

Consensus

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Johnson County Citizen Engagement: Engaging residents in tough budget choices

Report on 12 focus groups with Johnson County adults and high school seniors

Prepared by **Consensus**

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Section 1: Engaging citizens in budget decisions: The purpose and benefits

It is so easy when there is enough money to pay the bills. But when times are tight and there is not enough to go around, we have to make tough choices. It's true for individuals, and it's true for governments.

Before the recent economic collapse, many governments around the U.S. had never involved the public in a meaningful way in budget decisions. According to the Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management, the reason for that was "the belief that citizens do not have the knowledge and expertise needed to make the complex and technical decisions involved in allocating public funds." That view led to public engagement that rarely influenced budget decisions.

Most often, governments used the public hearing model to engage residents on budget issues. Public hearings are usually held after the budget is created but before (often minutes before) the budget is approved. Residents are given a few minutes at a microphone to make the case for whatever budget item they want to keep. The hearings draw people who want a particular outcome, such as funding for a program, and usually serve a symbolic or perfunctory function with no real impact.

At a time of budget shortfalls, however, governments are looking for ways to engage residents that actually make a difference. They realize that, as the Government Finance Officers Association puts it, "Public priorities are particularly important in making budget decisions when revenues are not sufficient to continue to provide all services at their current levels."

The attitudes of elected officials determine whether governments engage the public in a meaningful way, according to studies. "Meaningful" means that engagement happens early enough that public input can influence decisions, and that the process encourages people to consider the common good rather than just their own narrow interests.

In Johnson County, government leaders did what they could to handle the budget shortfall. The County's elected and staff leaders cut funds and personnel and evaluated programs. Leaders said they had made all the easy cuts and many difficult ones. They were left with no option but to make cuts that could affect service levels. They realized that these difficult choices should be shared with local residents, so that cuts would reflect the community's values. Engaging Johnson Countians was a sign that government viewed residents as citizens and partners rather than just customers of government services.

The Citizen Engagement Committee and its plan

2012 was the first step, albeit a giant step, towards a robust process for engaging Johnson County residents in setting budget priorities. The goal: Assuring that the county's budget priorities match the values of the community. The intention this year was to gather valuable feedback, of course, but also to learn and revise so that subsequent years continue to improve.

A staff committee was charged with designing the process. The Citizen Engagement Committee was composed of members from the county manager's office and from the Johnson County Budget and Financial Planning Department, which advises the board of commissioners on fiscal policy. The committee set the following goals:

- To seek increased community feedback on County service priorities;
- To foster an ongoing dialogue with the community regarding public services; and
- To develop an informative, reliable process for the board of county commissioners to utilize when setting service priorities and making budget decisions.

After conducting research into how other communities engaged their citizens in budget decisions, the committee set criteria for its own effort, including:

- The input should be representative of the community;
- It should offer an opportunity for a large number of citizens to participate;
- Input should be received early in the process;
- The process should reveal sincere preferences;
- The process should promote two-way communication between the public and officials; and
- Officials should consider the input in their decisions.

The committee created a three-part plan that its members believed would meet its criteria. The plan included:

1. An online budget simulator available for any resident of Johnson County to use to weigh in on budget priorities. The simulator would invite citizens to balance the budget by increasing or decreasing service levels or revenues, and would show the consequences of budget changes. The simulator would not include every type of expenditure but would focus on those where the public could influence the outcome.
2. Focus groups with adults, one group per district, to offer an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of local residents.
3. Focus groups with students in a high school in each district. These discussions were intended to reach out to younger Johnson Countians and get them involved.

The Citizen Engagement Committee created the online budget simulator.

The County hired Consensus to recruit participants and design and conduct the focus groups. Consensus is a nonprofit firm that engages the public on behalf of the community and clients here and around the U.S. Team members included Dan Blom, Mary Jo Draper, and Jennifer Wilding, who served as project manager. For more information, see www.consensusconsultants.com or www.consensuskc.org. Consensus worked with the Citizen Engagement Committee to develop the focus group scripts, and County staff members handled all logistics, such as setting meeting dates and venues, taking notes and arranging for meals.

Recruitment engages a mix of Johnson Countians

Consensus was responsible for recruiting a mix of Johnson Countians for the focus groups. In doing this, we mainly worked with existing organizations to invite their members, along with some random calling.

The County expected well over a thousand local residents to take the simulator in the two months it was posted online. That meant that the nearly 80 focus group participants would not be able to sway the outcome of the voting. Instead, the focus groups would help the County understand the values that drive budget decisions and the tradeoffs people would and wouldn't be willing to make for a balanced budget. By design, commissioners were not involved in recruitment. No commissioner was ever asked to contact a potential participant and they did not see the list of participants prior to the focus group sessions. We all wanted to avoid the impression that the focus groups were hand-picked to reflect one or another perspective.

