

Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee

2002/2003 Annual Report

In many ways, 2002/2003 proved to be a watershed year for the Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC) and its Office of Citizen Involvement (OCI). Continuing budget shortfalls in the county led to a cut in the Office budget of nearly 50% from the 2001/2002 budget to the 2003/2004 budget and a resulting reduction in staff from 3 positions to 1.5 positions, bringing us below the two staff positions spelled out by county ordinance. This loss of staff included the unexpected loss of our long-standing Executive Director, and the immediate result was a blow to staff and volunteer morale as well as a loss of productive capacity to implement and oversee outreach efforts. Nonetheless, the members of the CIC and its staff moved forward with a number of initiatives to focus the direction of the organization and expand our outreach both within County departments and out into the community at large. We look forward to expanding our outreach and integration efforts in 2003/2004.

Innovative Leadership in Difficult Times

As an organization, we were confronted with the alternatives of recreating ourselves or facing the prospect of continuing decline in financial resources and programs. The CIC and OCI refocused and prioritized their activities towards more direct citizen outreach and enhancement of existing programs, and in so doing accomplished more with less this year. We hit the ground running, immediately taking decisive steps toward a new vision of what citizen involvement can look like in this county and how best to achieve it. Transitioning to a leaner, more effective organization required strong, innovative leadership, courageous, consistent staff and hard-working volunteers. We were blessed with that and more, including improved working relations with the Chair's Office through its Constituent Relations Director and CIC liaison, Andy Smith. These improved relations were not only reflected in joint projects (such as the Citizen Budget Forums) but also in more forthright dealings with the committee during this year's budgeting process.

Revisiting our Roots

Our first act this year was to hold a retreat at which volunteers and county staff heard from former CIC members and county commissioners and gleaned a sense of the history and mission of the organization as an institution within the county. We were impressed with the energy and enthusiasm that volunteers have brought to the organization over the decades and appreciated the innovations that have brought Multnomah County critical acclaim across the country, including national awards for citizen involvement and numerous inquiries regarding aspects of our program—from the Citizen Budget Advisory committees to our publications and cable television show.

At the same time, we recognized that with budget cuts and fewer staff to facilitate volunteer work, we needed to define our most important priorities. As a result, some of these innovations, which have sparked imitation both regionally and nationally, would have to be set aside for the time being.

CIC: A Strong Advocate for Citizen Involvement

Citizen-led: determining our own projects and budget, managing our own staff

Representative: both geographically and in terms of diversity, with revolving membership nominated by community groups

Accountable: following relevant laws and regularly reporting our activities, plans and diversity

Effective: with enough clout to collect information and serve as an effective and empowering partner for citizens in the community

Goals Clarified

Our first policy decision was to revise and clarify our goals. Decades of revising goals across changing committees and shifting landscapes had produced goals that were overlapping, repetitive and not fully reflective of our mandate as spelled out in the county Charter and enabling ordinance. Based on those documents, as well as a review of our annual reports, we approved new Core Goals as the guiding principles for the work of recreating our outreach and involvement efforts.

Bigger Projects in Motion

While we let some activities go, the Office continued to recruit citizens for committees and to facilitate departmental citizen budget advisory committees and their central steering group in their work to analyze budgets and policies and provide independent reports to the Board and county managers. Rather than produce an issue of the Conduit, our official newsletter of citizen involvement activities and opportunities in the County, the Office produced and mailed a flyer on the impacts of Measure 26-48. The Office also continued to produce the Volunteer Awards Ceremony honoring the numerous volunteers who devote thousands of hours of time, resources, and ideas which supplement the increasingly limited amount of financial resources available to provide needed services throughout the County. The Office also facilitated the addition of the Youth Involvement Award.

In addition to these ongoing efforts, we also adopted a forward-looking work plan. As part of our effort to improve relations with county officials, we met repeatedly with each commissioner and the Chair to discuss the ongoing activities and goals of the Committee and the Office of Citizen Involvement. We also worked with the Chair's office to co-host several community budget forums throughout the county, and reached agreement with the Chair's Chief of Staff to begin consolidating the recruitment and appointment process for Boards and Commissions under the Office of Citizen Involvement.

New Location

After many meetings and false starts, we negotiated a suitable space on the first floor of the Multnomah Building for the new Office location. We are excited about this space because we believe it will give us greater exposure to citizens and help facilitate greater collaboration between the Office, county departments, elected officials and the broader public. While the space itself is just adequate for our immediate needs, we appreciate the support of the Chair's Office in acquiring it. We also note this process might have gone more smoothly (and wasted fewer volunteer hours and county resources) if all concerned parties had been involved early on when considering space on the sixth floor of the Multnomah Building that was initially assigned for our use and then withdrawn.

New Website

One of our biggest projects this year was the overhaul of our website to serve as a one-stop source of direct information and participation for citizens and as a tool for all County offices in providing better citizen assistance.

The Office of Citizen Involvement will **inform, inspire, involve** and **integrate** the citizens of Multnomah County in all aspects of county policy and program development.

