communication plan should include a diverse basket of opportunities focused on the correct audience. The plan should consider communicating how citizen input will be integrated into the decision-making process and should emphasize two-way communication.

Because the simulator did not obtain a representative sample, a sampling plan might help guide Johnson County to capture more low-income and minority responses to ensure a more representative survey.



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Literature Review/Key Recommendations

I. Introduction

The Johnson County Budget Simulator focuses on specific services the County provides, and citizens' interest in maintaining and cutting certain programs. As with most local governments, Johnson County has experienced a significant decline in revenue (maps.jocogov.org/budgetsurvey, 2012) and cannot sustain all of the public programs citizens have enjoyed in years past. In 2012, the county created a budget simulator to weigh citizen preferences on the level of public services they prefer. A citizen could go to the county website to rate different services and their importance.

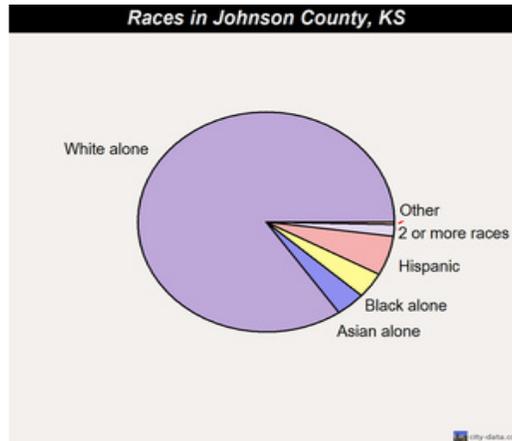
According to a February 2012 press release by Johnson County the goals of the budget simulator were “to seek increased community feedback in the budget process, foster an ongoing dialogue with the community regarding public services, and develop an informative, reliable process for the Board of County Commissioners to use for county service prioritization and budgetary decision-making that hits warp speed from June to August.” (maps.jocogov.org/budgetsurvey, 2012)

Overview of Johnson County

Demographics

The racial distribution of Johnson County (Figure 1) is largely homogeneous. Nearly 85 percent of Johnson County citizens identify as non-Hispanic White. The next largest race is Hispanic or Latino, comprising nearly six percent of the county's population. About 73 percent of Johnson County households earned more than \$50,000 in 2010. The median age for Johnson County is 35.2 years, mirroring that of the state of Kansas. The following figures represent Johnson County's 2010 Census information which depicts the County's demographics relating to race, gender, and median age (2010 Johnson County Census).

Figure 1: Johnson County Racial Demographics



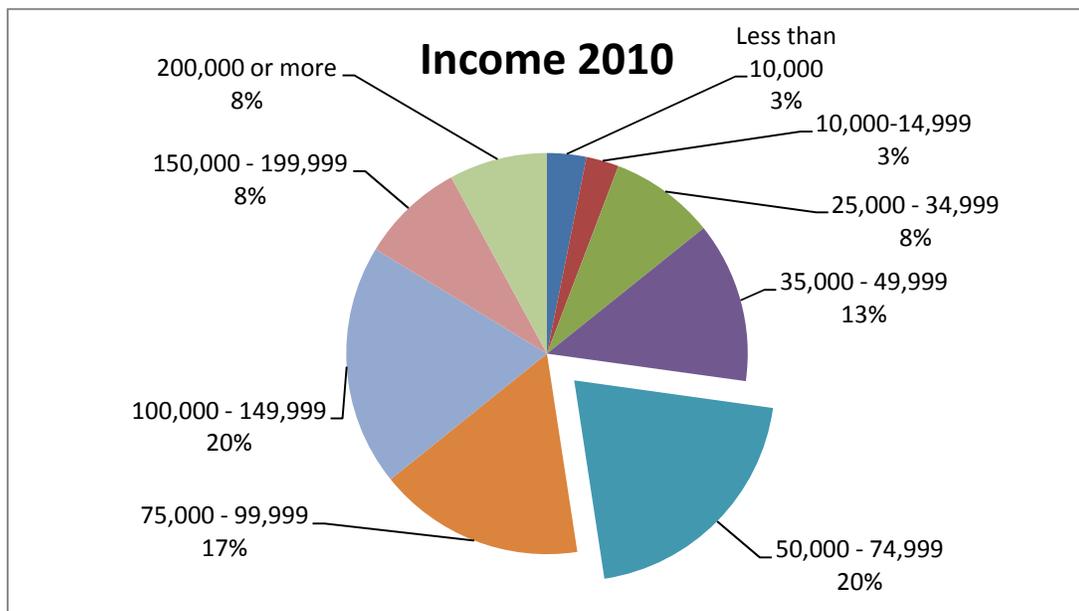
Races in Johnson County, Kansas:

- White Non-Hispanic Alone (84.6%)
- Hispanic or Latino (5.8%)
- Black Non-Hispanic Alone (3.8%)
- Asian alone (3.7%)
- Two or more races (1.7%)

Median resident age: 35.2 years
 Kansas median age: 35.2 years

Males: 220,329 (48.8%)
 Females: 230,757 (51.2%)

Figure 2: Average Income Range for Johnson County



Financial Condition

Using the financial statement information provided in the 2010 comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) our analysis showed a positive overall financial condition of Johnson County. Cash solvency, long-run solvency and budgetary solvency are satisfactory; however, unrestricted net assets could be improved. Of the available (unrestricted) net assets, the County has \$280.35 to spend per person to maintain service levels.

The county should pay close attention to unrestricted net assets. The county should consider ways to increase the amount of unrestricted net assets. The unrestricted net asset ratio was 0.26 in 2010, when it should be closer to 0.50.

Table 1: Financial Conditions

Level of Solvency (Ability to Pay)	Ratio	Calculated Ratio – 2010 Governmental Activities	Satisfactory Level
Cash Solvency	Quick Ratio	1.85	Good
	Budgetary Own-source Revenue	0.87	Good (>0.80)
Long-run Solvency	Net Asset Ratio	0.62	Fair
	Unrestricted Net Asset Ratio	0.26	Poor
	Long-Term Debt Ratio	0.06	Good
Service Solvency	Net Assets per Capita	\$671.90	Fair
	Unrestricted net assets per capita	\$280.35	Poor
	Long-Term Debt per capita		Good
		\$65.00	

The County faced a number of challenges due to the recent economic downturn. According to the 2010 Johnson County CAFR, the tax base decreased and the state reduced funding. The real estate market negatively impacted assessed valuation. Projections indicated that the fund balance may need to be reduced to the required minimum levels and the service delivery and staffing levels could be impacted further.

II. Purpose for Citizen Engagement in the Budgeting Process

Over the last twenty years, researchers have increasingly focused on ways to improve efficiency and accountability in the local government budget process. One strand of research has focused on citizen participation and engagement. The recent economic recession caused budgetary constraints at all levels of government. With the hard-hit housing market, local governments—who depend on property taxes and intergovernmental transfers—are increasingly in the position of trying to find compromises between citizen expectations and citizen’s willingness to pay for service delivery. It is these recent economic constraints that have served to bring additional relevancy to local government budgeting research.

The beginning of academic theory of citizen participation is largely credited to Arnstein (1969), who developed a ladder approach to participation. Moving upward, each rung represented a step toward greater citizen empowerment, and each step down toward government controlled, or government manipulated participation. Regardless of the method used to illustrate participation, researchers agree that the various methods utilized for participation do fall along a continuum from less to more participation.

Typical of public administration, research into the theory of citizen involvement and application of effective methods is complicated, facing constraints such as information asymmetry, politics, citizen perceptions of the process or of elected officials and vice versa, and available

In engaging citizens in the budget process, government attempts to improve communication and move past breakdowns caused by free ridership and discontinuity between the service levels citizens’ demand and what citizens are willing to pay for those services.

data for quantitative research. Budgeting is a complex negotiation of technical information and democratic values. Within the budgeting negotiation lies the “murky space between normative political theory and praxis” (Rossman and Shanahan, 56). In engaging citizens in the budget process,

government attempts to improve communication and move past breakdowns caused by free ridership and discontinuity between the service levels that citizens demand and what citizens are willing to pay for those services.

Methods of Participation and Engagement

Most states require local governments to hold a public hearing at the time of adoption of the annual budget, or seek public input when raising taxes. However, according to previous research, participation can be constrained when local governments focus on minimum requirements (Ebdon and Franklin 2006). While public hearings are required by law in most states, they often occur late in the budget cycle after all major decisions have already been made and the opportunity to affect change by citizens is dramatically diminished. Additionally, it is not representative, because typically the citizens that attend a public hearing are there for a single issue. Public hearings are also one-way communication devices. Other methods similar to the public hearing are voting, town hall meetings and non-representative surveying.

Focus groups, citizen advisory committees, and consultations with advocates are methods that are more conducive to two-way communication, but still lack elements of representation. Focus groups lack sampling accountability. Bringing in major stakeholders is an important piece of citizen engagement; however, ensuring its representativeness of the community is important. Only meeting with certain factions undermines the tenants of openness and transparency. However, these types of activities do allow for improved education and interaction with citizens.

Methods such as simple polls and surveys or focus groups with probability sampling provide a better representation of the citizens but less two-way or interactive communication. Polls can only provide answers to a predetermined set of questions. Polls do not always capture how strongly a person feels. Focus groups are difficult to manage when the topic is broad, therefore citizens'

feelings toward service prioritization or interconnectedness between issues is often underrepresented.

The methods that provide good two-way information exchange and are representative have been improved with technological advances to allow for interactive surveys. Interactive surveys, such as representative table-top simulations, allow citizens to view how their stated preference or indifference toward one service affects the preference or prioritization of another service. However, equal representation or equal access can be both an advantage and a constraint when relying on technology. Participation rates can be negatively affected when participation is required over time, thus limiting governments from utilizing these types of activities. These constraints are an excellent example of how public administration theory of best practice can clash with how that theory is applied or perceived by practitioners.

As demonstrated above, balancing the ideal engagement activity with what can be feasibly implemented can be difficult for public administrators. Community demographics, political constraints, citizen's perception of the budget process and their government, time constraints and available staff resources are factors that contribute to the lack of institutionalization observed by researchers, and must be considered by public administrators in guiding local government efforts for increased participation.

Previous Research

Research to date has largely focused on the participation and engagement in the operating budget by utilizing case studies, small limited samples, interviews of key personnel, or targeted questions derived from a broader survey (Ebdon & Franklin 2006). These methods

Preparing for Citizen Engagement

- **set expectations and goals of participation**
- **strategically select the engagement method(s)**
- **understand the multiple and sometimes competing contexts in which citizen engagement takes place**

provide a descriptive background and have allowed researchers to develop a structure for understanding the types of citizen participation and engagement exercises cities have used, as well as barriers to participation. Gaps in the research remain, although not the fault of researchers. Whether cities rely on only one method of participation at a time, or several methods simultaneously, rarely are the methods institutionalized—that is they are not used year after year to allow for longitudinal studies of effectiveness (Ebdon and Franklin 2006). Research has worked to establish criteria for public engagement in the budgeting process that will be conducive to institutionalizing this input. Following Ebdon and Franklin (2004), participation should occur at a time in the budget process when it may still be considered in decisions. Input should be representative of the citizenship and there should be numerous opportunities for participation. Deciphering sincere citizen preferences as well as willingness to pay for services is difficult and requires strong effort by city management. Communication in citizen engagement should be two-way when possible. Lastly, citizen input should be considered in decisions and the community should be informed about how citizen preferences are integrated into the budget process (Ebdon and Franklin 2004).

Cities should clearly define expectations and goals of participation in preparation for engaging the public. Furthermore, cities should strategically select the engagement method(s), and should understand the multiple and sometimes competing contexts in which citizen engagement takes place. Contexts to consider include political contexts, environmental factors and citizen or elected official biases (Ebdon and Franklin 2004). Often cities are not clear from the beginning about the purpose or goals of participation. While researchers can draw conclusions of how citizen participation affects the budget they cannot definitively measure how well goals were reached or the effects of certain methods of participation or understand what structurally or environmentally leads a government to adopt a particular method of participation (Lu 2011; Ebdon & Franklin 2004; Ebdon & Franklin 2006).

