

CITIZENS' ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY COMMISSION

The 1999–2000 Orange County Grand Jury, in pursuing avenues to better serve the citizens of Orange County, learned that Los Angeles County created a Citizens' Economy and Efficiency Committee in 1964, which became a commission in 1975. This commission has published more than 128 reports, position papers, letters, and associated documents. The gains in efficiency and effectiveness and multi-million dollars in savings have earned recognition for performance and professionalism from the County of Los Angeles, the media, and by numerous national, regional, and local awards.

The Orange County Grand Jury believes that a similar commission in Orange County will embody the concept of community participation and involvement by providing the Board of Supervisors with strong, independent citizen input regarding matters of major importance to the County.

The decision to contract for this report was influenced by the fact that the expertise of Mr. Bruce J. Staniforth could not be replicated within the Grand Jury membership. He is currently the Executive Director of the Economy and Efficiency Commission of Los Angeles County.

The attached report, consisting of a cover page and seven pages of text, dated April 20, 2000, is adopted in all respects by the Grand Jury and incorporated herein as its own.

All Findings and Recommendations noted in the attached report are findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury.

Under *California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05*, the Board of Supervisors is required to respond to Findings 1 and 2, and Recommendations 1 and 2.

**A CITIZENS' ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY
COMMISSION**

Prepared for the

1999–2000 Orange County Grand Jury

April 20, 2000

Prepared By

Bruce J. Staniforth

Consultant

661 Coronado Place

Oxnard, CA 93030

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SUMMARY

This report presents a framework for considering why and how to expand the participation

of citizens within local government and examines those options available to local government to engage them. The conclusion reached is that Orange County should promote the participation of its citizens in the decision-making processes through the creation of a Citizens' Economy and Efficiency Commission. The creation of this commission will provide Orange County with:

- A unique and valuable perspective into county management, operations and policy making,
- A strong foundation in developing meaningful community support for governmental actions and programs,
- An improvement in the capability of county management to facilitate citizen participation,
- Increased synergistic possibilities between community and government, and
- The ability of Orange County to leverage the existing expertise of its citizens to significantly contribute to the success of government.

The function of citizens in contemporary society is continually evolving, becoming progressively more complex. The public is constantly being bombarded by television, radio and the print media with a wide spectrum of opinions concerning the responsibilities of both government and its citizens. As a result, even educated and motivated individuals are frequently unable to define their proper role.

Providing effective public services and improving communities are major challenges facing local government as it moves into the 21st century. Many communities now recognize that by engaging citizens in finding solutions to these challenges they are able to improve the governing process and to create stronger community based solutions by leveraging the participation of both public and private resources.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This report is intended to evaluate the issues of how best to enable citizens to contribute

to the efficiency and effectiveness of Orange County government. Its objective is to support the grand jury's commitment to the concept of encouraging the direct involvement of citizens in achieving the improved economy, efficiency and effectiveness of county government. It attempts to persuade local government of the mutual benefits accruing to both government and the public that are inherent in providing access and encouragement to the community to participate in the policy and decision-making processes.

Clearly, expanded citizen participation will result in a stronger and improved government and community. It is also evident that how government engages its citizens in the decision making process can significantly impact the outcomes of government activities. The mechanisms available to government to insure effective response to citizen concerns are addressed in this report.

METHOD OF STUDY

The information used in developing this report has been derived from literature reviews,

discussions with knowledgeable parties, various government web sites, and cited publications.

Governments that have successfully involved their citizens in their decision-making process were also considered. These included the Citizens' Budget Advisory Committees in Multnomah County, Oregon; the Joint Venture-Silicon Valley Network; the Economy and Efficiency Commission of Los Angeles County; Sustainable Boston; and the Fund for the City of New York.

Numerous participation approaches available to government entities were considered to determine the optimum vehicle for Orange County. Examples of some types of models of public involvement considered include:

1. General Public Education: This approach informs the general public by using mass media, e.g., newspapers, brochures, etc. Although this approach involves a large number of people, it has little depth in its ability to expand public understanding and involvement.
2. Public Hearings: This approach attracts both the strongly positive and - strongly negative citizens, particularly the negative. In their efforts to define their position, often to the exclusion of the opposing view, these citizens may not provide sufficient objective information to meaningfully assist decision makers. The result of hearings is often a concern on the part of the decision-maker because of very visible public opposition. Although this approach has many drawbacks, it is so entrenched in the institutional and political decision-making process that its use is to be expected in any program that is developed to involve the public in government.

Public Discussion Groups: This approach brings together a segment of the population for the purpose of educating them on an issue and then working with them to develop a solution that is acceptable to the community. This fragmented approach is not conducive to providing continuity in the decision-making processes.

BACKGROUND

Throughout the history of the United States, its citizens have contributed in a

consequential manner to the functioning of their government. It is a founding principle of American Government that its citizens, whether alone or as part of a larger group, should be active rather than passive in addressing the issues of the day. Without the adherence to this concept of citizen participation, the basis upon which our government has been founded will be seriously jeopardized.

