

**Improving the Way Our Communities Work**

By Kathleen Brunet Eagan

Marc Holzer, dean of the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA), has a prediction about the City of Newark. His prediction: that Newark will become a leader for government efficiency and perhaps even an agent for helping to reduce New Jersey's high property taxes.

An impressive prediction, certainly, but one based on several recent developments, including Newark's formation of an Office of Innovation and Performance Management. Also helping Newark to make that a reality is SPAA. This June, the school will begin offering an Executive MPA program for city employees and other public and nonprofit professionals at Newark City Hall. In addition, SPAA faculty and students are working with the Office of Innovation and Performance Management on implementing a performance measurement project for the city. The first part of that project will be to survey Newark residents.

"It's not just about gathering complaints," says Holzer. "Citizens can tell you what you are doing well and what needs improvement. Measuring where you are helps you to get where you want to be."

For example, if a survey finds that a city's building permit process is overly complicated and plagued by delays, it also uncovers a reason why its economic development may be off track. Information provided by such surveys can help pinpoint where changes need to be made, which can range from something as simple as redesigning a form to realigning staff and financial resources.

Although still in the development stages, the Newark survey most likely will address the full range of city services, from garbage collection, to the issuance of building permits, to street and sidewalk repairs, to transportation, says Holzer.

Numerous communities around the country have gained impressive results from performance measurement, including New York City and Anchorage, Alaska, says Holzer. But there has yet to be a comprehensive effort undertaken in New Jersey. Newark will be the first. As it does so and identifies how it can improve its efficiency, the city not only can provide a model for other municipalities in the state, it also can position itself to offer its services to smaller surrounding communities. All of which could serve to make government in New Jersey more efficient and perhaps even help to lower property taxes, says Holzer.

"I think the heart of municipal innovation in New Jersey is going to be Newark," he adds. "It's wonderful to see this taking root in the state."

A newsletter for the Rutgers-Newark community and neighbors

# COMMUNITATIONS