Failure to define the goals of citizen engagement and to clarify the expected use of citizen input along with the variations of engagement methods, communications, and contexts restricts researchers' ability to evaluate and analyze citizen participation in public budgeting. Given these constraints on researchers, many different theoretically based perspectives have been used to evaluate citizen involvement in the budget process such as public values, ethics, positivism, decision-making, equity, efficiency, and so forth. Each theoretical basis uses their own lens to examine how culture of the community, political culture and political environment, government structure, e-governance utilization, method evaluation and allocation outcomes contribute to the likelihood and types of citizen participation cities engage in.

Even with these varying perspectives, when piecing together the different research strands there are a few key concepts researchers agree on that provide the foundation for future research:

- **Form of government matters** – Nalbandian (1999) and Ebdon (2002) demonstrate that under the council-manager form, cities are more likely to use citizen participation or engagement. Most council-manager forms elect the city council by district rather than at large to ensure equity of representation, which can cause divisions between council members. Councils can, in turn, be more likely to engage citizens to resolve ideological differences.
- **Timing matters** – King, Feltey and Susel (1998) demonstrate that the longer a government waits to include citizens in the budget process, the more likely citizen input will not be meaningful to the outcomes of the process. Edelenbos & Klijn (2005) also iterate the importance of managing interactions of citizens in the decision making process.
- **Representation matters** – Lu (2011) shows that not only does timing need to be considered, but there needs to be a strategy for engagement to ensure all stakeholders are

represented. Ho (2002) and Robbins, Simonsen and Feldman (2008) discuss the use of e-governance tools such as website utilization and online surveys to add dimensions of accessibility and lower costs to governments. However, while technology is becoming more and more accessible, only utilizing web-based techniques can be prohibitive to certain socio-economic and ethnic groups, and requires staff dedication of time and resources so that information is managed and updated in a timely manner.

- **Types of engagement matter** – Beginning with Arnstein in 1969 there has been an understanding that not all participation is created equal. There is a continuum that occurs

Keys to Citizen Engagement

- ***Form of government***
- ***Timing***
- ***Representation***
- ***Types of Engagement***
- ***Process Management***

with the different methods ranging from one-way communication to two-way or interactive communication. Even along this continuum though, the various methods used will garner different results based on the context in which they are used, and not every method will work the

same for every government. Environment, organizational structure, citizen representation all can affect the results of a method (Kelleher and Lowery 2004). Therefore, as with timing and representation, governments need to have a plan in place before implementation (Ebdon & Franklin 2004, 2006, Edelenbos and Klijn 2005, Lu 2011). Also, the engagement needs to seem genuine, transparent and accessible (Rossman and Shanahan 2012).

- **Process Management matters** - According to Edelenbos and Klijn (2005) in six case studies of citizen participation, process management emerged “as the most important

condition for good and satisfactory outcomes.” Regardless of the other factors outlined above, process management was the variable most correlated with positive outcomes.

Feeding in to the five key matters above, Ebdon and Franklin focused on four key elements in citizen participation in budgeting and their potential variables of impact: environment, process design, mechanisms, and goals and outcomes.

Budget Simulation and Citizen Preference

Goals of using budget simulations to reveal citizen preferences are twofold. First, the structure of the budget simulator allows for the government to educate the citizen by illustrating actual constraints, and thereby increasing citizen trust in the government (Ebdon & Franklin 2004). Second, a budget simulator uncovers specific information about citizen preferences in administering local services.

Some local government services are public or quasi-public goods—and as such are unlikely to be profitable—but generate desirable externalities. Non-monetary externalities, such as clean air, create difficulties in determining an appropriate level of local government spending for services. Citizens’ willingness to pay for services is a monetary measure for services with non-monetary value. Soliciting citizens’ willingness to pay for services provides budgetary decision-makers a measure of priorities and values to use in aligning budgets with citizen preference.

Incorporating citizens’ willingness to pay for services into budget simulation can draw upon contingent valuation survey techniques. Contingent valuation techniques were established in the early 1960s and further developed through funding by the United

Soliciting citizens’ willingness to pay for services provides budgetary decision-makers a measure of priorities and values to use in aligning budgets with citizen preference.

States Environmental Protection Agency in the 1970s (Mitchell & Carson 1989). The objective of

contingent valuation techniques is to “obtain the respondents’ consumer surplus for the amenity—the maximum amount the good is worth to the respondent before he would prefer to go without it (Mitchell & Carson 1989).”

When faced with financial constraints, local politicians often favor cutting services rather than raising taxes (see the Priority Lincoln Case Study in the Appendix to learn how the City of Lincoln, NE used citizen engagement during a financial crisis). Measuring citizens’ willingness to pay for services often measures individual services in terms of monetary value without any recognition of constraint. In reality, local governments are constrained, and services need to be measured against each other to determine the direction and amounts of service cuts. Contingent choice techniques incorporate budget constraints and require citizens to make budget choices across categories (Koford, 2010). Rather than measuring dollar amounts for services, contingent choice pits public programs against each other so that citizens’ willingness to tradeoff is revealed (Blomquist, Newsome, & Stone 2004).

Both contingent valuation and contingent choice methods are valid approaches to uncover citizen preference. The difference between them can be found in the resulting data. The results of contingent valuation can be used in cost-benefit analyses and to guide decision makers to an appropriate level of tax and spending for individual services. Service preferences are relative to each other in contingent choice such that citizen preference of the entire bundle of services is achieved. Simonsen and Robbins (2002) offered a dynamic approach in that contingent choice and contingent valuation techniques were combined.

Ebdon and Franklin provide a model and evaluation criteria in order to measure the success of citizen engagement as it relates to the budget process. These criteria will be applied to both the budget simulator and the focus groups as we discuss the successes and opportunities for improvement in Johnson County.

Evaluation Criteria

- Input is representative of the community
- Opportunity is available for large numbers of citizens to participate
- Input occurs early in the process
- Sincere preference / willingness revealed
- Participation includes two-way communication between public and government officials
- Input is considered in decisions

(Ebdon & Franklin, 45)

III. Theoretical Analysis of Engagement Tools

Historical Context

Historically, Johnson County has engaged in other citizen participation efforts, but not to the degree of the budget simulation process. Past participation was limited to online surveys about citizen satisfaction and dissatisfaction with Johnson County departments. Surveys were also conducted that would allow citizens to make broad suggestions in relation to governmental issues; however, these suggestions were not solicited or in correlation to the county budget. Citizen engagement was exclusive to citizens offering input through Johnson County’s online website. The downside to these methods was the required dedication of staff and other resources when managing them as information had to be constantly evaluated and updated in a timely manner.

Citizen Engagement Committee at Johnson County

The Citizen Engagement Committee was formed in answer to a request by the County Commissioners to figure out a way to gather input for preferences among citizens. The Citizen Engagement committee is made up of a representative of the County Manager’s office (a master of public administration student intern), five staff members from the Budget and Finance Department, and a representative of the Public Relations area. While the Commissioners did initially request this information, the process, research, decision-making and execution was staff driven. One of the stated goals was to “seek increased community feedback on County service priorities” and figure out

what values drive decision-making (KC Consensus interview). With the economic downturn being the motivating factor to seek out input for the first time, outside of public hearings, the extent commissioners will use the results to influence budget decision making is still unclear. With trends indicating changes in intergovernmental funding, local government will be burdened to fund many programs, therefore service prioritization and citizen engagement will only become increasingly important (CBO 2012 report).

Focus Groups

The focus groups were chosen as one of the methods to help understand citizen preferences for service levels. After undergoing research for citizen engagement strategies, the committee understood from the beginning that they would not have the capacity or the ability to serve as an unbiased facilitator to successfully lead the focus group process. Consensus KC was contracted to secure a professional and experienced project team to lead the focus groups. A Budget and Finance staff person shared that they intentionally wanted staff absent from this process because they understood that, “if expertise is in the room, then the public is less likely to say what they really think for fear of offending or sounding uninformed (Budget staff interview).” In addition, the facilitative skills needed did not exist in-house.

It was decided that one focus group per district would involve adults and one more focus group per district would be made up of high school students for a total of 12 groups. Jennifer Wilding, the project manager, shared that Chairman Ed Eilert requested the focus groups for the younger audience in order to gain insight into preferences of our younger citizens with the notion of retaining them as future leaders in our community (KC Consensus interview).” Chairman Ed Eilert did attend the majority of focus groups with County commissioners from each district also attending the two focus groups in their district. Buy-in from the decision makers is critical for the future

success, eventual budgeting outcomes, and potential for institutionalization of citizen engagement moving forward.

The attendees were chosen in two different ways. From the beginning, KC Consensus sought to provide a good representation of the community. Initially, KC Consensus randomly called citizens in each of the districts. While citizens answering their phones were likely to show interest in participation, it became clear that getting people to answer the phone was the primary challenge. With this challenge and the aggressive timeline, they turned to citizen groups that were non-political in nature to help identify participants including chambers of commerce, school PTAs, Rotary clubs, and other leadership organizations.

Admittedly, KC Consensus staff members wanted to have more diversity and capture underrepresented groups in the process. Participants were selected along with back up participants in the case of cancellations. Surprisingly, there were not any “no-show” participants in any of the 12 focus groups which are quite unusual in the staffs’ experience, with “20-40 percent being the typical rate.”

The two-hour focus group experience included dinner, a brief video about the services provided by the County, completion of the budget simulator, a moderated conversation about the exercise, commissioners’ final comments and briefly addressed questions of the groups.

The focus groups played an important role in this effort by providing an opportunity for qualitative data which gets more at the “why” behind the simulator results and what values drove the results. J.W. Creswell explains in his article, “Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions,” the rich data that is gathered causing “focus groups to feature patterns formed by words, called themes or perspectives.” It is these themes that provided meaningful insights that County Commissioners will read to influence the final budget. A focus group facilitator can and should take extra care to note silence and body language that can reveal lack of knowledge,

understanding, or discomfort. Schensul and LeCompte share the importance of observed “silence as clues to perspectives and world views” in their writings about focus groups (Schensul and LeCompte, 1999). It is unclear from the report if attention was paid to this aspect of information gathering that can inform as much as the words themselves.

Focus Groups Measured with the Ebdon and Franklin Criteria Input is representative of the community.

There was a concerted effort to have a voice from each district. In addition, focus groups were formed for adult citizens and high school students. The approach to gathering the members leaves some room for improvement. The statistical analysis (Chapter IV) also confirms that several groups are underrepresented creating problems for the integrity of the data. We also know that the focus groups and simulators both assumed experience and comfort with technology which automatically removes a segment of the population. KC Consensus staff did see an opportunity for improvement, sharing that “they plan to fine tune this area and utilize mail more in their approach.” It is recommended for future focus groups that focus groups be formed to include: members of the Hispanic population, Chinese population, and African-American population, all growing minority populations in the Johnson County area. A focus group dedicated to seniors would be beneficial because they will become a larger segment of the population in the coming years, affecting demand for services.

Opportunity is available for large numbers of citizens to participate.

Focus groups by design do not accomplish the ability to include large numbers of participants. In fact, focus groups are considered ineffective over 14 people, which is why it is important for the focus group to be part of a portfolio of tools to achieve community engagement (Grudens-Schuck 2). However, focus groups are helpful for developing themes and reasons behind the larger numbers revealed in the budget simulator. More color and texture is brought to the data

by focus groups, helping to understand the values driving the results. More effort must be made to improve engagement across diverse segments of the population. In addition, a comprehensive marketing plan must be incorporated to allow citizens to become aware of the opportunity to engage in the process.

Input occurs early in the process.

Input from the focus groups was completed with results aggregated and presented to the Board of County Commissioners at a budget retreat prior to final decisions and votes, which provided the commissioners the opportunity to be informed and educated about how citizens were thinking about service prioritization and hear from the citizens themselves. The lead time, however, did present challenges for recruitment, promotion, and execution which ultimately weakened the content. It would be recommended to begin the process earlier to work through some of the challenges as it relates to recruitment.

