

A SUMMARY OF CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN WASHINGTON STATE GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

2007 Citizen Tour

Government Management Accountability &
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CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN WASHINGTON STATE

For the second year in a row, Governor Chris Gregoire and her senior staff visited communities across the state to engage citizens in a broad conversation about the role of government, its purpose and objectives, and how well it is meeting those objectives.

Hearing directly from citizens – people who are not lobbyists or part of special interest groups – is vital. The views of citizens must be incorporated into the work that is carried out on their behalf. Moreover, Washington citizens demand more accountability. They want to know what they are getting for their tax dollars, and they expect good customer service. Citizens, however, are more than just customers. They should be partners in the institution of government and the democratic process.

Citizen feedback from these outreach efforts influences public policy and legislative debate, how priorities are paid for, how progress is measured, and how results are communicated back to the public. In both 2006 and 2007, the Governor and her staff developed a multi-level approach to engage citizens in their state government:

- **Citizen Workshops:** Approximately 250 Washington citizens attended two-hour workshops in five different communities around Washington State to discuss and prioritize performance measures. Citizens were chosen at random by an independent research firm to discuss how state government performance is measured in areas such as education, health, the economy, and transportation.
- **Community Leader Meetings:** The Governor's senior staff and cabinet members met with community leaders representing a broad spectrum of interests and organizations to discuss the most important issues in communities across the state.
- **Town Halls:** Governor Gregoire spoke with citizens in an open community dialogue about what needs to happen to move the state forward. Citizens were given the opportunity to ask the Governor directly about the issues that impact their lives. The Town Halls were open for anyone to attend, and drew over 3000 participants in six locations across the state: Seattle, Bellingham, Grays Harbor County (Aberdeen), Yakima, Spokane Valley, and Tacoma.

Citizens who might not otherwise be involved in their government were invited and given the opportunity to be heard. State agency directors heard directly about issues and the impact of their work in communities they serve. Citizens were able to speak candidly with the Governor and citizens in need received answers and assistance in following up on their concerns and suggestions to improve Washington State government.

We believe that citizen engagement brings citizens closer to their government, and the citizen focus is improving government performance by making sure we measure what really matters.

CITIZEN WORKSHOPS

This year, workshops were held in the following five communities:

- Seattle
- Bellingham/Whatcom County
- Aberdeen/Grays Harbor County
- Yakima
- Spokane Valley

The workshops were designed by an independent research team (Elway Research, Inc. and FLT Consulting, Inc.), in collaboration with the Governor's Office. For each workshop, the research team selected about 50 citizens at random from the list of registered voters in the surrounding community and invited them to attend. Locations were recommended by the consultant, within time and budget constraints, with the objectives of reaching across the state to represent as many citizens as possible and including a diverse set of communities.

Workshops were facilitated by the independent research team. Staff members from the Governor's GMAP program (Government Management Accountability and Performance) and the Office of Financial Management attended each workshop to answer questions and explain how citizen feedback would be used to influence legislation, budget priorities, and performance measures to hold state agencies accountable for specific results.

The workshops lasted for two hours, and included interactive electronic data-gathering, facilitated group discussion, and collaborative work in small groups. Each workshop followed the same outline:

1. Welcome and introduction by facilitator and Governor's Office senior staff members.
2. Introduction to the use of interactive electronic devices to provide instant, anonymous feedback during the workshops.
3. Brief discussion of how well state government is working, followed by priority ranking of key policy areas: education, health, economy, social services, transportation, environment, and public safety.
4. Collaborative small group work: evaluating and prioritizing current performance measures for two key policy areas.
5. Facilitated large group report-out: Discussion about current performance measures for the two key policy areas, final ranking of performance measures and discussion about why the top performance measures are the most important to try to improve results in our state government.

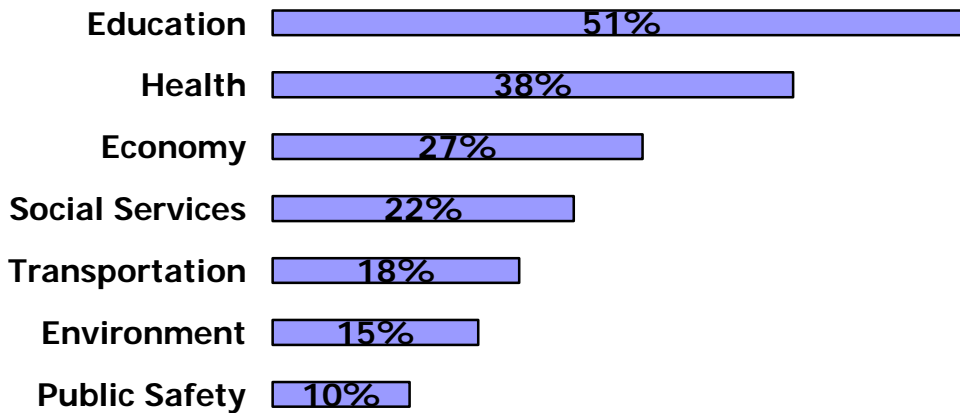
PRIORITIZED AREAS OF GOVERNMENT: SUMMARY

Workshop participants voted for the area they felt should be the top priority of Washington state government, followed by the second most important priority.