It is unfortunate that in some areas due to issues such as government structure, issue complexity, etc., the ability of citizens to actively participate has been drastically limited. In other areas, such as community-based political groups, civil rights activities, union organizations, and issue-oriented advocacy, to name a few, active participation is still common. In a 1991 Kettering Foundation report, *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street American*¹, it was reported that citizens expressed discontent with the political process, but at the same time, described the strong desire of citizens to participate in the public process where that participation could make a difference. Traditionally, local governments have attempted to advance community outcomes by making operational or policy decisions to expand, contract, or redesign county services generally based upon the limitations established by revenue generating capabilities, service delivery preferences, and/or legislated state and federal requirements. Additionally, governments have also initiated and implemented policy by legislating, stimulating, or supporting initiatives of the private sector, e.g., modifying zoning to encourage sustainable development or cooperating with private organization to revitalize a neighborhood.

Citizen participation, as a founding concept of American government, is a goal toward which government should constantly strive. The implementation of this concept requires a commitment from elected officials and county management to derive the maximum benefit. Without this commitment, the striving of citizens to participate in their government may not be recognized. Additionally, if policies, budgets, or operations reflect no follow-through, the effort of citizen participation will be dissipated and become ineffectual. On the other hand, if a community is committed to achieving citizen-influenced goals and reflects them in its budgets, performance targets, and service operations, a form of synergy is created that strengthens citizen influence and enables it to be felt through specific decision and actions. Such synergy can develop through explicit linkages between levels of policy, planning and operations and thus, result in significant savings to local government.

FINDINGS

In accordance with *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, each finding must be

responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

¹ Harwood Group (1991). *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street America*, New York, NY, Kettering Foundation, 1991.

1. Orange County does not have a panel of knowledgeable citizens to assist the Board of Supervisors in achieving improved economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of county government.

A response to Finding 1 is required from the Board of Supervisors.

2. Orange County does not have a Citizens' Economy and Efficiency Commission to assist in improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness of county government.

A response to Finding 2 is required from the Board of Supervisors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, each recommendation

must be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based upon the findings, the 1999-2000 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that:

1. That Orange County Government commit itself to the concept of increasing meaningful and effective citizen participation in its policy and decision-making processes.

A response to Recommendation 1 is required from the Board of Supervisors.

2. The Orange County Board of Supervisors should create a Citizens' Economy and Efficiency Commission with the mission of advising the Board, either by direction of the Board or through their own initiative, on matters of economy, efficiency and effectiveness of management, operations or policy within local government. This commission could be organized and operated using the following guidelines:

- A. Commissioners will be appointed by the Board of Supervisors. In appointing commissioners, the Board should strive to have the commission reflect the community, racial, cultural, economic and gender diversity within the county. Each Board member shall nominate four persons for appointment to the commission. The 21st member of the commission shall be a member of the newly retired grand jury selected by a majority vote of the current grand jury. The purpose of the grand jury appointment is to bring to the commission an increased understanding of the efforts undertaken by the grand jury, and to assist the commission in following up on the recommendations made by this group. If no member of the current grand jury is able to serve, or, if following appointment, becomes unable to serve, the Supervising Judge, Criminal Courts Division, Orange County Superior Court shall nominate another member of any former grand jury. The Board shall appoint individuals based on the following criteria:

- i. Members shall not be in a position to augment their income or promote their special interests through membership on the commission.
- ii. Members should be broadly representative of the community.
- iii. Members should be knowledgeable, active and interested in community affairs, and should be available for at least two or three half-days a month for commission and task force meetings and commission work.

- iv. No member of the commission shall be a county employee.

The grand jury member, or other duly appointed member of any retired grand jury, shall serve a one-year term commencing September 1st and until his/her successor is duly qualified and appointed. All other members shall serve a three-year term commencing September 1st. Each member shall serve until his successor is duly qualified and appointed. The members of the commission shall serve subject to the right of the Board to remove any member at its pleasure. Commission members shall receive no compensation for attending commission or working group meetings.

- F. When a vacancy occurs on the commission, or upon the expiration of the term of office of any member, a successor shall be appointed by the appropriate appointing authority. When a vacancy occurs for any reason other than the expiration of a term of office, the appointee to fill such vacancy shall hold office for the unexpired term of his/her predecessor.
 - G. The budget of the commission shall be established by the Board of Supervisors at a level adequate to enable the commission to hire staff and conduct studies in support of its mission.
 - H. The commission shall meet not less than once a month, unless cancelled by the chairperson due to lack of a quorum or lacking sufficient business.
 - I. The commission shall make every effort possible to insure that the interests of the public are being adequately represented in their deliberations. This may include, but not limited to, such activities as public hearings, input from a web site, surveys, etc.
 - J. By a vote of not less than a majority of the commissioners who have been qualified and appointed, the commission shall prepare and adopt rules and regulations for the internal government of its business, including: the obligations and responsibilities of its officers and members and designating the time and place of holding its meetings, providing that such rules and regulations are not inconsistent with any applicable county ordinance or statute. A quorum shall exist if a majority of the commissioners who have been appointed and qualified are present.
 - K. The staff of the commission shall be those individuals designated in the current salary ordinance of the county of Orange or employed by the county by contract.
- A response to Recommendation 2 is required from the Board of Supervisors.