Sincere preference/willingness to pay is revealed.

In order for sincere preferences to be expressed in a focus group setting, there needs to be effort put into providing an unbiased facilitator as to not create a culture of intimidation. A couple of things show sincere preferences and willingness to pay. The zero percent no-show rate for this exercise is an indication of the willingness for citizens to engage and of their trust that their input will be heard. KC Consensus staff shared that in several groups, there was spontaneous discussion around raising taxes to be able to keep certain services. The option to raise taxes was not in response to any question which indicates there is a willingness to pay here that should be explored more in the coming year with other tools. The choice to limit the discussion to five services did hamper the ability to truly measure willingness to pay. Many focus group members did express a desire to be given more information, background and choices (Budget staff interview). The Budget staff member agreed that this was lacking but time considerations prevented them from including

more options. The goal was to find the sweet spot between the scope of the content and services covered and the amount of time that a participant would be willing to spend on the simulator.

Participation includes two-way communication between public and county officials.

The focus group by its very nature provides an opportunity for two-way communication by inviting citizens to share in the burden and knowledge of how cuts can be achieved with the least amount of pain. The presence of the County Commissioners at the end of the focus group was critical for the citizens to both share their thoughts and be able to ask questions and converse with the decision makers. The focus group participants will also receive a report of the outcome after this process is complete providing that important loop of communication so the focus group attendees know that their time and input mattered (KC Consensus interview). The focus group participant interviewed, rated the experience a 10 on a scale from 1-10, sharing that “the very idea they are doing this kind of participation is really important.” The enthusiasm for this opportunity exists but it must be fostered more to harness the potential. Incorporating strategic strategies is vital to keep the two-way communication ongoing. Using the laptops that were provided, it would have been beneficial to ask all participants to “like” the county on Facebook and subscribe to the county e-newsletter, allowing the communication loop to keep going outside of the focus group experience. Denver provides an example where similar strategies were engaged. A separate website was launched around this effort called “Delivering Denver’s Future, completely dedicated to fostering a two-way communication (<http://www.deliveringdenversfuture.org/>). The website is well designed with simple steps that lead the citizens through a process to learn about the budget, fix the budget, and provide ideas. The vast majority of the citizens that took the simulator in Johnson County, however, did not have this same opportunity to be educated and then provide open-ended feedback at the end. Frank Benest alluded to this in a 1997 article entitled, “Engaging Citizens in the Bottom Line”:

To successfully market a budget, a local government must move from monologue to dialogue. That means including the public in the budget process before the actual document is formally adopted (Benest 8).

A dialogue has truly begun, but the relationship must be nurtured for it to genuinely inform the process and reflect the values of the community.

Input is considered in decisions.

Because the budget process has not come to completion, it would be conjecture to conclude how these tools will influence budget decision making. It is a good sign that the County Commissioners were present and involved in the focus groups which started this important two-way communication. It is also a good sign that both the budget simulator and the focus groups were launched and conclusions provided prior to the budget vote. As shared by a staff member of Consensus KC, “70 percent of local communities utilize town halls as their citizen engagement just minutes before the vote (Consensus KC interview, 2012).” It is clear that we have entered a “new normal,” where budget surpluses, robust intergovernmental transfers, and rising property values are out of reach. Frank Benest shares it best when he says, “it is risky to truly open up and engage people in the budget process. But it is even more risky not to (Benest 8).” How the input is used will be important for the integrity of this process. Providing a communication strategy (feedback loop) will be critical moving forward so that positive energy continues to build around this process.

Table 2: Focus Group Evaluation

Participatory Criteria	What Johnson County Did Well	Recommendations for Future Improvement
1. Representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A concerted effort was made to insure each adult and student focus group was chosen from each of the six districts in Johnson County. • Captured Youth Perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit from the simulator respondents and specifically approach groups that will accomplish more diversity (Hispanic chamber, Kansas City Chinese American Association, ELL parent groups from schools)
2. Opportunity for large numbers to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups are not designed to capture large groups so it was a success to have limited the number to less than 14. • They did contact non-partisan groups to promote participation including PTAs, Chamber groups, and Kiwanis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and recruit from the simulator respondents • Broadly apply a variety of promotional techniques to allow access from various population groups to participate.
3. Occurs early in process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group were conducted and results were presented at final budget retreat to inform decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin the process earlier to allow focus groups to inform budget simulator process and allow more time to properly promote and recruit focus group participants.
4. Sincere preferences /willingness to pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chose to contract the focus group portion with KC Consensus allowed sincere preferences to be expressed (without presence of professional county staff) • Willingness to pay was somewhat present (By default a tax increase was implied with the property tax increasing if the budget was not balanced) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice to omit tax increase (mill levy) questions did miss an opportunity to learn of citizens willingness to pay for various services • The choice to limit the discussion around a small number of services also blocked ability to gain sincere preferences/input
5. Two-way communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time was built in at the end of the focus group to encourage feedback /comments from focus group participants • The presence and participation of commissioners at each focus group by district was an effective way for participants to also feel like they were being heard • Follow up report will be mailed to each participant to provide that affirmation that the feedback was heard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missed opportunity with computers present to invite participants to keep the two-way communication going by asking them to “like” the county on facebook and “subscribe” to the existing county newsletter” • It is suggested that a separate website be launched to pursue more two-way communication • A mobile app is another great way to increase ability for two-way communication

6. Input considered in decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board of County Commissioners was provided with the results and themes prior to any votes or budget decision-making • Commissioners participation at focus group did ensure greater likelihood of buy-in by providing this “face time” with citizens • Plans are in place to do a press release and post information on the county website of the budget results and ways this process assisted the decision-makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To insure buy-in in the future from the County Commissioners, ask for feedback/suggestions from the County Commissioners as to how the information helped and what format/timing might work better for them. • Final outcome of how decision-making was considered is unknown at this time.
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Budget Simulator

The budget simulator utilized by Johnson County was created through a partnership with Automated Information Mapping System (AIMS) staff. The intention of developing the project in-house was to offer the County greater control, flexibility and ownership over the simulator so it could best be tailored to the County’s needs and because it was most cost effective (Budget Staff Interview, 2012). The committee was directly engaged in determining the questions included in the simulator and the timing and design of the simulator. Overall, this process was well organized and the significant time and effort put into the development of the budget simulator created many successful outcomes from the use of this innovative engagement tool.

Budget Simulator Measured with the Ebdon and Franklin Criteria

1. Input is representative of the community.

In order to most accurately represent the opinions of the community the budget simulator must include participation from all of the diverse groups that make up Johnson County. An online format was used to administer the budget simulator, which creates both benefits and disadvantages related to representation. The benefit of the online format is that individuals who have internet access will likely find the availability of completing the simulator online convenient because it is

quick to access, it can be completed at any time during the survey period, and it can be submitted at the click of a button rather than having to mail something back. However, for citizens of Johnson County without access or with limited access to the internet, the budget simulator is much more difficult to complete, if not impossible. Because lower-income or disadvantaged community members are more likely to not have access to the internet, this presents a significant problem regarding representation because low-income or disadvantaged community members may be more substantially affected by the budgetary decisions related to program and services cuts.

In order to improve representation, supplementary citizen engagement options should be considered. Supplementary options could include ensuring that the simulator is compatible with mobile devices, offering a version of the budget simulator to be completed over phone, or mailing out a paper survey to solicit feedback. In order to keep the interactive format of the online budget simulator, another option could be to bring laptops or mobile tablets to neighborhood meetings, especially in lower income areas, creating opportunities for citizens to complete the survey even if they do not have internet access at home. By diversifying the format of the budget simulator and making it available through a variety of means, there would be a higher likelihood of increasing the representativeness of the results.

In order to increase the statistical significance of the results, it is important to have a large enough sample size. Johnson County Budget Office staff stated that the approximately 1,300 submissions through the budget simulator made up less than one percent of the population of Johnson County (Budget Staff Interview, 2012). Staff indicated that the committee acknowledged that a broader and more random sampling of the population with the budget simulator would be an important focus for any future application of this process (Budget Staff Interview, 2012).

One of the primary ways to improve the sample involves changing the ways outreach and promotion of the budget simulator is conducted. Indeed, in the Simulator Report for the April

Budget Retreat, one of the lessons learned from this first use of a budget simulator to engage citizens in Johnson County was that “outreach needs to be more sustained, broader and start earlier, preferably before the simulator is released” (2012, p. 2). The committee did utilize several effective techniques to advertise the budget simulator, including posting information on the websites for municipalities and County departments, sending out a press release, and putting up signs in various Johnson County libraries (Budget Staff Interview, 2012). However, other advertising techniques, such as utilizing social media, were only used minimally (Budget Staff Interview, 2012).

Several potential avenues exist to increase citizen participation and the representativeness of the budget simulator. First, the increased use of social networking tools carries the benefit of quickly reaching a large audience, having no financial costs, and allowing other individuals to advertise for you by sharing the information over their various social networks. Social networking is also more frequently utilized by younger populations, which could help reach out to that group and increase their representation. However, since this method would not reach citizens who do not use social networking, it is important that a variety of marketing techniques be utilized.

Second, current methods of communication with citizens could be tapped into in order to publicize the simulator. For instance, information about the simulator could be included in regular newsletters or even as a flyer added to wastewater bills. Additionally, information about the simulator could be provided to all Johnson County employees, and in turn the employees could be asked to spread the word to friends, family and other citizens.

Third, the committee could utilize radio and television ads or attempt to publicize through various news outlets. One way of potentially gaining media coverage would be to engage high school students in participating with the simulator and/or conducting a project to analyze the simulator. In addition to educating students this would also increase representation of youth, which

is important since the youth will be significantly impacted by the long-term effects of the budget decisions made today.

Fourth, the committee could enlist the services of marketing experts to assist in targeting the marketing to all areas of the community. Because it was indicated that low-income and minority populations were less likely to participate in the budget simulator, advertising directed towards these populations would be beneficial in helping to lessen this gap and creating more equal representation. Targeted marketing could include posting information about the simulator in community newspapers or newsletters, in various community centers, at libraries and grocery stores, and even through the mail. It would be particularly useful to advertise the simulator in areas with free internet access, wireless or otherwise, such as coffee shops or libraries. Indeed, the County could even create a prompt about the simulator that automatically comes up on library computers, because the libraries are where many lower-income individuals go to access computers and the internet.

Fifth, the simulator could be brought to the community, rather than encouraging community members to take the initiative to access the simulator on their own. For example, staffed stations with mobile devices could be set up outside of high-traffic areas, such as grocery stores or malls, in order to reach passersby and create more opportunities for participation.

Sixth, if feasible, it could be helpful to offer incentives for participation. Incentives could be as simple as advertising the benefit that citizen input could have on preserving community services and programs that they enjoy or depend on.

Table 3: Strategies to Increase Citizen Participation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize social media • Tap into current methods of communication with citizens, such as newsletters or utility bills • Create simulator prompt on library computers • Increase utilization of the media • Engage youth through creating participation opportunities in high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlist services of marketing experts • Increase word of mouth communication by engaging County employees • Target traditionally underrepresented communities • Bring the simulator to the community through use of portable devices • Offer incentives for participation
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2. Opportunity is available for large numbers of citizens to participate.