A total of 51 percent of citizens ranked education as either the top or the second most important priority. Health was second with 38% of the total votes.

Last year, citizens ranked education, the economy, and health as the top three priority areas. This year, education and health still topped the list, but social services had a stronger showing behind the economy.

GRAPH A: TOP TWO PRIORITY AREAS OF STATE GOVERNMENT



PRIORITIZED AREAS OF GOVERNMENT: BY COMMUNITY

The following table compares the priorities as ranked by citizens in each community. Education was ranked by all of the workshops as the top priority area for state government, although health was essentially tied with education in Yakima and Spokane Valley.

TABLE 1: PRIORITIES OF GOVERNMENT – BY COMMUNITY

Seattle	Bellingham	Grays Harbor	Yakima	Spokane Valley
1. Education	1. Education	1. Education	1. Health*	1. Education*
2. Transportation	2. Health	2. Health	2. Education*	2. Health*
3. Safety/Security	3. Environment	3. Economy	3. Economy	3. Economy
4. Health	4. Transportation	4. Social Svcs	4. Social Svcs	4. Public Safety
5. Natural Resources	5. Economy	5. Transportation	5. Public Safety	5. Social Svcs
6. Economy	6. Social Svcs	6. Environment	6. Environment	6. Environment
	7. Public Safety	7. Public Safety	7. Transportation	7. Transportation

*Health and Education essentially tied for first place.
 Note: Based on citizen feedback from the first workshop (Seattle), Safety/Security was split into two separate priority areas for subsequent workshops. The category name of “Natural Resources” was also changed to “Environment” to clarify the topic area.

Citizens ranked education and health as the top two areas in all workshops except Seattle. Citizens ranked the economy third in Grays Harbor, Yakima, and Spokane Valley. In the individual workshops, social services ranged from the third to the sixth priority. When workshop data from across the state were combined, social services essentially tied with economy for third place.

In 2006, citizens in each workshop consistently ranked education, the economy, and health as the first, second, and third priorities for Washington state government. However, in the 2007 workshops, rankings of the top priorities differed depending on the community. Two stand-outs were transportation in Seattle and the environment in Bellingham. In Seattle, citizens ranked transportation as the second priority. Other workshops ranked Transportation in the bottom tier,

with Yakima and Spokane Valley ranking it last. In Bellingham, citizens ranked the environment as their third priority. In all other workshops, the environment rated second to last.

A lower ranking of priority by citizens did not necessarily mean they considered that area to be of lower importance. In general, when citizens ranked an area as lower priority, they said it was because that area was doing fairly well in their community and they felt more effort and attention should be directed to improving results in other areas. Conversely, citizens ranked areas as higher priority when they felt government needed to address issues or problems in that area more urgently.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Participants received simple charts with data on several performance measures in seven priority areas of government. Each workshop was assigned measures from at least one of the three top priority areas from 2006 (education, economy, health), plus one other key area of government. The facilitator then asked the groups to evaluate the performance measures in each policy area.

TABLE 2: PERFORMANCE MEASURE AREAS DISCUSSED BY WORKSHOP

Seattle	Bellingham	Grays Harbor	Yakima	Spokane Valley
Health Transportation	Education Safety	Economy Environment	Education Social Services	Economy Health

Participants worked together in groups of eight to ten to assess the relative value of measures used by the state to gauge performance. They were asked to identify the performance results they thought needed the most attention or improvement. Participants anonymously ranked the measures in order of priority. They also were given the opportunity to provide written feedback about current measures or suggest other performance measures for the state to consider.

