



Citizens League Report

Results for Citizens, Options for Officials

REPORT SUMMARY

*Public affairs
research and education
in the Twin Cities
metropolitan area*

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

Results for Citizens, Options for Officials

REPORT SUMMARY

Prepared by:

**Committee on Organization of Local Government Services:
Goals and Structures**

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Approved by the Citizens League Board of Directors

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REPORT SUMMARY

Local governments in Minnesota are under pressure. Demands for public service continue to grow, while their primary sources of revenue have not kept up. Local governments have often responded by cutting services and raising taxes and fees, thus giving citizens less for more. At the same time, citizens are more concerned about the effectiveness of local services. What is the value received for dollars spent?

For the past 20 years, the Citizens League has been among the voices suggesting there is an alternative, namely to redesign service delivery and government structures. In 1991, the Citizens League convened a study committee to revisit public service design and to examine how local governments organize and deliver their services.

Over a four-month period, we heard from many people who offered their thoughtful perspectives on how local governments organize and deliver services. We saw many good examples of local governments doing things well. Talented managers and far-sighted elected officials work together to launch innovations, create incentives for employees and managers and provide choices to consumers and officials. Individuals and neighborhood groups make smart choices and help guide officials in designing services.

Clearly, though, these things are not happening everywhere. What are the impediments to local governments doing things differently and better? Here are some key barriers:

- **Misplaced incentives and motivation.** Local officials often work in a system of motivation and reward in which incentives are absent or encourage the wrong result. For example, if officials don't spend their entire budgets by year end, they may not carry over the surplus to future years or invest it to improve service. In some cases, they may see their budget cut.
- **Lack of flexibility.** Local officials often lack flexibility in identifying their responsibilities and how to best carry them out. This is

seen when the state delegates service responsibilities to local governments in a way that emphasizes complying with a detailed prescription for *how* things are to be done, rather than a shared vision of *what* should be accomplished.

- **Lack of evaluation.** They may often lack a formal way of measuring and evaluating the outcomes of their services and sharing that information with citizens.
- **Lack of opportunities for citizen involvement.** Citizens, in turn, lack tools and opportunities to hold their local government accountable and to encourage innovative approaches to service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CREATE NEW OPTIONS FOR MANAGING SERVICE BUDGETS

We recommend:

- ☐ **Local governments, neighborhoods and individuals should have additional opportunities to manage service budgets as a means of improving service delivery.**

Our premise is that, in many cases, dollars now spent for services can be spent in different ways to improve the delivery of services. We assume that the changes would have to be budget-neutral.

In our view, introducing these options, even if they were rarely exercised, would create significant incentives for local officials to improve services because they will want to keep people satisfied within the system.

These new opportunities can take place on several levels. For example:

- *Local governments* should be given increased options for managing funds now designated for a certain service and controlled by other units of government. The local government, working closely with citizens, would design the service, select the vendor and manage the service budget.

The transit programs developed by Maple Grove and other suburbs provides a good example of how local governments can develop a new relationship with a regional operating agency such as the Metropolitan Transit Commission. The close involvement of citizens helps make the approach successful.

Another example might involve cities receiving a budget with which to buy certain criminal justice services now provided by their local county. Cities might continue to use the local county as the vendor. But, maybe they would see if other counties could provide the services on a more effective or more economical basis.

- *Neighborhood-level organizations* should be given options for managing the funds designated for a certain service, including the authority to design the service and select the vendor.

In past reports, the League has recommended that cities foster the development of neighborhood service delivery models. Now we propose that neighborhoods should be able to petition a local government for the opportunity to manage part of a local service budget.

The issue here is whether neighborhoods could provide the service better or could buy it better than the city is already doing. Our committee heard from the Whittier Alliance (of Minneapolis) about its ideas for taking the money now spent on Whittier Park and using it to design and provide park programs. Perhaps the neighbors would develop a contract with the Park Board or consider other vendors. Perhaps volunteers would take some responsibilities for organizing programs and maintaining the park.

Creating opportunities for such neighborhood-based initiatives requires some rules or structure; obviously not just anyone can come in to scoop up some money. However, if this option will be useful, then the local government can't be a gatekeeper with all authority for approving or rejecting the neighborhood's proposal. One approach would be for the Legislature to identify ground rules for a viable proposal.

- *Individuals* should be given options for taking funds designated for a certain service and managing a budget where the individual has designed the program and selected the vendor.

An example of this approach is the Dakota County account management program for families of persons with developmental disabilities.

DEVELOP PUBLIC SERVICE ENTERPRISES

One of the most significant ways of expanding choices for elected officials is to reinforce the fundamental distinction between local governments *deciding* and *doing*. We propose to create new opportunities for local governments to shed some of their operating responsibilities and operate as sophisticated buyers of services.

We recommend:

- ☐ **Local governments should be authorized and encouraged to transform their operating bureaus into enterprises.**

A local government unit, such as a city or county public works department, could be transformed into a *public service enterprise*. In turn, city councils or county boards could enter into a contract for services with the new entities. In addition, the new enterprise could market its services to other cities, counties or school districts in the area.

Transforming government departments into enterprises builds on examples already in place of governments buying services from each other. For example, the city of Roseville maintains the grounds at the schools in the Roseville district. This is a very good example of how schools could use different approaches to organizing those administrative and support services that are outside their core responsibility of instruction.

The purpose of creating this contracting option (or any contracting option) is not to pay less for services but to provide services more effectively. In setting up enterprises, local governments should give them additional flexibility and significant responsibility. Thus, to the extent that civil service systems or procurement requirements

create obstacles to effective operation, enterprises should be freed from those constraints.