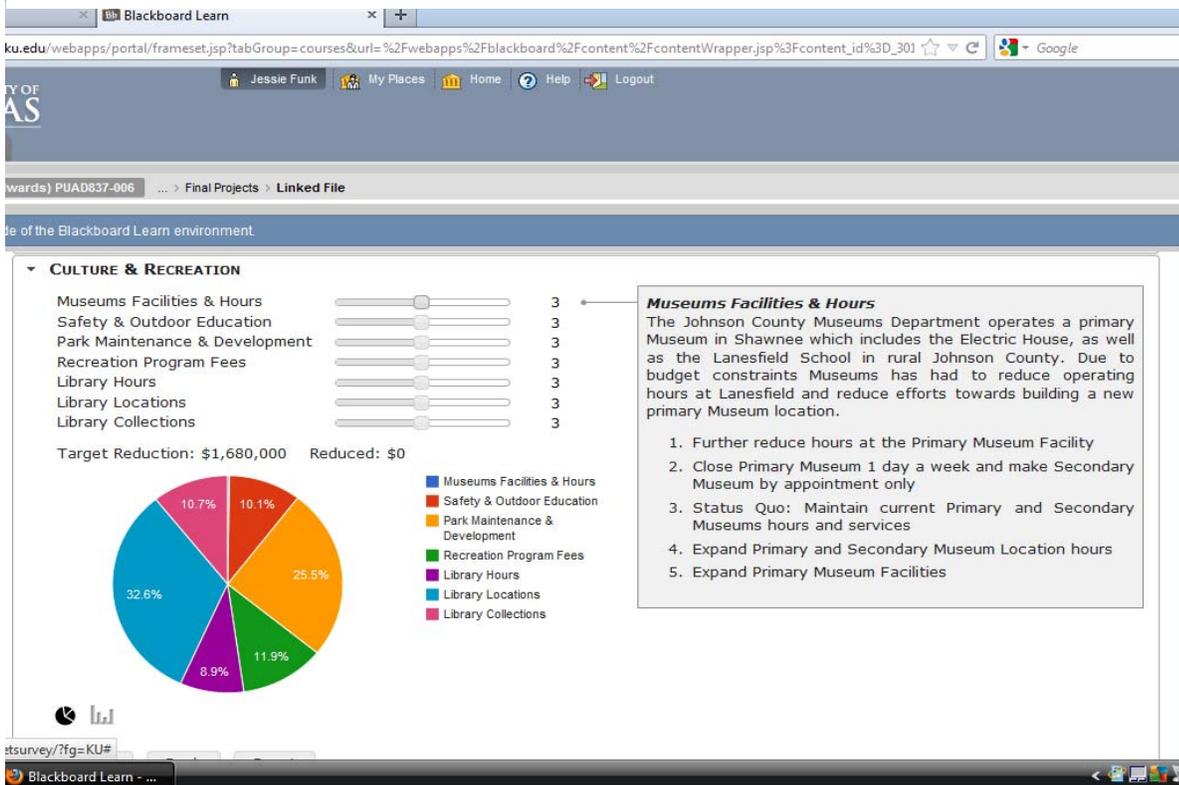
Another component of an effective citizen engagement tool is its openness to large numbers of participants. Because the budget simulator was offered online, this allowed for a large number of responses to be captured and analyzed since there were no restrictions on space, such as there might be for a town hall meeting or focus groups. Additionally, by being available online, the budget simulator allowed participation at any time, which could have been useful in opening up participation to people with very busy schedules. As indicated in the Simulator Report for the April Budget Retreat (2012), the goal was for a participant to be able to complete the simulator in 30 minutes or less, and so the design of the survey was developed to facilitate speedy completion. This helps to make the simulator more open to participants because a lengthy process would likely discourage or prohibit participation by some. The budget simulator was also available online for a number of weeks, which allowed a significant window of time for citizens to participate.

In the future, participation could be made even more available and inclusive by increasing the timeframe in which the budget simulator may be completed. Furthermore, it is important to consider accessibility issues related to the budget simulator and how those could be improved.

Budget Office staff acknowledged that attempting to design the simulator for a wide variety of participants was one of the biggest challenges the committee faced (Budget Staff Interview, 2012). In order to open up participation in the simulator to the largest possible audience, considerations should be made for people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency and people with variable knowledge about the budgetary process and community services.

In particular, all possible efforts should be made to make the language of the survey as simple as possible in order for the greatest number people to be able to understand. For instance, some of the terminology used to describe the options for the services could have been difficult to understand for some people, such as “latent fingerprint cases” and “reduce timeliness of visits for re-licensure to contract minimum of 90 percent annually” (Johnson County Budget Simulator, 2012). One option to help with this is to have a definition section to help clarify unfamiliar terms. It would also be helpful to create more cohesion in the options by establishing evenly measured changes with more clarity. For example, Figure 3 is a screenshot of the options listed for the Museums Facilities & Hours.

Figure 3: Johnson County Budget Simulator Screenshot



The options do not necessarily proceed in an equally measurable format, and there may be confusion surrounding what is really meant by “further reducing hours” or “expanding primary museum facilities” (Johnson County Budget Simulator, 2012).

The visuals provided in the simulator can be useful in helping to illustrate components to enhance understanding, but they must be presented clearly and with an emphasis on simplicity. Using a bar chart and a pie chart was a good choice for the simulator because they are perhaps some of the most familiar and easy to comprehend charts by the general public, and providing more than one chart option is useful. However, some improvements to the visuals could include increasing their size so that they are easier to view, making the percentages on the pie charts more visible, and changing the format of the bar chart so that it is easier to read. Additionally, the overall simulator design could be changed to make it easier for participants to read the descriptions of services and the available options. With the current design, it can be difficult to keep the description of each service displayed while hovering over the slider bar. It might work better to have a link to the text on the left that when selected will display the explanation on the right until another service is selected. This change would make it much more user-friendly and would be especially helpful for participants with less computer experience. In addition, it would make it much easier if the price choice associated with each service level was listed next to the description of that service level.

Providing more explanation about the budget process and the program services could increase citizens’ knowledge and understanding of what they are deciding upon. Future simulators could focus effort up front on public education regarding the programs and services that might be mentioned in the simulator, allowing the public to be more educated and feel more informed in their decision-making. Participants might also benefit from more explanation about how the financial amounts were determined and how their budgetary decisions can influence property tax. One issue mentioned by a focus group participant is that there was no clear explanation provided through the

budget simulator on the concept of spending money to save money, which could have changed the way some participants made their decisions (Focus Group Participant Interview, 2012). Clearly, the issue of keeping the simulator within the target time limit for completion and making sure that it includes enough information to properly inform citizens with limited previous knowledge of these issues is challenging. Perhaps one way to help find a balance would be to offer a “learn more” link that citizens can click if they would like more information so that participants who would benefit from more detail could have that option while not including it on the main page for everyone to read through.

3. Input occurs early in the process.

The time period in which citizen input is requested is important for successful citizen engagement. In order for citizen feedback to be adequately considered during the decision-making process, it must be gathered early on during the budget process. The Johnson County Budget Simulator was made available at an early point in the budget process for the County, but this required a short turn-around time for the committee between completing the budget simulator and having it go into effect (Budget Staff Interview, 2012). Indeed, staff mentioned that the committee even found themselves having to change a few things about the budget simulator after it went live (Budget Staff Interview, 2012).

To reduce the stress and demand on the Committee, it could be beneficial for a review of the budget simulator to happen as early as possible before it is utilized again. This will allow for changes to be made in plenty of time before the simulator is made available to the public. Thankfully, now that a budget simulator has been created, making improvements to the simulator should be quicker and less difficult than creating the simulator from scratch. By making the budget simulator available as early as possible in the budget process, this will allow for sufficient time for

the analysis of the results and the incorporation of the results into budgetary discussions and decision-making.

4. Participation includes two-way communication between public and county officials.

An essential element of effective citizen engagement is two-way communication between officials and citizens. The budget simulator created an excellent opportunity for officials to gain feedback from citizens, but it was not as well suited to provide a communication loop from officials to citizens. The simulator did provide for some important communication on behalf of officials, such as providing a summary of the County's financial situation and explaining the decision-making that takes place to determine service delivery. The simulator was also a good way to educate and inform citizens on the programs that are currently provided by the County and their meaningfulness. For instance, one of the Johnson County focus group participants explained that through participating in the budget simulator he gained a better understanding of the relationship between spending and the services provided by jails and mental health programs, and he developed a deeper understanding of the role of mental health services (Focus Group Participant Interview, 2012).

In addition to the useful information provided by officials through the budget simulator, there are also many other ways that communication and feedback can be provided to citizens in order to improve the two-way communication component of the simulator. One aspect to consider is that the explanations and information provided within the simulator could provide more details to participants. For example, a citizen might wonder about the long-term consequences of the decision they are making today, such as the effect on next year's budget or the long-term impact on society. Projections of that nature could be useful if they are available. Additionally, the simulator does not address what the citizen should do or prefer to do if the indicated budget cuts are not made (i.e. whether the citizen wants to raise taxes), which could cause some confusion from participants about what the consequences or other options may be if the budget cuts are not achieved. It is unclear

why the five program areas were chosen and the specific services and pricing options under those programs. A short explanation about the selection of programs and services for the simulator could be enlightening and helpful for participants. Also, the descriptions of services were very useful but a description of each program would also be useful (i.e. Public Safety & Emergency Services).

In order to create more opportunities for community dialogues about the simulator, a few options could be presented. First, after a citizen responds to the simulator questions, the participant could be given information about how other citizens have responded or how other cities or counties have addressed these services. If a “learn more” link is included for each question, this link could provide such information, in addition to providing pros and cons surrounding the options. Second, an “other” option could be added to each question or at the end of the survey which would allow participants to enter their own suggestions for addressing the budget deficit and potential changes to services. Third, after completing the simulator, participants could be invited to attend a neighborhood meeting, public hearing, and/or social media site in order to give more feedback and have the opportunity to bring up questions or concerns. The simulator would then be the beginning of the engagement process and it would help tie together other engagement options in order to help increase overall participation and improve the comprehensiveness of the citizen engagement process. Participants could even be engaged in the evaluation of the simulator itself by creating a satisfaction survey that pops up after completion of the simulator, or by inviting a small group of citizens to test out the simulator and provide feedback before it goes public.

Another way to improve two-way communication through the simulator would be to provide more explanation about how the public’s input will be considered and how officials will report back to the public about the results of the simulator and the influence on their budgetary decisions. However, despite the limited two-way communication, citizens still seemed to gain satisfaction from the opportunity to share their feedback with officials and to have their concerns

and opinions taken into consideration. As an illustration, the Simulator Report for the April Budget Retreat (2012) states: “The biggest take away from the Citizen Engagement Process is the incredibly positive response from citizens about the engagement efforts, both in the form of the budget simulator and the focus groups”, and “Citizens seem to genuinely appreciate the County’s efforts, and enjoy being able to participate in the process” (p. 3). Public enthusiasm needs to be fostered by continuing to offer opportunities for meaningful engagement and by providing direct feedback on the impact of their participation.

5. Input is considered in decisions.

Just as important as two-way communication is how well citizen input is used by decision-makers. Upon completing the simulator, the citizen might wonder what will be done with the information gathered. Developing a report, an education piece or dedicating a webpage to report information would inform citizens of the results and enhance communication with them. A webpage could be used to market how the information was used and continue to report on information of the next budget simulator. If people feel like the information is not being used, than they will not want to take the time to give their opinion in the future, which could impact ongoing community engagement efforts. Although the Simulator Report for the April Budget Retreat (2012) explains that a next step in their process is to make the results of the budget simulator public once they are analyzed, likely through positing the information on their website and sending out a press release (Budget Staff Interview, 2012), many participants may not be aware of that plan. In the experience of one focus group participant, he felt that there were no clearly communicated plans “to share the results of the budget simulator with the public or to follow-up with participants to explain how their input influenced the decision-making process (Focus Group Participant Interview, 2012). Granted, since this is the first time the budget simulator has been conducted in Johnson County, the

results of this pilot may not be as widely advertised as the results of later budget simulators that have become more finely tuned after the lessons learned from the first attempt.