TABLE 3: PRIORITIZED PERFORMANCE MEASURES

EDUCATION 1. High School Graduation Rate* 2. Low Income Student Achievement Gap* 3. Graduates in High Demand Fields* 4. Test Scores: Reading & Math	HEALTH 1. Health Insurance Coverage* 2. Infant Mortality* 3. Adult Obesity* 4. Tobacco Use – Teen 5. Tobacco Use - Adult	SOCIAL SERVICES 1. Preventing Child Re-victimization* 2. Population Above Poverty* 3. Long-term Care 4. Employment for the Disabled
ECONOMY 1. Job Growth 2. Business Survivability* 3. Household Income* 4. Employment Rate* 5. Median Hourly Wage 6. Median Home Price	TRANSPORTATION 1. Condition of Highways* 2. Condition of State Bridges* 3. Travel Times in Major Corridors* 4. Projects Completed On-Time and On-Budget*	ENVIRONMENT 1. Toxic Releases* 2. River & Stream Water Quality* 3. Air Quality 4. Puget Sound Water Quality 5. Endangered Wildlife*
SAFETY 1. Re-Offense Rate* 2. Crime Rates* 3. Emergency Responder Communication	*In the 2006 workshops, citizens rated measures marked with an asterisk as one of the “Top 4” most useful in its category.	

4. Highway Fatalities*	
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See also [“Summary Tables & Performance Measure Charts”](#)

EDUCATION:

Education was discussed in the beginning of all workshops because it was ranked as the top priority. Workshop participants in Bellingham and Yakima discussed the topic more in depth and ranked the high school graduation rate as the most important measure for education. They wanted a high school diploma to mean something. Several participants mentioned citizenship, arts and languages as important aspects of a well-rounded high school graduate. In nearly every workshop, business owners expressed frustration about job applicants who had graduated from high school, but could not fill out a job application.

In addition to improving the graduation rate, many parents felt that ensuring a good education was more important than graduating on time; they stated if it takes more time to graduate and the student is being held to certain standards, the school or student should not be penalized. Many citizens agreed with the need for standards, but expressed frustration about the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) exams.

Closing the achievement gap was ranked a close second. The achievement gap measure compares overall test scores with the scores of low-income students. Participants suggested revising the measure to focus on achievement gaps regardless of the perceived cause (in this case, low income). Several questioned whether lower income automatically meant lower performance, and cited examples of low performance for other reasons such as lack of parent involvement and poor health. Citizens in the 2006 workshops also ranked the high school graduation rate as the best measure of success in education, with closing the achievement gap second.

HEALTH:

Health was rated as the first or second priority by all but one workshop. Workshop participants in Seattle and Spokane Valley discussed the topic in more detail and ranked health insurance coverage as the most important measure for health.

Health care was a key issue for citizens at all of the workshops. The current measure used in the workshop comes from the Washington State Population Survey for persons from 0 – 64 years old. The measure shows the percentage of population that have at least one type of health care insurance coverage (e.g., employee-sponsored, Medicaid or Medicare, military, public or private).

The workshop information did not include an explanation of the measure, and several people questioned the validity of the data. For example, the graph showed that in 2006, 90% of people aged 0 – 64 were covered. Participants asserted that it was more important to measure whether health care insurance was **affordable**, provided **adequate** health care coverage (not just whether people had any), and whether people had **access** to health care.

Citizens in the 2006 workshops also ranked health care coverage as the most important measures of success. Notably, the percentages of participants ranking this measure as their first or second choice increased from 58% in 2006 to 91% this year.

ECONOMY:

Economic indicators were discussed in more detail in Grays Harbor County (Aberdeen) and Spokane Valley. Participants chose job growth as the top performance measure (54%), followed very closely by business survivability (51%). In last year’s workshops, citizens rated median household income as the top measure, followed by job growth.

The economy was more of a concern on the eastern side of the state. Citizens talked about the difference in economic opportunity between their communities and the Puget Sound area. Participants emphasized that just counting the number of new jobs created was not as important as measuring whether new jobs paid a **good living wage**. They also mentioned the need to disaggregate the data and distinguish job growth by region to see differences across the state.

Business survivability moved to a close second this year after tying for third in 2006. The current measure shows the percent of **new** businesses in 2002 that were still in business after the first three years. Participants in both workshops this year acknowledged the importance of new businesses succeeding. However, they also suggested that the state find a way to measure whether **established businesses are continuing to thrive**. Citizens in both workshops gave examples of “big box” stores entering the area and forcing long-time businesses to close shop.

SOCIAL SERVICES:

Preventing the re-abuse of children was by far the most important performance measure for the social services category. Seventy-six percent of citizens chose this measure as either their first or second priority. The importance of this measure increased from last year’s workshops. In 2006, **preventing child re-abuse** was ranked first, but at 43%. Population above poverty was a close second last year, with 40% saying it was the top priority.

