

City of Kansas City, Missouri

Case Study Proposal

*2014 Alliance for Innovation – Transforming Local Government Conference
Inside and Out
Denver, CO
April 23-25, 2014*

Section A: Cover Sheet Information

Case Study Title: A Big High5: Storytelling with Citizen Survey Data

Case Study Category: Communications

Jurisdiction: Kansas City, Missouri

Population: 459,787

City Manager: Troy Schulte

Would you like the application to be considered for an Innovation Award? Yes, please!

Would you like the application to be considered for our Rapid Fire Session? Yes, please!

Project Lead: Julie Steenson, Senior Analyst
City Manager's Office
(816) 513-6567
Julie.Steenson@kcmo.org
414 E. 12th Street, Kansas City, MO 64106

Section B: Synopsis

On a hot July day in Kansas City, Missouri, enticed by curiosity and ice cream, one hundred-plus city employees gathered in a park adjacent to City Hall to take a historic photograph. From the roof of the 30-story City Hall, the Mayor, City Manager and local media could easily see that employees on the ground were being strategically directed into the shape of a giant “+5” to represent a 5% increase in citizen ratings of Kansas City as a place to live based a question in the annual Citizen Survey. This public display of data marked the first effort of its kind to showcase for citizens the results of the FY2013 Citizen Satisfaction Survey and to congratulate city employees for their part in increasing satisfaction levels. Citizen Survey data was used to transparently communicate inside and out that Kansas City deserves a big High5!

Kansas City’s Annual Citizen Survey has been conducted consistently since 2000, with intermittent surveys going back to the 1970s. Though the results were presented with meticulous precision every year, city management and elected officials were not encouraged to effectively use the powerful data in decision-making. Few embraced the truth that survey data provides best practice outcome-oriented performance indicators and can assist in telling a community’s story.

Getting to High5 was a process that began in late 2011, when the City Council recognized that Kansas City’s annual Citizen Survey should be aligned with efforts of the City Manager’s Office of Performance Management, where data was and is being used to pinpoint inefficiencies and drive more effective city services. Simultaneously, a small group of city employees representing many departments gathered in a large conference room to review and ultimately revise Kansas City’s citizen survey instrument. Though a small step, this meeting jumpstarted a sequence of events that has had an immediate effect on the evaluation and prioritization of city services.

The existing instrument contained some questions that Performance Management staff consistently heard were out-of-date or too vague to provide actionable data. Some services, like Police and Fire/Ambulance, were grouped together which prevented comparisons about citizen priorities. Other questions were simply not needed any longer - for example, a question about the maintenance of downtown had been added during a large redevelopment project, but no longer held relevance. The out-of-date survey instrument, combined with the lack of integration of the survey results into larger performance management efforts, resulted in widespread belief by department staff and leadership that the survey was useless. It was widely believed that citizen perception and opinion could not be changed enough to “move the needle” of satisfaction levels.

To combat this perception, FY2012 data (using the existing survey instrument) was rolled out in a dynamic and actionable way, with an emphasis on making the data comprehensive and tied to service provision. The results were not only presented one time per year to the City Council, but were also customized and presented to each department and community stakeholders. The results were also integrated into weekly performance management meetings all year long. This had a domino effect. The City Manager, Elected Officials and some department staff started using the data to tell stories about needs and priorities. In 2013, the City Council went so far as to adopt several satisfaction-level outcome indicators based on citizen survey data as part of their strategic priorities.

Several departments have followed suit and are using indicators of satisfaction to gauge both actual service delivery and communication efforts. By engaging departments in the revision of the instrument, they now feel more vested in the resulting data and can see the benefits of using it to tell stories about their improvements and to communicate their needs to elected officials and the public.

As an example, the Parks and Recreation Department has begun using “Maintenance of City Parks” as a way to evaluate how effectively they are deploying a new dedicated tax fund for parks. This is part of their story to the Parks Board, City Council and public about using these funds.

In addition to the cultural shift in attitudes about the survey, the use of survey data in weekly Performance Management meetings has meant that the data is directly impacting decisions about service provision. By embedding the survey data into discussions along with measures of service level, timeliness and customer requests, managers can see the whole story about their service delivery – demand, performance and perception. This multi-faceted approach identifies what is at the core of a service issue – for example, if service is performing well but customer perception is still low, the discussion focuses on how best to communicate to and manage the expectations of customers. Survey data has also been used in the setting of Kansas City’s public-facing “PerformanceStat” program – KCStat – to make points about geographic differences in perception, user vs. non-user satisfaction levels and changes in satisfaction over time.

For citizens and external stakeholders, citizen survey data is often inaccessible, so over the last year, in addition to the work being done inside City Hall, Performance Management staff took the “show on the road”. Staff has presented to civic groups, boards and the ever growing “hacker” community in Kansas City. This effort to take the data to the public has been a dynamic demonstration to citizens about how the City is using their collective opinion to drive change.

All of these efforts were instigated beginning with the roll-out of the FY2012 citizen survey data. For FY2013, Performance Management staff wanted to take the story up a notch. Enter the City of Kansas City’s City Communications staff, Chief Innovation Officer and Public Art Manager.

From the minds of this creative team, the concept of displaying data in a very public and interactive way emerged. It only seemed natural to take citizen survey data and use it to tell the biggest story of all that emerged from the FY2013 Citizen Survey – three out of four people now believe Kansas City is a good or excellent place to live, a 5 percent increase from the prior year.

The goal of the display was to continue to elevate the conversation about the Citizen Survey as a way to measure the City’s progress. It was a statement about how important citizen input is to the City; it also showed employees that their hard work does change perceptions about Kansas City.

The High5 display was both the climax of an initiative to use the survey for storytelling and the kick off to a marketing campaign that will continue to highlight data from the Citizen Survey throughout the fall.