If citizens do not feel that their input is meaningful to officials, then they likely will be less willing to provide it. The committee will clearly need to take time to analyze the results of the citizen input, and the Simulator Report for the April Budget Retreat (2012) details that the next step in their process is “to determine how the BOCC (Board of County Commissioners) would like this information used for the FY 2013 budget” (p. 3). However, at this point, it is unknown how much the citizen input will be integrated into the budget decision-making process. The challenge that arises is how to most effectively integrate citizen input into the decision-making process while balancing the expertise and opinions of officials. Staff notes that there can be tension between public wishes and the fact that stark fiscal realities exist that may demand a certain amount of cuts to the budget (Budget Staff Interview, 2012). Indeed, citizens are known for wanting the best of both worlds when it comes to the amount they have to pay and the services that are provided by the government. As Jack Citrin (1979) explains in his article, *Do People Want Something for Nothing: Public Opinion on Taxes and Government Spending*, “the public’s readiness to demand and consume government programs is understandably greater than its willingness to pay for them” (p. 113). Sometimes managing the competing demands to cut costs and increase or maintain services can seem an impossible task. However, engaging the public more directly and helping to educate them in the realities of the budget process is a good first step. Even if the ultimate budget decisions are not in line with the majority of the public input, as long as officials are able to explain how the input was carefully considered and why the ultimate decision was made, citizens can still find the process meaningful and it allows for greater transparency within the decision-making process.

Another issue related to the consideration of citizen input is how much freedom participants had through the budget simulator to express their preferences. Many parameters were set by

officials that limited the extent of citizen input through the budget simulator, such as what options participants could choose in regards to service changes, how much money needed to be cut, and the fact that increasing revenue was not depicted as an available option. Setting up restrictions on feedback prevents the expression of the full range of citizen input and could incorporate unintended bias by officials. This appears to be recognized by the committee because the Simulator Report for the April Budget Retreat (2012) lists the need for including a section for increasing revenue options and expanding the number of services and options included in the simulator as some of the lessons learned through this process. Some ways to do this could include offering more than five options for each service and adding an “other” option so that participants could write in their own suggestion or preference if it is not already listed. This would increase the difficulty in analyzing the data, but it could still be viewed as beneficial to the overall process. Another option would be to have a citizen committee evaluate different options, then solicit wider public input through the simulator and neighborhood meetings, and finally combine the input results to develop policy recommendations.

6. Sincere preference/willingness to pay is revealed.

It is not enough to merely ask for citizen input, but the type of engagement and the response from citizens must be informed, sincere, and thoughtful in order to be valuable. In order for citizens to be able to provide genuine feedback and opinions, they must first have an understanding of the complexities of the issues at hand. This puts government officials in a position where they must provide both education and options when they seek to engage the public. Mark D. Robbins, Bill Simonsen, and Barry Feldman (2004) address this issue in their article, *The Impact of Tax Price on Spending Preferences*, when they state:

The use of naïve voter surveys or referenda to obtain the preferences of citizens gathers opinions that are uninformed about the real trade-offs facing a jurisdiction. If queried fully,

with trade-off and cost information provided, a set of tax and service combinations ought to be revealed that represents the choices of an informed citizenry. With this information asymmetry about service costs removed, revealed preferences should be closer to the socially optimal combination for that jurisdiction. (p.82)

Their comments illustrate the importance of providing tax specific information and educating citizens on the issues in order for citizen input to be closer to their actual preferences and willingness to pay.

The Johnson County Budget Simulator is useful in that it provides a clear connection between the tradeoffs between spending and services. The simulator also offers useful introductory information about the budget situation and the services, which assists participants in making a better informed decision. However, there is more that can be done to increase public understanding and more valuably engage their participation. One consideration is that educating the public about the economic and budgetary situation of the County should be an ongoing process, and not just tied to a survey, focus group, or budget simulator. Future citizen engagement opportunities can attempt to overcome myths and misunderstandings about budget decisions and issues. For instance, if a citizen has the impression that government is wasteful, then they will likely not be very inclined to thoughtfully consider the options of cutting services or raising revenue until they understand that all other efficiency building options have been addressed. The Simulator Report for the April Budget Retreat (2012) explains that: “The County, thus far, has been able to reduce the budget with minimal service impacts through efficiencies and vacancies” (p. 1). This would be helpful information for the public to know as they complete the budget simulator so that there can be more understanding that all of the other options have been exhausted and that service cuts or revenue increases are now the only available means to address the continued cuts necessary to balance the budget. By following up with the public to let them know that their input was used in a meaningful way to guide

the budget decision-making process, citizens understand that their feedback is being taken seriously and potentially acted upon. When citizens see the results of their input being carried out, they may be more likely to provide their most thoughtful and sincere opinions when asked to engage with officials. On the other hand, if the public believes that their opinions and feedback are not taken into consideration and do not really matter, than it could increase the likelihood of careless and half-hearted input.

Table 4: Budget Simulation Evaluation

Participatory Criteria	What Johnson County Did Well	Recommendations for Future Improvement
1. Representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickness and convenience of online format encourages broad participation. • Utilized multiple techniques to advertise the simulator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more diverse outlets for outreach and marketing, including social media. • Target outreach to typically underrepresented communities. • Have an earlier and more sustained marketing process. • Offer engagement incentives to encourage participation.
2. Opportunity for large numbers to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online format allows for large number of responses to be captured and analyzed. • Simulator designed for quick completion. • Significant window of time for citizens to participate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase simulator participation timeframe. • Improve accessibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simplify language and formatting and create more cohesive options ○ Provide option to learn more about budgeting process and services ○ Bring simulator to neighborhood or community groups, especially in low income areas
3. Occurs early in process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulator conducted early during the budget process, even though this required quick development. • Analysis of simulator presented at April budget retreat to inform future engagement plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct evaluation of simulator and make changes for next year as early as possible to decrease turnaround time stress.
4. Two-way communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulator created an excellent opportunity for officials to gain feedback from citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more information and explanation within the simulator. • Provide feedback to participants immediately upon completion of the

<p>5. Sincere preferences /willingness to pay</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants learned more about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ County’s financial situation ○ Budget decision-making process ○ Programs and services provided by the County • Plan to make the results of the budget simulator public once they are analyzed. 	<p>simulator about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The importance of their input and how and when it will be considered ○ How to get involved with other engagement opportunities ○ Where they can get questions answered and provide feedback through a satisfaction survey about the simulator ○ When the results of the simulator and the budgeting decisions will be made public
<p>6. Input considered in decision making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive simulator provides clear connection between tradeoffs between spending and services. • Offers useful information about the budget situation and services, which assists participants in making a better informed decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what has already been done to address decreased revenue. • Create ongoing opportunities to educate the public about the budget and financial situation. • Follow-up with participants to show that their input is meaningful and actually influences the decision-making process.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Engagement Committee was formed and formal engagement process was initiated. • The Board of County Commissioners was provided with the results and themes prior to any votes or budget decision making. • Plans are in place to do a press release and post information on the county website of the budget results and ways this process assisted the decision makers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate citizen input into the decision-making process while balancing the expertise and opinions of officials. • Allow consideration of more input by providing a broader range of choices to participants, such as a specific option to raise revenue. • Final outcome of how decision making is considered is unknown at this time.

IV. Budget Simulator Data Analysis

Johnson County's budget simulator solicits public information from citizens in much the same way that a typical survey would, thus ethical sampling considerations must be taken before the resulting data can be used for decision making. Chi-square statistical analysis of demographic data generated by the respondents of Johnson County's budget simulator, triangulated with the United States Census, was conducted to test the quality of the sample data.

Validity of Johnson County's Budget Simulator

Johnson County's budget simulator asked five demographic questions:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Race
4. Household income
5. Education

Each of the demographic variables may be triangulated with the United States Census to determine if the sample sufficiently represents the demographics of the population of Johnson County. Because of the nature of the budget simulator, household income and race were chosen to test the sample representativeness.

Gender, age, and education were excluded for the following reasons. About 54 percent of the survey respondents were female, which aligns closely with the 51.2 percent reported by the Census. Age and education were not chosen to test because of the political nature of budgetary decisions. About six percent of budget simulator respondents identified themselves to be under 18, while about 26 percent of the total population are under 18, thus a statistical test would likely indicate that the budget simulator is not representative in terms of age. Reconciling data in terms of age would not be practical.

Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-square analysis tests categorical data based on the observed frequencies and expected frequencies of demographic data. Respondents were asked to report their race based on six categories:

1. American Indian and Alaska Native
2. Black or African American
3. Asian or Asian American
4. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
5. Non-Hispanic White
6. Other

The response rate (and population rates found in the census) was so low for American Indian and Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander that they were omitted from chi-square calculation (chi-square requires a frequency expected of at least five). Cases in the dataset that did not include information on respondent race were also excluded (there were 1,365 total cases, and 1,049 that included answers to race). Table 5 contains the observed frequencies generated by the budget simulator, the expected frequencies derived from the Census, and the chi-square calculations.

Table 5: Chi-Square Analysis of Race

Race	Observed	Expected	Total from Census	Census %	Chi Square
Asian or Asian American	15	45	22,743	4.31%	20.15
Black or African American	14	47	23,636	4.47%	23.11
Non-Hispanic White	946	929	468,052	88.61%	0.29
Other Race	74	27	13,797	2.61%	79.26
Total	1,049	1,049	528,228	100%	122.81
Degrees of Freedom	3				
Chi-Square Critical (alpha 0.05)	7.82				
Chi-Square Critical (alpha 0.01)	11.34				

$$\text{Chi-square} = \sum (fo - fe)^2 / fe$$

Where

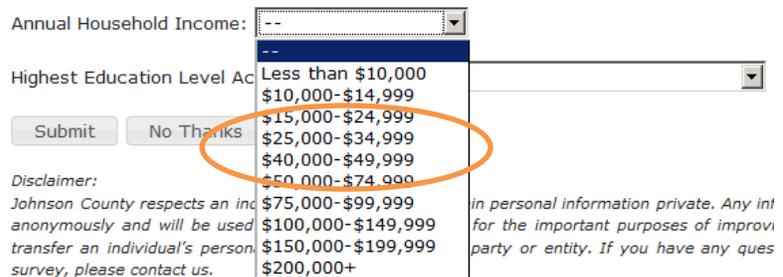
fo = the frequency observed for each category

fe = the frequency expected in each category

Because the chi-square of 122.81 falls well beyond the critical region of 7.82 (alpha 0.05), the sample of Johnson County residents generated by the budget simulator does not represent the racial make-up of the county’s population. Too many people identified themselves as “Other Race” while not enough respondents identified themselves as “Asian or Asian American” or “Black or African American.” It seems as though the number of respondents that identified themselves as “Non-Hispanic White” closely reflected the true population of Johnson County.

The same method was used to calculate the representativeness of the budget simulator sample to Johnson County’s population in terms of household income. Cases in the data set that do not have household income information were removed, leaving 978 valid responses.

Figure 4: Johnson County Budget Simulator Screenshot



There was an error found on the Johnson County budget simulator concerning household income, as there was no category for people making between \$35,000 and \$39,999 (figure 2). The chi-square calculations were conducted under the assumption that respondents whose household earnings fell within this range either did not select an income, or selected \$40,000 to \$49,000. Table 6 contains the observed frequencies generated by the budget simulator, the expected frequencies derived from the Census, and the chi-square calculations.

Table 6: Chi-Square Analysis of Household Income

Household Income	Observed	Expected	Household Income Totals (Census)	Census %	Chi-Square
Less than \$10,000	6	29	6,209	3.0%	18.12
\$10,000 to \$14,999	9	24	5,188	2.5%	9.49
\$15,000 to \$24,999	19	62	13,303	6.3%	29.71
\$25,000 to \$34,999	51	78	16,666	7.9%	9.07
\$35,000 to \$49,999	81	119	25,509	12.1%	11.94
\$50,000 to \$74,999	215	187	40,171	19.1%	4.25
\$75,000 to \$99,999	202	152	32,753	15.6%	16.19
\$100,000 to \$149,999	233	179	38,386	18.3%	16.62
\$150,000 to \$199,999	87	77	16,498	7.8%	1.37
\$200,000 or more	75	73	15,595	7.4%	0.08
Totals	978	978	210,278	100%	116.84
Degrees of Freedom	9				
Chi-Square Critical (alpha 0.05)	16.92				
Chi-Square Critical (alpha 0.01)	21.67				

$$\text{Chi-square} = \sum (fo - fe)^2 / fe$$

Where

fo = the frequency observed for each category

fe = the frequency expected in each category

Because the calculated chi-square of 116.84 falls beyond the critical chi-square value of 16.92 (alpha 0.05), the sample is not representative of the population. In general, there were too few respondents whose household income was less than \$50,000 per year, and too many respondents whose household income was more than \$50,000 per year. Had the income categories been properly established on Johnson County’s budget simulator, it is still unlikely that the sample would have been representative of the population (based on the extraordinarily high chi-square).