This year, **quality of long-term care** edged out the percent of population above the poverty line for the number two spot. The long-term care measure focused on protecting the elderly client’s health and safety by matching them with services to fit their needs. We also heard concerns about long-term care and the cost and quality of care during the discussions on health.

TRANSPORTATION:

Citizens in Seattle discussed the transportation measures in more detail. Last year, the biggest issue for workshop participants was ensuring projects were built on time and on budget, followed by travel times. This year, participants considered additional measures on the condition of highways and state bridges. Sixty-one percent of participants chose condition of highways as either the first or second priority. Condition of state bridges was nearly a tie with 59%.

Participants ranked travel (commute) times third and on time/on budget projects last. When asked to explain their rankings, the majority of Seattle participants were frustrated about commute times, but they also expressed concern about the condition of the Alaskan Way viaduct in Seattle (and whether it should be considered as a bridge or highway – it’s both). On-time and on-budget projects ranked last for two main reasons: part of the group believed that over 90% on-time and on-budget completion was commendable, while others in the group questioned the validity of the data.

ENVIRONMENT:

Workshop participants ranked the amount of toxic releases into the air, water, and land as the top measure for the environment category. Last year, toxic releases was also the top-ranked measure. River and water quality ranked second in both years as well. Citizens this year said they ranked toxic releases first because they felt that preventing toxic releases would lead automatically to improvements in other areas such as river and stream quality, air quality, endangered wildlife, and the condition of Puget Sound.

PUBLIC SAFETY:

Last year, workshop participants ranked property and violent crime rates as the top measure. This year, citizens discussed offenders returning to the community after incarceration, and talked about the importance of education, job skills, and social services (housing, mental health, addiction services) in preventing recidivism. They said that breaking the cycle of returning to prison, as

measured by the rate of re-offense (recidivism), was the most important measure of success, with property and violent crime rates second.

Overall, citizens ranked public safety at the lowest priority this year compared to fourth place last year. Again, citizens did not equate the lower ranking with lower level of importance. In several workshops, citizens stated they felt relatively safe in their community, or that they saw public safety as a local issue.

COMMUNITY LEADER MEETINGS

State agency directors from the Governor’s Cabinet met with community leaders in six communities across the state: Seattle, Bellingham, Grays Harbor, Yakima, Spokane Valley, and Tacoma. Cabinet members had conversations with a diverse group of leaders, ranging from businesses to non-profit organizations to community activists. See Appendix B for the list of community leaders.

Community leaders shared their views of the most important priorities in their communities, how their issues might impact the work of state government, and how the community leaders and state government could build a better future together.

Across the state, community leaders echoed concerns expressed by citizens in the workshops:

- **The importance of education and of creating a skilled workforce.** Education was the most common recurring theme in the community leader conversations. Repeatedly, leaders spoke about the importance of keeping kids in school and graduating students with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace. Leaders emphasized the need for alternative paths beyond high school in addition to four-year colleges, such as apprenticeships and trade skills training.
- **Rising costs and accessibility of health care.** Many community leaders identified affordable, adequate health care as issues for businesses and families. They viewed the high cost of health care as a burden for both businesses and individuals.
- **Economic opportunity beyond the Puget Sound.** Community leaders from Grays Harbor, Yakima, and Spokane Valley emphasized economic opportunity and attention in their communities. Specifically, they mentioned the need for a skilled workforce, business development, and business retention (both large industry and small businesses).
- **Other: Mental health and immigration issues.** Leaders in Yakima and Bellingham were concerned about the effects of federal immigration policies on their communities.

TOWN HALLS

The Governor hosted town halls in six communities across the state to hold an open conversation with citizens. Unlike other events sometimes held by elected officials, these Town Halls were unscripted, and open to anyone who wanted to attend. Citizens with computer access were asked to register so planners could ensure adequate seating was available. However, in nearly every location, public turnout exceeded both planning projections and expectations.

About 500 people participated in each town hall conversation, with the largest turnout in Spokane Valley.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AT EACH TOWN HALL (APPROXIMATE)

Seattle	Bellingham	Aberdeen	Yakima	Spokane Valley	Tacoma
450	550	350	500	600	550

The Governor's Office staff were present to take notes and follow up on citizen issues and concerns. In addition, citizens who attended the Town Halls were given the opportunity to fill out "comment cards" if they wished to communicate further with the Governor. The Governor's Office received – and responded to - over 550 constituent contacts including comment cards, calls, and emails.

TVW, Washington State's public affairs network, independently filmed four of the Town Halls (Seattle, Bellingham, Yakima, and Tacoma). They are available for viewing at www.tvw.org.