- 1) Identify, create, and track opportunities for citizens to help shape county policies and programs
- 2) Inform citizens about these opportunities and plug them into the process
- 3) Facilitate direct communication between citizens and county officials
- 4) Convey citizen requests, input and proposals to county officials and departments
- 5) Maintain good working relationships with county officials, organizations and staff

A lot of time has been committed to improving the website to serve as an information- and news-sharing vehicle, provide updates on volunteer opportunities, and facilitate communication between citizens and officials. The overhaul includes the creation of new citizen participation vehicles such as an online calendar, and announcement and discussion lists whereby citizens can learn about and give input into county decision-making processes. Most significantly, the site will allow volunteers to log their hours in an attempt to better track the total number of volunteer hours our programs leverage for the county. Much of the site will be designed to be maintained by volunteers.

Website Highlights

- Online version of the Conduit
- Online article submission
- Form to contact county officials
- Calendars, agendas, minutes
- Feedback mechanisms
- List of volunteer opportunities
- Form for citizens to volunteer for boards and commissions
- Announcement and Chat lists
- Log volunteer hours
- Distributed maintenance

We are currently waiting on the County to resolve some connection issues before we can proceed to test the new site. When completed, a link to our page from the county front page will be restored to facilitate citizen access.

New Brochure

Concurrent with our new location, new website and emphasis on the Office, we are redesigning our brochure, letterhead and business cards. The new outreach materials will have a more professional look and better serve the evolving needs of our outreach efforts.

New Outreach Position

The most difficult decision we made this year was to retire a staff position and create a new position focused exclusively on outreach. We are currently conducting a candidate search and hiring process to fill this position with an enthusiastic self-starter who is excited about citizen involvement and has experience drafting outreach materials and reaching out to groups. We are also creating a new Outreach Committee within the CIC to work with the outreach coordinator and other county citizen involvement stakeholders.

CIC Requests Special Audit

To address some concerns we had over whether we, and the county as a whole, were meeting our mandate for effective citizen involvement, we requested and received a special audit from the County Auditor. The report was a welcome affirmation of many of our concerns and pointed out several areas that needed attention and improvement—all of which we had started to address before the review began. Our efforts to address these concerns include working toward consolidation of the appointment process for all Boards and Commissions under the Office of Citizen Involvement and enhancing our website to serve as a one-stop source of information. The report pointed out that responsibility for effective involvement programs rests with the County and stressed the need for ongoing citizen input, objective evaluation, and a solid, ongoing commitment of resources to citizen involvement programs.

We remain concerned that we lack sufficient resources to accomplish our mandate. Nonetheless, the County again reduced our funding and has been unable to follow through with promised resources such as web development assistance. While the demand for citizen involvement grows, the impact of budgetary reductions can translate into decreased citizen access to government, public information and involvement opportunities. While we continue to ask that the matter of what constitutes “sufficient funding” for citizen involvement be addressed, we also realize the rest of the county departments labor under similar constraints, and so we continue to focus our energies on building our strengths and leveraging what resources we can.

Addressing Audit Issues

Sufficient Resources

- Work to define “sufficient funding”

Improved Citizen Input

- Facilitate Boards and Commissions searches
- Provide one-stop shopping via our website

Objective Evaluation

- Have past CIC members review our work
- Exchange audits with peer organizations
- Establish benchmarks to provide regular feedback on county involvement programs

We are continuing to seek better ways to objectively evaluate the work of the Office and County’s citizen involvement programs over time and we have initiated several approaches. In the year to come, we will explore the creation of a county-wide benchmarking system to give regular feedback to all county departments and offices regarding their involvement efforts and effectiveness.

Lastly, the audit highlighted some confusion over the defined roles of, and distinctions between, the Citizen Involvement Committee and the Office of Citizen Involvement. This was another area we anticipated and began to address early on. Since the beginning of this year, we have sought to draw a clearer distinction between the Office of Citizen Involvement and the

Citizen Involvement Committee in our communications and materials, focusing on the Office as program implementer and the Committee as oversight provider and evaluator.

Recognition Appreciated

From our discussions with County Commissioners, the Chair, and departments, it is apparent that the work done by the Office of Citizen Involvement and our Committee is appreciated and recognized. While we do serve some public information and constituent relations roles, our core mission of informing and engaging citizens and conveying their input to County officials is of inestimable value. If funding and resources for a dedicated Office of Citizen Involvement continue to decline, it will result in fewer opportunities for citizen participation and restrict access to government, services and policy information, all of which can further result in diminished public confidence and reduced credibility of government operations and decisions. Committing resources to enhancing and developing citizen involvement in all aspects of County government will produce tremendous returns, both financially and through enhanced quality of policy decisions and services.

As we move forward, we remain committed to the goals and principles of establishing a responsive and comprehensive citizen involvement program that is the hallmark of Multnomah County’s government.

Citizen Involvement a Good Investment

Total value received is more than double the direct cost allocated by the County.

\$134,552 OCI Budget

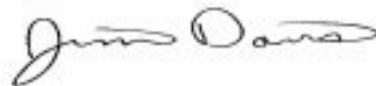
Value of Volunteer Contributions:

\$72,000 / 1,314 hrs Oversight / Resources

\$82,560 / 1,914 hrs Appointments

\$154,560 / 3,228 hrs Total Value/Time

\$289,112 Total Value to County



Jim Davis, Chair

J.C. Kizak, Vice Chair; Sy Kornbrodt, Treasurer; Nancy Johnson, Secretary;
M’Lou Christ, Cassandra Garrison, Fran Landfair, Jeanne McPherson, Ken Ray, Marie Sowers
Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee, 501 SE Hawthorne, Room 192
Portland, Oregon 97214.....503-988-3450.....www.citizenweb.org