Post-stratification weighting was conducted and applied to the responses of Johnson County’s budget simulator so that generalizations about preferences of Johnson County citizens can be more accurately derived. Because the racial makeup of Johnson County is homogeneous,

household income was chosen for post-stratification calculations. The purpose of post-stratification weights is to value underrepresented populations more—and overrepresented populations less—so that the resulting data better relates to the population. Table 7 is the calculated post-stratification weights.

Table 7: Post-Stratification Weights

Household Income	Post-Stratification Weights
Less than \$10,000	4.81
\$10,000 to \$14,999	2.68
\$15,000 to \$24,999	3.26
\$25,000 to \$34,999	1.52
\$35,000 to \$49,999	1.46
\$50,000 to \$74,999	0.87
\$75,000 to \$99,999	0.75
\$100,000 to \$149,999	0.77
\$150,000 to \$199,999	0.88
\$200,000 or more	0.97

Post-stratification weights = $(f_s^o / n) / (f_p^o / total)$

Where

f_s^o = the frequency observed of the category in the sample

n = sample size

f_p^o = the frequency observed of the category in the population (taken from the Census)

$total$ = the aggregate amount of all categories in the population (taken from the Census)

We may then apply the post-stratification weights to the counts of responses per question of the budget simulator. Refer to Table 8 for tabulation of the counts of responses, both before and after post-stratification weights.

Table 8: Tabular Data Before and After Weighting

		Reduce Spending		Status Quo	Increase Spending								
Public Safety & Emergency Services		1	2	3	4	5	Avg.	Decrease		Maintain		Increase	
Q0a	Mental Health Crisis Responders:	283	363	611	86	22	2.415	646	47.3%	611	44.8%	108	7.9%
	Weighted	219	250	430	60	19	2.397	469	48.0%	430	43.9%	79	8.1%
Q0b	Work Release:	306	571	441	38	9	2.174	877	64.2%	441	32.3%	47	3.4%
	Weighted	255	409	279	22	12	2.107	664	67.9%	279	28.6%	34	3.5%
Q0c	Re-Entry Programming:	261	423	612	59	10	2.366	684	50.1%	612	44.8%	69	5.1%
	Weighted	222	305	398	40	13	2.303	527	53.8%	398	40.7%	53	5.5%
Q0d	Juvenile Offenders:	198	565	532	51	19	2.361	763	55.9%	532	39.0%	70	5.1%
	Weighted	173	401	349	35	20	2.312	574	58.7%	349	35.7%	55	5.6%
Q0e	Criminalistics Laboratory	71	192	662	286	142	3.174	263	19.4%	662	48.9%	428	31.6%
	Weighted	56	134	446	216	117	3.211	190	19.6%	446	46.0%	334	34.4%
Culture & Recreation													
Q1a	Museums Facilities & Hours:	311	568	423	48	15	2.185	879	64.4%	423	31.0%	63	4.6%
	Weighted	221	408	297	33	20	2.205	629	64.3%	297	30.3%	52	5.4%
Q1b	Safety & Outdoor Education:	176	368	666	117	38	2.614	544	39.9%	666	48.8%	155	11.4%
	Weighted	133	249	473	93	31	2.631	382	39.0%	473	48.3%	124	12.6%
Q1c	Park Maintenance & Development:	96	394	629	159	87	2.815	490	35.9%	629	46.1%	246	18.0%
	Weighted	67	284	442	118	67	2.831	351	35.9%	442	45.2%	185	19.0%
Q1d	Recreational Program Fees:	224	525	510	77	29	2.386	749	54.9%	510	37.4%	106	7.8%
	Weighted	159	378	357	62	23	2.400	536	54.8%	357	36.5%	85	8.7%
Q1e	Library Hours:	196	562	380	156	71	2.519	758	55.5%	380	27.8%	227	16.6%
	Weighted	139	404	262	117	57	2.537	543	55.5%	262	26.8%	173	17.7%
Q1f	Library Locations:	269	376	594	94	32	2.446	645	47.3%	594	43.5%	126	9.2%
	Weighted	187	272	417	72	30	2.473	460	47.0%	417	42.6%	101	10.4%
Q1g	Library Collections:	126	396	631	143	69	2.731	522	38.2%	631	46.2%	212	15.5%
	Weighted	81	299	432	118	49	2.749	380	38.8%	432	44.1%	166	17.0%

		Reduce Spending		Status Quo	Increase Spending										
Health & Human Services		1	2	3	4	5	Avg.		Decrease		Maintain		Increase		
Q2a	Child Care Licensure:	112	388	735	82	48	2.682		500	36.6%	735	53.8%	130	9.5%	
	Weighted	94	301	479	67	38	2.646		394	40.3%	479	49.0%	104	10.7%	
Q2b	Family Health Services:	99	292	755	161	58	2.844		391	28.6%	755	55.3%	219	16.0%	
	Weighted	71	193	552	120	42	2.865		264	27.0%	552	56.5%	162	16.5%	
Q2c	Supported Employment Services:	96	380	756	101	32	2.702		476	34.9%	756	55.4%	133	9.7%	
	Weighted	71	276	537	70	24	2.695		346	35.4%	537	54.9%	94	9.7%	
Q2d	Intake/Outpatient Services:	69	366	777	111	42	2.774		435	31.9%	777	56.9%	153	11.2%	
	Weighted	48	256	557	80	37	2.799		303	31.0%	557	57.0%	117	12.0%	
Q2e	Aging Services:	79	233	836	156	61	2.917		312	22.9%	836	61.2%	217	15.9%	
	Weighted	59	178	593	99	49	2.900		236	24.2%	593	60.6%	148	15.2%	
Q2f	Multi-Service Center:	154	402	682	87	40	2.602		556	40.7%	682	50.0%	127	9.3%	
	Weighted	116	309	453	63	37	2.589		424	43.4%	453	46.3%	101	10.3%	
Infrastructure															
Q3a	Snow Removal:	110	421	718	81	35	2.641		531	38.9%	718	52.6%	116	8.5%	
	Weighted	81	313	501	55	28	2.627		394	40.3%	501	51.2%	82	8.4%	
Q3b	The JO Hours and Trips:	240	503	492	67	63	2.421		743	54.4%	492	36.0%	130	9.5%	
	Weighted	154	380	341	49	53	2.454		535	54.7%	341	34.9%	102	10.4%	
Q3c	The JO Routes:	296	493	425	105	46	2.349		789	57.8%	425	31.1%	151	11.1%	
	Weighted	207	358	292	82	39	2.373		565	57.8%	292	29.8%	121	12.4%	
General Government															
Q4a	Vehicle Tag Renewals & Titles:	192	511	568	61	33	2.437		703	51.5%	568	41.6%	94	6.9%	
	Weighted	142	370	400	38	28	2.427		512	52.3%	400	40.9%	66	6.7%	
Q4b	Distance to Voting Location:	260	662	387	41	15	2.186		922	67.5%	387	28.4%	56	4.1%	
	Weighted	211	458	261	35	13	2.164		669	68.4%	261	26.7%	48	4.9%	
Q4c	Voting Wait Times:	176	518	601	52	18	2.427		694	50.8%	601	44.0%	70	5.1%	
	Weighted	137	374	419	28	20	2.408		511	52.2%	419	42.8%	48	4.9%	

Kruskal-Wallis Analysis

To extend the depth of data analysis, Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to detect any patterns of responses across socio-demographic groups. Kruskal-Wallis is similar to ANOVA but tests the variation of grouped medians rather than means. In essence, the Kruskal-Wallis model is measuring the calculated grouped median response (with known parameters, one being the lowest score and five the highest) of a particular bin within a socio-economic variable against the grouped median response of the remaining bins within that particular socio-economic variable.

To clarify, it is intuitive that the responses for the survey question about aging services would be different based on the age of the respondent. In other words, the older the respondent, the more likely they will not choose to decrease aging services. Therefore, a hypothesis test can be established:

H_0 : In terms of age of respondent, there is no difference in grouped median scores for Aging Services.

H_1 : In terms of age of respondent, there is a statistically significant difference in the grouped median scores for Aging Services.

Test statistic: Kruskal-Wallis

Alpha: 0.05

P -Value for Q2e, Aging Services by age: 0.000 (Table 5)

Because the p -value is less than alpha, we can reject the null hypothesis in favor of the test hypothesis, there is a statistically significant difference in grouped median scores for Aging Services. Now that we have established the statistical significance of Q2e: Aging Services and age, we can use table 9 to view the actual grouped median scores. The grouped median response was higher

Table 9: Grouped Median Responses for Q2e: Aging Services

Q2e: Aging Services		
Age	N	Grouped Median
Under 18	43	2.66
18-29	152	2.73
30-39	203	2.84
40-49	201	2.94
50-59	217	3.03
60-69	124	2.91
70-79	32	3.28
80+	3	1.75
--	3	3
Total	978	2.89

for people older than age 40 than the total grouped median, and lower for those under 39. Therefore, service cuts to Aging Services would be more popular with younger residents and less popular with older residents.

Many other questions from the budget simulator were significant based on income, age, and education. Table 10 shows the results for the Kruskal-Wallis test across all variables. Grouped median scores for statistically significant questions can be found in Tables 11-13. Using these tables, county officials can get a general idea of which socio-economic group would be more likely to resist a service cut. Because race was significant across all questions on the budget simulator there was caution in including those results and they have been excluded. It is possible that weighing the data by income distorted the data when calculated by race because such a large majority of respondents identified as Non-Hispanic White. If more racial diversity were added to the sample (and recall that the sample is not representative of the population in terms of race) some questions would likely lose their statistical significance.

Table 10: Kruskal-Wallis Test Results

Kruskal-Wallis Test Results				
Code	Question	P- Value		
		Income	Age	Education
Public Safety & Emergency Services				
Q0a	Mental Health Crisis Responders	0.000*	0.072	0.002*
Q0b	Work Release	0.009*	0.215	0.319
Q0c	Re-Entry Programming	0.000*	0.010*	0.013*
Q0d	Juvenile Offenders	0.017*	0.267	0.089
Q0e	Criminalistics Laboratory	0.000*	0.000*	0.009*
Culture & Recreation				
Q1a	Museums Facilities & Hours	0.002*	0.062	0.082
Q1b	Safety & Outdoor Education	0.011*	0.650	0.336
Q1c	Park Maintenance & Development	0.051	0.250	0.529
Q1d	Recreational Program Fees	0.000*	0.014*	0.150
Q1e	Library Hours	0.003*	0.279	0.004*
Q1f	Library Locations	0.024*	0.362	0.002*
Q1g	Library Collections	0.000*	0.034*	0.013*
Health & Human Services				
Q2a	Child Care Licensure	0.000*	0.213	0.063
Q2b	Family Health Services	0.328	0.009*	0.002*
Q2c	Supported Employment Services	0.002*	0.254	0.378
Q2d	Intake/Outpatient Mental Health Services	0.015*	0.497	0.016*
Q2e	Aging Services	0.043*	0.000*	0.002*
Q2f	Multi-Service Center	0.013*	0.569	0.841
Infrastructure				
Q3a	Snow Removal	0.000*	0.129	0.001*
Q3b	The JO Hours and Trips	0.014*	0.141	0.369
Q3c	The JO Routes	0.000*	0.837	0.868
General Government				
Q4a	Vehicle Tag Renewals & Titles	0.096	0.065	0.074
Q4b	Distance to Voting Location	0.045*	0.000*	0.065
Q4c	Voting Wait Times	0.056	0.003*	0.000*

*p-value<0.05

Table 11: Grouped Median Scores by Household Income for Statistically Significant Questions