In developing contracts, the local governments should set performance measures and provide incentives for superior results. Our goal is that local governments could choose from several competing enterprises (or other local governments) in carrying out their functions.

There are several interesting examples in Great Britain and the United States of transforming government operations into enterprises. During the 1980s, the Conservative government in Great Britain began to transform large portions of the public service bureaus of government into self-contained agencies. These new agencies are to be headed by strong executives with broad discretion over staffing and budgets, and are given clear performance targets.

We see several advantages of this approach:

- Creating these enterprises would allow city councils and county boards to shed some of their operating responsibilities and focus their work on policy making. At the same time, they would have a choice of competitive providers.
- Because they have to earn their budget, managers and employees of these enterprises would have stronger incentives to adopt a customer-service orientation.

ALLOW LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO CHOOSE RESULTS-BASED REGULATION

In many service areas, local governments are the final delivery point in a state-local service system. Over the years, a complex system of mandated procedures has been instituted in some of these areas. For example, if a county is providing services to a child with developmental disabilities and severe behavior problems, it will go through a series of planning processes and assemble interdisciplinary teams to develop different individualized plans for the child's special needs.

Because of this focus on *process* -- doing things right, less attention is paid to *results* -- doing the right thing. In cases where local government is carrying out those shared responsibilities (including most mandates), we propose giving

those units significant flexibility to craft a new kind of relationship with the state.

We recommend:

- ☐ **Local units of government and state agencies should develop contract relationships that focus on results. Such agreements would give the local unit significant flexibility for how it reaches those goals.**

The local unit and the responsible state agency could negotiate a contract (or a series of contracts) which would specify performance standards and expected results. Our recommendation is very similar to the social services contracting proposal included in H.F. 2420, introduced in 1992 by Representative Wayne Simoneau and Senator Don Samuelson. The Legislature passed that bill, an initiative of Anoka County.

Social services provide the clearest example of where results-based regulation might apply. However, there are many other possible examples in areas such as education, licensing and inspection functions. For a variety of service areas, local government should be given a choice. Either they can work under the current regime of administrative rules or a more "entrepreneurially-friendly" system based on performance standards and results.

CREATE A "VALUE FOR MONEY" AUDITING FUNCTION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The state should fill a gap in its performance auditing capabilities. No office is charged to evaluate the performance of local governments. The State Auditor conducts or supervises financial audits of *local* governments. The Legislative Auditor evaluates programs of *state* agencies and audits their books.

We recommend:

- ☐ **The Legislature should direct the Legislative Auditor or the State Auditor to develop and implement a program of performance auditing of local governments.**

GOVERNMENT AUDITING RESPONSIBILITIES		
	Local governments	State government
Financial audits	State Auditor	Legislative Auditor
Performance/program evaluation	?	Legislative Auditor

This office would assemble data produced by local units and develop comparative statistical profiles. These would make "Truth in Taxation" hearings a much more meaningful exercise because citizens would have reliable information comparing their local units with others.

The office would also conduct in-depth studies. For example, one year it might examine how well local governments are operating their hospitals and nursing homes or diversion programs for juveniles. We think that directing an existing office to expand its role into local government performance reviews would provide invaluable assistance to the Legislature, local governments and the citizens of the state.

The Audit Commission of Great Britain provides a model for how a program of performance auditing can be valuable. The Commission's philosophy is to help local units improve "value for money."

Each of our recommendations for redesigning services assumes that citizens and their local officials will have good information about what services are provided, the costs of services and the quality of the outcomes, and are able to compare that information with what is done in other cities or counties. For example: local governments maintain thousands of miles of streets, and their crews patch thousands of potholes each year. Information will be needed to determine when a neighborhood-based proposal to manage street maintenance should be approved, or to help a local government compare proposals from pothole patching enterprises.

We recommend:

- ☐ The Legislature should direct development and implementation of a performance accounting system to be used by local governments.

Soon after a local government performance auditing function is launched, we expect that the auditors will find that the information generated by local governments on how they perform their functions is inadequate to make the useful comparisons that we want to see. School districts and counties have long used uniform, multi-dimensional financial accounting and reporting systems with a standard chart of accounts. They now need to build on to that structure a standard method of measuring spending on inputs (labor, trucks, blacktop, etc.) and linking that information with results (500 square feet of potholes patched) and quality -- the patches lasted six months.

We think that citizens have a basic right to know how public funds are spent, to have measures of the quality of local services and to be able to compare local government performance. When program results are known, the public won't have to wait for sporadic investigative reports in the news media to find out how well treatment programs for sex offenders are working, or whether job training programs are placing clients in well-paying jobs. Programs that are demonstrated to be effective should have an easier time getting their budget requests approved.

Turning the quality spotlight on local governments means identifying problems but also celebrating successes. We suggest that Minnesota establish an award for local governments that achieve excellence in delivering or arranging local services. Like the Malcolm Baldrige award given for excellent quality in private industry firms, a state award could be a powerful external incentive for local governments to excel.

In addition, it would be desirable for the state to actively disseminate information about high-quality operations. Working with the various associations of local governments, it could establish a clearinghouse for sharing ideas and for providing technical assistance to help local governments improve their use of contracting options, develop better outcome measurement and evaluation systems.

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Over the years, League reports have been a reliable source of information for governmental officials, community leaders, and citizens concerned with public policy issues of our area.

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- *Minnesota Managed Care Review 1991* -- Important information and analysis for people working in Minnesota's dynamic health care marketplace.
- *Minnesota Homestead Property Tax Review 1991* -- The League's annual analysis of residential property taxes in the Twin Cities area and other Minnesota cities.
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*Public affairs
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Citizens League

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