

Active Citizenship/Accountable Government

Vision for 20/20

Knowledgeable, informed citizens actively participate in their state and local governments and hold their governments accountable for the resources they receive and the services they provide. Citizens are empowered and actively engaged in government. As the owners of government, they have a vested interest in governance, demanding accountability, effective and appropriate services, and responsiveness.

Accountable government is effective, efficient, and responsive government. It addresses the changing needs of the state and its citizens in an efficient, appropriate, and equitable manner. It demonstrates sound planning and fiscal management. It encourages its citizens to be informed participants in civic affairs and actively involved in the governing process.



Goal 1: Citizens assume an active, informed, and meaningful role in civic affairs at all levels.

Civic involvement is no mere luxury. In a democracy, the power to govern derives from the people. Voting is the most fundamental form of civic engagement, but also important are the voluntary activities and services that enable us to create a community out of a disparate collection of individuals. To be most effective as citizens, we must come to the task armed with a basic understanding of our government and of domestic and international issues.

Facts:

- An estimated 71% of citizens 18 and older are registered to vote.
- Voter turnout in the 2000 presidential election was 58.2%, the lowest since 1972.
- Voter turnout in the non-presidential election of 1994 was only 28.6%.
- North Carolina has the 36th worst voter participation rate in the nation.
- Students in service learning programs are more likely to vote, stay in school, and participate in the community, and they have a higher academic performance, according to the Education Commission of the States.
- Americans are 15-20% less interested in politics and 25% less likely to vote in 1994 than in 1973.
- Only 4.2% of high schoolers in 1999-2000 took courses in International Relations or World Cultures.

Targets:

1.) **Voting.** 80% of eligible voters will be registered to vote. In addition, 85% of registered voters will cast ballots in presidential elections, 75% will vote in even-year, non-presidential elections, and 60% will vote in odd-year, local elections. Voter turnout in the 2000 presidential election (58%) was the lowest recorded voter turnout since 1972.

According to the Corporation for Enterprise Development, NC is ranked 36th in the US in voter participation.

2.) **Community service.** By 2010, 50% of all high schools will require community service hours for graduation. No data are available on high schools that require community service hours for graduation, but 59 schools offer the curriculum-based “Learn and Serve” programs.

3.) **Civic knowledge.** More citizens will understand their governments and the way they work. The Civic Education Consortium of the UNC Institute of Government has developed a *Civic Index* that will create a way to track civic knowledge.

4.) **Global knowledge.** At least half of all high school students will take a course in international studies. Their teachers in turn will have demonstrated competency in the field. In 1999-2000, only 4.2% of high schoolers took an international studies class. Furthermore, a secondary social studies teacher must demonstrate competency in several areas (e.g., economics, geography, history and sociology), but not international studies.

Goal 2: State and local governments are accountable and accessible to all citizens.

If the power to govern derives from the people, then the first responsibility of any government is to ensure that the people have an effective means of participation. This includes opening government to public scrutiny and eliminating barriers to participation.

Facts:

- Only 33 counties in North Carolina use automated touch-screen voting systems.
- 15 counties still use punch card or lever machines.
- NC was tied for 26th in the US in the percent of adult Internet users visiting state or local government web sites.
- 41% of all county governments serving more than 100,000 residents and 62% of all cities serving more than 50,000 residents have received the Government Finance Officers Association budget award; state government has not.

Targets:

1.) **Election system integrity.** Every eligible and interested citizen will find it easy to register and vote, and every vote cast will be accurately counted. In North Carolina, all citizens may register to vote when they obtain a driver's license, but voter registration rolls at the voting booth are not always current. Only 33 of North Carolina's counties use modern, automated touch-screen voting systems.

2.) **Public information access.** NC will rank among the top 10 states in state government web site use and quality. In 2000, NC was tied for 26th in the US in the percent of adult Internet users visiting state or local government web sites. A Brown University study found that NC's state government web site was tied for 11th in the US in terms of quality, accessibility, and security.

3.) **Government performance measurement.** State and local governments will use performance measures for planning, budgeting, decision-making, and monitoring. In 2001, data were not available on the status of the state government's performance measurement initiative (the NC Performance Measures Status Report 2000).

4.) **Government financial accountability.** The state and local governments will maintain the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. As of 2001, the state had not yet received this award. In contrast, 41 local governments in North Carolina, including 43% of all county governments serving over 100,000 residents and 62% of all cities serving over 50,000 residents, had earned the GFOA budget presentation award.

Goal 3: State and local governments are effective, efficient, financially sound, and responsive to all citizens.

Fiscal health is a prerequisite to effective government. Government also depends on qualified elected leaders and on trained, knowledgeable, and inventive appointment officials. To recruit and retain the best people, governments of the 21st century will have to commit substantial resources to training and development.

Facts:

- North Carolina earned a "B" rating in finances, human resources, information technology, capital management, and results-oriented management in the Government Performance Project of Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. (p. 202)
- In 1998, NC was ranked 28th in the nation for using digital technologies for improving public service.
- In 2000, NC had the 34th highest state and local government expenditures per 10,000 residents. **This also means NC had the 16th lowest expenditures!**
- NC has the 19th most state employees and the 28th most local government employees per capita in the nation.
- Employee turnover in state government is speeding up. The three-year retention rate from 1987 to 1990 was 60%. Ten years later, it was less than 50%.
- In 2000, approximately \$9 billion of the \$14.2 billion state budget was spent on personnel.

Targets:

1.) **Governmental effectiveness.** 100% of NC's largest cities (with 25,000 or more people) and counties will have a council-manager form of government, and NC will be among the top 10 states in using digital technologies for improving public service. In 1995, 100% of NC's largest cities (serving at least 25,000 persons) and 99% of NC's counties employed the council-manager form of government. In 1998, NC was ranked 28th in the US in using digital technologies for improving public service.

2.) **Governmental efficiency.** State and local governments in North Carolina will provide public services while maintaining per capita expenditures below the national average. In 2000, NC ranked 34th in state and local government expenditures per 10,000 residents.

3.) **Fiscal health.** The state will maintain its AAA bond rating, and all local governments will maintain or improve their bond ratings by 2010. The state has maintained its AAA bond rating since 1963. Most local governments are fiscally strong; 69 of North Carolina's counties are rated "A" or above by one or more of the bond rating agencies, 5 are rated "BB" or higher, and 26 are unrated.

4.) **Public sector training.** 90% of local elected officials will complete leadership and training courses. Furthermore, 2% of public personnel costs will be devoted to employee training and skill development. In the 1990s, an average of 90% of new county commissioners and (70%) 16% of municipal office holders completed training offered through the NC Institute of Government. As of 2001, public training and development expenditures were not tracked. **The red shows how this item was in the gap statement. I don't know what it means.**

The full text of **North Carolina 20/20** report is available on the World Wide Web at www.theprogressboard.org

It contains endnotes, a key word index, and searchable text

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