Household Income	Grouped Median Scores for Statistically Significant Questions																			
	Q0a	Q0b	Q0c	Q0d	Q0e	Q1a	Q1b	Q1d	Q1e	Q1f	Q1g	Q2a	Q2c	Q2d	Q2e	Q2f	Q3a	Q3b	Q3c	Q4b
Less than \$10,000	3.50	2.50	3.33	3.00	3.25	2.50	3.33	3.50	2.50	2.00	2.75	3.33	3.25	3.33	2.80	3.00	3.00	2.80	2.80	1.60
\$10,000-\$14,999	2.71	2.20	2.67	2.40	4.00	2.67	3.14	2.67	3.00	3.00	3.50	3.17	2.50	2.80	2.67	2.33	2.86	2.60	2.75	2.20
\$15,000-\$24,999	2.40	1.69	1.80	1.93	2.71	1.71	2.36	2.19	2.54	2.67	2.43	2.13	2.73	2.60	2.57	2.21	2.07	2.18	1.69	2.00
\$25,000-\$34,999	2.15	1.95	2.17	2.18	3.38	2.32	2.66	2.53	2.58	2.41	2.89	2.56	2.79	2.86	2.97	2.57	2.66	2.55	2.39	2.25
\$40,000-\$49,999	2.65	2.04	2.28	2.17	3.22	2.26	2.67	2.46	2.24	2.57	2.68	2.62	2.65	2.77	2.94	2.63	2.71	2.37	2.38	2.18
\$50,000-\$74,999	2.39	2.09	2.28	2.36	3.26	2.17	2.58	2.35	2.52	2.49	2.70	2.61	2.65	2.81	2.85	2.58	2.61	2.47	2.47	2.18
\$75,000-\$99,999	2.31	2.15	2.41	2.33	3.15	2.16	2.68	2.37	2.49	2.58	2.79	2.64	2.71	2.68	2.87	2.61	2.63	2.44	2.34	2.16
\$100,000-\$149,999	2.37	2.18	2.38	2.36	3.19	2.21	2.63	2.35	2.33	2.38	2.67	2.72	2.65	2.76	2.97	2.60	2.65	2.33	2.31	2.06
\$150,000-\$199,999	2.49	2.11	2.54	2.41	3.15	2.07	2.65	2.33	2.57	2.35	2.62	2.74	2.82	2.82	3.00	2.63	2.60	2.28	2.07	2.33
\$200,000+	2.39	2.06	2.32	2.35	3.38	2.24	2.64	2.22	2.24	2.27	2.58	2.53	2.52	2.74	2.87	2.53	2.62	2.34	2.11	2.02
Total	2.43	2.08	2.33	2.31	3.22	2.18	2.64	2.39	2.44	2.48	2.71	2.63	2.69	2.77	2.89	2.57	2.62	2.40	2.32	2.14

Table 12: Grouped Median Scores by Education for Statistically Significant Questions

Education	Grouped Median Scores for Statistically Significant Questions										
	Q0a	Q0c	Q0e	Q1e	Q1f	Q1g	Q2b	Q2d	Q2e	Q3a	Q4c
Less than High School Diploma	2.77	2.55	2.88	2.19	2.21	2.32	3.07	2.65	2.59	2.25	2.75
High School Graduate (includes equivalency)	2.64	2.49	3.01	2.42	2.63	2.71	3.04	2.80	2.82	2.46	2.49
Some college, no degree	2.44	2.36	3.38	2.40	2.44	2.76	2.72	2.67	2.90	2.71	2.38
Associate's degree	2.49	2.37	3.41	2.31	2.30	2.78	2.71	2.55	3.09	2.49	2.47
Bachelor's degree	2.37	2.24	3.24	2.51	2.53	2.71	2.79	2.75	2.89	2.67	2.34
Graduate or professional degree	2.36	2.33	3.23	2.50	2.51	2.78	2.95	2.88	2.96	2.65	2.40
--	2.72	1.70	3.60	1.52	1.57	2.42	2.43	2.68	2.43	2.28	2.83
Total	2.43	2.33	3.22	2.44	2.48	2.71	2.86	2.77	2.89	2.62	2.42

Table 13: Grouped Median Scores by Age for Statistically Significant Questions

Age	Grouped Median Scores for Statistically Significant Questions							
	Q0c	Q0e	Q1d	Q1g	Q2b	Q2e	Q4b	Q4c
Under 18	2.47	2.77	2.58	2.53	3.00	2.66	1.74	2.45
18-29	2.38	3.40	2.51	2.75	3.04	2.73	2.21	2.58
30-39	2.04	3.21	2.42	2.68	2.76	2.84	2.05	2.32
40-49	2.33	3.10	2.38	2.77	2.84	2.94	2.07	2.30
50-59	2.38	3.33	2.23	2.71	2.89	3.03	2.22	2.45
60-69	2.37	3.31	2.30	2.65	2.75	2.91	2.21	2.45
70-79	2.61	2.96	2.54	3.04	2.87	3.28	2.49	2.53
80+	2.17	2.50	1.75	1.38	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75
--	2.71	3.00	2.24	3.29	3.29	3.00	2.44	1.88
Total	2.33	3.22	2.39	2.71	2.86	2.89	2.14	2.42

V. Recommendations

In the first year utilizing the budget simulator there were many things Johnson County did well in order to meet the stated goals of creating a budget simulator and getting citizens to participate. In continuing to utilize the simulator for citizen engagement, there are a few recommendations that will help build a base for institutionalizing the simulator as a citizen engagement tool. While the goals for the first year were simple and achievable, in moving forward it is important to broaden those goals to encompass both long term and short term goals, while still keeping them achievable. By utilizing more broadly defined goals, not only for implementation, but for what questions or issues the simulator should help answer, will allow Johnson County to measure progress and evaluate the engagement tools utilized. It will also help in designing and selecting engagement tools by providing an outline or parameters for framing the engagement conversation. Goal setting will also help in determining the future direction and planning for engagement. Depending on the vision Johnson County has for citizen engagement, some goals will be more innate, others more intricate.

Cycle of Engagement

Budget shortfalls across the country have caused many local governments to turn to citizen engagement to address an urgent need during a single budget cycle. But because of constraints such as changing political environments, lack of support by the governing body, staff time and resources required for effective participation or because of perceived failures in attempted participation mechanisms, far fewer governments choose to continue engagement past the initial year. Another issue is that governments approach participation as a linear event and not cyclical. Much like the life-cycle of the budget, citizen participation should be cyclical. Often local governments engage citizens through a multitude of disconnected methods, ranging in representativeness and type of communication. However, in order to institutionalize participation, it is important for local

governments to consciously consider and integrate existing singular citizen engagement tools, to create a feeder cycle of engagement.

Figure 5: Cycle of Engagement



In the center of the cycle is process management, which as demonstrated by Edelenbos and Klijn (2005) is the variable most correlated with successful outcomes- even more so than representativeness and the types of engagement used. It is important the staff and Commission are aware of the goals, are working together to achieve those goals and understand why those goals are important to the integrity of the participation cycle. The cycle illustrated in Figure 5 above is anchored by two main events- the budget simulator and the citizen survey. Even if these are not utilized annually, they provide important opportunities for large scale citizen engagement.

Johnson County did well to utilize the focus groups before designing the simulator. By conducting these smaller scale engagement opportunities, it can help in designing a survey or

simulator to ensure the questions the staff and Commission feel are important are aligned with citizens' perceptions. Engaging citizens this way will allow for insight and refinement before sending out the finalized tool. Having clearly stated goals will also help in the question design phase to ensure questions are meeting those measurable goals, rather than designing questions without targeted goals or identified needs in mind.

In reviewing the results of the simulator, or any engagement tool, it is important to follow-up with feedback on the results. Occasionally, even with good process management, a question may provide a result that is difficult to explain, or one that deviates drastically from an expected result. In these cases, it is important to be able to follow-up with some participants to gather more information before moving forward to the implementation phase. Feedback should be used not only by stating the results of the tool and how it was used to make a decision, but to help continue the conversation.

Marketing & Communication Plan

The goal setting discussed earlier should be directly incorporated into the marketing and communication plan. In designing a plan it is important that not only are the right types of engagement activities selected, but the activities are communicated effectively, at the right time, to the right audience. Creating a branded image for engagement, utilizing a diverse basket of opportunities for engagement and ensuring the correct timing for engagement are all important. But the marketing and communication plan should not be completely citizen focused. It should also have elements dedicated to staff utilization, as well as how to involve and communicate with the Commission on utilization of engagement tools, as well as how to manage the Commission expectations. As with the citizens, the timing and creation of a continuum of engagement with the Commission is an important element to institutionalizing engagement activities. These goals should be revisited and reevaluated periodically and adjusted as necessary.

In creating a marketing and communication plan, here are some questions to answer and goals to consider:

- Who is the target? Is it all citizens, only registered voters, only property owners? Knowing this will help when framing the questions.
- How will input be utilized in the decision-making process? What budgetary questions or citizen preferences do staff or the Commission need answered?
- What are the incentives to participate? What are the benefits of participation to the citizen?
- Expand marketing to capture a wider audience and begin marketing sooner in the process

by:

- Providing a PowerPoint or education to all County staff, so that when they have contact with citizens during the normal course of business, or when they are away from the office, they can be directing residents and friends to the engagement tool, or making people aware of upcoming engagement opportunities.
- Provide information on the simulator in the Johnson County wastewater bills highlighting where people can go to complete the simulator, including access through the public library system or other public locations that have internet access.
- Utilize the library system with its internet access and locations across the county. Have a pop up when people log-in asking them to participate in the survey.
- Identify other community groups, churches and organizations that could assist with marketing the simulator, and/or that provide internet access for Johnson County residents.
- Go to the public school and utilize the simulator to get the younger generation actively engaged and involved.

- Make the simulator compatible with mobile devices. Equip volunteers with mobile devices and station them at important retail outlets like Price Chopper, Wal-Mart or Target to broaden access to the simulator.
- Just as Johnson County is moving toward institutionalized participation, how do we institutionalize participation in our citizens? How do we build a continuous dialogue? Once we have a citizen engaged, how do we keep them engaged?
 - At the end of the simulator, have a pop up that asks if the citizen would be interested in future engagement? Or if they would be willing to participate in follow-up engagement after the results of the simulator were tabulated.
 - Have a link to sign up for newsletters, notifications, or other county information.

Sample Validity

As the results of the survey indicated, having a clear and strong marketing and communication plan will be important in capturing some of the minority populations that were under-represented in the first simulator cycle. When conducting a simulator, it is an important goal to make sure you are capturing a representative sample of the key demographics in the county population. Although this initial simulator fell short of that goal, there are statistical methods to account for the shortage of participation by minorities and the low income. The method most commonly used, post-stratification, takes the responses gathered within a certain parameter and multiplies the responses to produce the statistically desired response level. While using post-stratification can be helpful, it makes the assumption that given those responses collected within that indicator, all other responders would have responded the same. For example, say to have a representative sample of those with an income of less than \$10,000, there should have been 10 respondents, but only 5 were received. Of those five, three answered “a” and two answered “b”;

then given that, post stratification would assume, had five more observations been obtained, three would have answered “a” and two “b”.

The farther the number of observations fall from the desired number of observations, the less confident one can be in the validity of post-stratification; however the closer the actual number of observations come to the desired number of observations, the more reliable using post-stratification becomes. Given this understanding, it is important going forward for Johnson County to create a marketing and communication plan that focuses on capturing more low-income and minorities in the simulator to further decrease the gap between desired observations. This will make the simulator more representative of the actual population in Johnson County and if post-stratification is necessary, will allow a greater confidence level in the observations collected.

Commitment to Continue

Developing any new method takes time and effort. It will take commitment by staff, elected officials and the citizens to make it work. While much of the heavy lifting has already been completed, patience will be needed as the simulator and its use by the County continues to evolve. If the County can persevere through some initial frustrations, the budget simulator presents some exciting possibilities for engagement. Even in this first attempt, the budget simulator has already provided value. In addition to the input given by citizens, many lessons have been learned regarding what went well and what did not. While many suggestions have been offered for improvement in this report, perhaps the most important recommendation is just to keep trying.

