



City Spirit Award
Citizen-Centered Collaborative
Budget Process

The ongoing “tax reform” battle in the State of Florida has resulted in an increase in demand for “responsive” government at all levels. The City of DeLand is not unique in this regard. There is perhaps no function of government of greater importance to the citizenry than the formulation of the annual budget, but in many jurisdictions citizen involvement in this process is limited to perfunctory remarks in the final hours before a budget is adopted. The budget process in the City of DeLand features citizen input from beginning to end in an effort to ensure that the Commission has the best information available in order to make decisions that affect all 27,000 of their constituents.

The budget process in the City of DeLand begins with the Strategic Plan. This document expresses the community’s vision for preserving the quality of life in DeLand and sets the priorities for the City Commission. The plan is updated every five years, and annual visioning workshops are held to ensure the plan remains relevant from year to year. The second element is the citizen satisfaction survey, in which the Stetson Institute for Social Research (SISR) conducts a wide-ranging and statistically valid survey to gauge how satisfied the average citizen is with City services. The goals and objectives and performance measures that are included in DeLand’s programmatic budget are derived from citizen input during the visioning process and citizen satisfaction survey. During this past fiscal year, two new elements were added to the process. In February 2008, city staff held a series of public meetings to educate the citizens on the city’s budget process and invite input to prioritize spending. These meetings were held on four nights over a two week period in various areas of the City. Citizens were able to have direct interaction with the commissioners and staff and focus on specific areas of concern within the budget and connect with other citizens on the issues. Several hundred citizens attended these meetings and completed prioritization surveys. Along

with the surveys, staff collected several hundred comments and ideas for cost savings or efficiencies. This data was combined with the findings of the SISR citizen satisfaction survey to provide the City Commission with direction for reductions in the current budget.

Perhaps the best example of the City of DeLand's commitment to citizen-centered collaboration is the Citizen's Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC). This formulation of this committee was a direct result of citizen input during the community budget surveys and provides citizens with direct access to the inner workings of the budgeting process. Members were appointed in March 2008 and the first meeting was held on May 20, 2008. Representatives include a retiree with Federal and large county government experience, a small business owner and former banker, an attorney, a CPA, a financial advisor, a retired engineer, a retired corporate purchasing manager, an insurance agent, the President and CEO of Florida Hospital DeLand, a retired City Manager and a retired Public Works director. All of these members live and/or work in DeLand and agreed to serve a two-year term to this committee. Several of the committee members were involved in the citizen budget surveys and became engaged during that process. The committee meets monthly with staff representatives, and several sub-committees have been formed that meet with staff on an interval basis to focus on specific cost centers. Sub-committee focus areas include Property/Liability/Casualty Insurance, Employee Compensation and Benefits, Capital Expenditures, Purchasing and Performance Measurement. In August 2008 the CBAC will present their preliminary findings to the City Commission before the final budget workshops. Because of the timing of its creation, the committee got started too late in this year's budget process to have a significant impact, but will be involved in the entire process of formulating the FY 09-10 budget.

The evolution of the City of DeLand's collaborative budget process came about as a result of greater demand for citizen involvement, responsiveness and transparency in the budget process. This process is innovative in that the entire budget is driven by citizens, from the formulation of the

strategic plan to the identification of priority funding areas, to the detailed involvement of the CBAC to the multiple open budget workshops, citizens in DeLand have a far greater say in where their tax dollars are spent than in many other jurisdictions. Some of the results of this project will not be felt immediately, but there has already been a marked improvement in the relationship between the citizens of DeLand, staff and the Commission. Before the City could expect an editorial in the local newspaper about how “they” waste tax dollars, now there is a pervasive feeling that “we” are working together to operate efficiently and in a cost-effective manner, while still maintaining a citizen satisfaction rate of over 90%. The simple acts of conducting a community budget survey and creating the CBAC are successes in and of themselves, as it is direct evidence of the City responding to the citizen needs and concerns. This budget process can be adapted to any community, but works best in one that has a strong base of civic-minded, engaged citizens. If such a base does not exist in a community, involving citizens in a strategic planning and visioning process is an effective way to begin cultivating the capacity for greater civic involvement.