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Interview with Project Manager of Consensus KC
Friday, April 13, 2012
Conducted by Susan Mong

1. **Do you anticipate that this process will this be institutionalized?**
 - It is my understanding that this will happen next year again and hopefully into the future.
2. **Why were student focus groups added to each district?**
 - Chairman Eilert really wanted this component added. He also did attend all 12 of the focus groups.
3. **Share your experience/understanding of citizen engagement in local government?**
 - 70 percent of communities have town hall as their main citizen engagement which really provides no input in the process given that most budgets are minutes from the vote.
 - Citizens are capable of making hard choices / given the ethical framework and this first step for Johnson County will help provide that opportunity.
4. **What was the goal of including the focus groups?**
 - Goal was to move community to a proactive and meaningful role - Citizen of Jo Co responded well.
 - Recruitment Goal - to get a mix of 14 interesting JoCo residents with no political agenda.
5. **How did you recruit/ select your participants?**
 - Started with cold calling – this did not turn out to be effective
 - Discovered that when people pick up the phone they were pretty cooperative and engaged 26-37 percent said yes when reached
 - But getting them to pick up the phone was the challenge.
 - Then moved to contacting – schools, neighborhoods, business groups
 - Rate of no show is typically 20-40 percent - for the Joco focus groups there was a 0 percent no show rate.
 - People believe their vote would make difference.
6. **What communication did you have with the participants prior to the event?**
 - 3 Contacts were made to focus group participants prior
 - sent notice /confirmation
 - confirmed, by email about a week out
 - day before – called to confirm
 - no pre-screening
 - goal was open dialogue . No family or employees could participate – and had to be comfortable with technology
7. **How do you see this information influencing the budget decision making and what would you suggest moving forward?**

- consistent values came up – seemed to drive decision making amongst participants – this will be shown in the report under themes.
- Interesting - Tax increase - not unanimous but ½ were willing to consider a rise - It did arise spontaneously amongst groups.
- love to see how commissioners take their info into account but understand they may not agree .
- larger scale comm. engagement is in order based on feedback.
- Learn more - public want more – want to be able to offer creative solutions/ support to increase revenue

8. **What was the most challenging part of this project?**

- Recruitment - the timeline was designed to be sure this information was completed and ready for to meet budget timelines and provide input – as a result it was an aggressive timeline. I plan to fine tune the recruitment strategies and use mail next time to reach more citizens. As a note - - of the 1400 who took the took simulator - adults from the focus groups made up 5 percent of results

Interview with Focus Group attendee, District 3
March 1st, District 3 focus group (one of six for adults).
Interviewed by Susan Mong on Monday 4/9/2012 9:30 am.

1. What did you think of the overall planning and execution of the focus group?

I thought it was very good both in terms of explaining why they were conducting the focus group and how they executed the focus group.

With today's technology, it was not that hard to set up and it provides transparency for citizens.

2. What can you share about how it was setup? The size and provisions?

There were 12-15 people. They provided everyone with a laptop. There was a brief introduction with some instruction and then we all individually completed the online simulator independent of one another.

3. How would you explain the budget simulator?

It provided several services and county functions and then offered a continuum of choices in order to meet the budget cuts. I like this because many times you hear in the political world, all or nothing and here you were able to look at different levels of cuts to meet your objective using a scale.

4. Were there leaders, elected officials in attendance?

Yes, Commissioner Peterson and Chairman Eilert were in attendance. They were mostly observers, but Chairman Eilert did share at the end and thanked them for coming.

5. Did the participants interact with each at all or discuss the process?

After we completed the budget simulation, we had discussion. Many were not able to meet the budget cut that was needed, but I was.

One concept that should have been explained more was the concept of spending money to save money. It was not intuitive – a kind of reverse logic - and worked differently than the other questions. You could save money on public safety (spend \$1 and save\$5) by investing in preventative services/ counseling, but the participants did not seem to understand this and did not utilize this as a way to meet the budget. They should of spent more time educating the participants on this particular question in my opinion.

The other neat thing was in our discussion after the simulator, there were some great suggestions by people who seemed to have professional experience in health care etc. I hope that is applied somehow.

6. What did you learn that you did not understand before?

The main thing I gained was the relationship between spending on jails and mental health services. I did not understand or had never seen the hard numbers/facts on these 2 things so I gained a better understanding and appreciation for the role of Mental Health.

7. What questions did you have or wonder about in the process?

I had to accept without much proof that the numbers they were presenting and the pricing of the scenarios was accurate?

8. Was there ever a discussion of why raising taxes was not part of the budge simulation?

The Chairman touched on this at the end, that they had decided to hold the line on taxes so the simulator had that assumption?

9. What future communication /follow up was planned for all the attendees to learn about the outcome of the budget?

There was not communication on this. I just assume that we can go online to see the results?

10. On a scale of 1-10, what would you rate this focus group experience?

I would rate it a 10. The very idea that they are doing this kind of participation is really important and as a bonus it was done really well.

**Interview with Johnson County Budget Staff Person, Friday April 13, 2012
Budget and Finance Office, Johnson County
Conducted by Susan Mong**

- 1) Was this project staff or council driven?

Prior to the 2013 budgeting process beginning, The County Commissioners charged the budget staff to introduce citizen engagement into the budget process. IT became clear that we were moving out of the efficiency saving phase of cuts and were now moving towards possible cuts in service that the public would feel.

The Citizen Engagement Committee was formed including:

**Budget Director
Budget/Finance staff
County Manager Intern (an MPA student)
Complete list in report**

They did a lot of research initially to find out best approaches, academic articles and best practices. The MPA intern was charged with this.

They quickly decided to do

**Budget simulator and
Focus Groups**

They had to then figure out a way to list service priorities with financial impact and make it understandable with little to no knowledge.

- 2) Are there other counties you modeled this after? Cities?

No , there was no county they knew of that had a good model in place. They found models they liked at federal level, united kingdom and 2 state models. – in report.

- 3) How did you choose the methods for citizen engagement?

Based on research conducted by MPA intern.

- 4) Who was involved in the budget simulator design – how was it done?

The AIMS Dept helped build the simulator model based on what the committee designed on paper/ visualized. They tool the approach of doing this in house for a couple of reasons: first, they wanted to have the control and ability to tweak the design easily. The cost would have been \$15,000- \$20,000 while in house they were able to use 2 weeks of staff time instead (cost not figured at this time)

They also would then own the data and there would be no conflicts of ownership.

- 5) In the budget simulator, there were 5 options/ services chosen in the simulator? Why were some specific and some very general in the proposed cuts? why were some services not included?

They actually used the “targeted projects” that each dept received at the very beginning of the budget process as a starting point to choose which dept/services to include in the simulator. They included no depts. That were not service oriented because they did not feel the public would have the expertise and time to understand the depts. Purpose etc. They focused on direct services.

Criteria was:

- 1) Direct services
- 2) Service or dept had to have Significant portion of their funding from the county (Developmental Supports is an example where this is not the case– Medicare funding, SS - lots of state and federal funding over which county has not control) Mental health is another example of heavy state/federal funding.
- 3) Reduction in funding could not shift cost to another department or cause a bigger cost down the road. Deferred maintenance were not options included - Things like road maintenance, water infrastructure etc. are examples of cost cutting that would cost more down the road or shift cost to another dept. If cut.

Note – they did get buy-in/ approval from depts. On wording in the simulator to be sure they were representing the services accurately and the targeted projections.

- 6) Why was an explicit tax increase not provided as an option?

They went back and forth on this, but it was the value of the commissioners not to include this as a question.

However, if you noticed on the simulator (at the top of the simulator) , if a resident did not make the necessary cuts, the taxes on their property would show the increase as a result so Benz argued that indirectly they did communicate that higher property taxes would results.

- 7) I asked about the flaw for citizens who listed an apartment or a business as an address and how the tax amount would reflect the entire complex etc.

This problem was made note of during our interview.

- 8) Results

Commented that they had about 1300 submissions (not huge – about one percent) but they know it is a starting point.

- 9) How was marketing and communication involved? / what strategies were used to promote it?

- 1) They had it on the website
- 2) They did a press release
- 3) Social media was minimal
- 4) Signage went in library
- 5) Municipalities, and county depts. Listed the info on their websites
- 6) KC Star – could not get them to cover.

10) Biggest challenges

Short turnaround time between completing Bud Sim. And having it go live. – did even tweak a few things right after it was up.

Looking at results - Tension between public wishes and cuts that have to be made at the end of the day.

Dealing with 2 depts that have elected officials (Sheriff and DA) because service wording and service cut or increase could impact staffing etc. had to be extremely careful with wording here.

Designing the simulator for a wide variety of participants.

Finding the sweet spot in the simulator with detail of information/explanation and making the simulator friendly to citizens who may not have a lot of knowledge.

Was really hard. Did not want to create something that took longer than 20 minutes.

11) How you seen success with institutionalizing these tools?

We would like to see this happen and are operating understand the assumption to gear up for next year and make improvements.

But at the same time, the board has to find this information valuable, and actually use it in their decision making. This is a lot of work so we will be waiting to see if the board of CC will apply this and incorporate this into how they make decisions.

12) Will it be included in strategic planning process?

This is unclear at this time

13) What follow up is planned to report the results?

Focus group participants will receive results in the mail about this process.

14) Tell me about the involvement of the high school students as focus participants – why was this done?

They wanted to learn about the future youth who could be our citizens, what their preferences and vision for the future of Joco could be. They also thought this could create more buzz with parents, adults teachers etc.

15) Who will this inform the final budget decisions?

it will go up on website and probably a press release.

16) What would you do differently?

Involve depts. More in the process – will take more time, but will need to drill down deeper to give citizens more exposure and more choices, which they clearly stated they wanted.

Broader group of population
More random selection

Case Study: Priority Lincoln Budgeting for Outcomes

Facing a budget crisis in 2008, the City of Lincoln decided to adopt an outcomes-based budgeting approach and kick off an initiative called “Priority Lincoln”. The City identified eight strategic priorities for 2008-09: Accountable Government, Destination Lincoln, Economic Opportunity, Effective Transportation, Environmental Quality, Healthy & Productive People, Livable Neighborhoods and Safety & Security. The Mayor and staff invited the public to give input on the ordering of the priorities, the priorities themselves and budget funding options including input on revenues and expenditures.

The City of Lincoln partnered with the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center to provide five different public participation methods:

1. Scientific Telephone Survey: A random-digit-dialing procedure was used to obtain a representative cross-section of residents.
 - Strength: reliable insight into views of residents
 - Weakness: point in time assessment
2. Deliberative Discussion: 51 participants identified from the scientific telephone survey participated in a day-long discussion about budget issues. Portions were broadcast via public television to educate others in the community. Pre- and post-event surveys were given to participants to measure knowledge.
 - Strength: post-discussion responses reflect random views of residents who have been informed about budgeting issues
 - Weakness: time commitment to participate
3. Non-Random Survey: available on the internet as well as a paper copy
 - Strength: accessible to many in the community
 - Weakness: results cannot be generalized to other residents; too complex
4. Town Hall Meetings: Series of meetings were held and the Mayor attended each meeting. Department Heads and other high officials were also in attendance.
 - Strength: provided residents the opportunity to interact with other residents and city officials and voice concerns to city officials
 - Weakness: too much information for the end of the workday
5. Focus Group: Facilitated by a professional facilitator with four residents randomly selected from the scientific telephone survey list. Answered same post-event survey as the deliberative discussion group.
 - Strength: provided a small group an opportunity to thoroughly discuss budget issues
 - Weakness: difficult to draw conclusions because attended by so few people

Budget information materials were prepared and sent to participants prior to the deliberative discussion and focus group and made available on the Public Policy Center’s website for anyone who wanted to review them.

The City of Lincoln continues their efforts and evidence can be found on the Taking Charge website, <http://lincoln.ne.gov/city/mayor/takingcharge/index.htm>. Residents can continue to stay informed about city programs and priorities.