Our goal was to recruit 14 adults in each of the six focus groups, with the expectation that the usual 20-40 percent would be no-shows. Remarkably, although four or five individuals had to drop out in advance, our no-show rate was zero. Everybody who said they would attend actually attended, which meant that many of the focus groups included 14 participants. There are a few reasons we think that everybody showed up. People took seriously the opportunity to make their choices known. They understood that there was a waiting list and that others were ready to take their place if they couldn't attend. Many participants were already actively involved in one or another of the organizations that contribute to a vibrant Johnson County, but it's interesting to note that those who were recruited via cold calling also kept their word. In addition, Consensus stayed in contact via email and phone with participants, explaining what would happen during the focus group and why it mattered.

We began by calling residents of Districts 2 and 6 at random to issue invitations. When people picked up the phone, 22% in District 2 and 38% of District 6 residents agreed to participate. The challenge was getting people to pick up the phone, something that hadn't been a problem when recruiting focus groups for another project in northeastern Johnson County. After taking one-to-three hours to recruit each of seven people via cold calling, we realized that it was time to switch to Plan B, and with the agreement of the Citizen Engagement Committee, we did so.

Consensus identified the three mainstay organizations likely to exist in each of the six districts: neighborhoods, schools and businesses. (Churches are also mainstay organizations, but our experience is that church policy does not allow them to inform

parishioners about outside events.) We usually asked mainstay groups to help us connect with a handful of their members, because we wanted to avoid having to turn away dozens of interested residents. We contacted schools to ask them to invite active PTA members and went to city staff members to ask them to invite neighborhood leaders. The most receptive were chambers of commerce, who helped us connect with general members and participants in their leadership programs. We also reached out to groups that reached the whole county, like a list of Kansas Leadership Center alumni living in Johnson County, United Community Services, and Johnson County Rotary Clubs. We did not contact any partisan political organizations.

In addition, Consensus invited some members of its list of people who had participated in previous engagement events. For example, the list included people we recruited for a national engagement on the federal budget held in 2010 that was held at the Johnson County Library. The 80 participants were recruited to reflect the political and demographic make-up of the county. It also included people who were recruited at random for deliberative forums sponsored by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions.

Participants were accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. They were placed in a focus group based on the district in which they lived. The last seat was filled the evening of Wednesday, February 1, in District 6. Districts 1, 2 and 4 filled up rapidly, but eventually districts 3, 5 and 6 were full with a waiting list, as well. At most, we had to turn away 10-12 persons per district. We informed each person that the simulator would be posted online and encouraged him or her to complete it.

Consistently, people said they were excited about participating in the focus group and appreciative that the County was reaching out and asking for their opinions.

The focus groups offer an understanding of choices

The Citizen Engagement Committee commissioned focus groups so it could build an understanding of why people made the choices they made. Consensus worked with the committee to identify specifically what it wanted to learn, and then created a script to generate that information. We made sure that the simulator experience occurred before the discussion and that we did not answer content questions; we wanted the simulator results for the focus groups to be created as much as possible under the same conditions as residents taking it on their own. That way, the focus group discussion would illuminate results that were consistent among respondents.

Each meeting began at 6 p.m. in a public meeting room at a government building. The County provided a deli tray. People gathered sandwiches and moved to a table where a laptop computer was set up at each place. The Consensus moderator explained the ground rules and the flow of the evening, and led introductions. The chair of the county commission welcomed the group and that district's commissioner talked about steps the County had taken so far to balance the budget. The remarks made it clear that the County had no choice but to cut services.

Participants watched an informational video about services the County provides, then spent 15-30 minutes completing the online budget simulator. A staff person with the Johnson County Budget and Financial Planning Department tabulated the results and printed copies. The moderator facilitated the subsequent conversation, while one or two County staff members took notes.

The moderator asked a series of questions, among them:

- What was the easiest choice you made while taking the simulator?
- When you look at the services this group cut the most (and least), tell us why you made the choice you did. What impact do you expect to feel personally? What consequences worry you the most?
- You completed the simulator before talking with your fellow citizens. If you were to take it again, what choices would you make differently as the result of the conversation?
- What values should drive decisions about what to cut when budgets are tight?
- In the future, when you think about how Johnson County residents should be involved in setting budget priorities, what would you like that process to look like?

During the final ten minutes, the commissioners had the chance to ask questions of the focus group participants.

The focus groups with students used the same questions, but added questions to determine how students feel about the county and what would entice them to live there as adults. Also, the students took the simulator at home anywhere from a day to two weeks prior to the focus group.

Section 2: Key findings from adult focus groups

The key findings offer common themes, a few unique results, and a little about what we heard in the six districts. The findings are summarized so they can be understood quickly. The complete focus group report from each district is contained in an appendix. We were struck by how seriously people took the task of cutting the budget and how thoughtful they were about the choices they made.

The way people made choices was consistent across the groups

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People chose cuts that cause inconvenience rather than cuts that would harm the vulnerable.	All	Consistently, people cut general government line items like voting sites and the Department of Motor Vehicles as a way to avoid cutting human services to the neediest residents. They also talked in terms of intermittent problems, like removing snow from the occasional snowstorm, versus daily problems like meeting the needs of an aging population.
Personal experience had a major impact.	All	People acknowledged that what they cut was affected by the services they had used and the kind of work that they did. People who relied on a particular service or who worked in the field were staunch advocates of those services.
Others' experiences led people to change their minds.	All	Most participants said they would have changed some of their choices after hearing other people's stories about which services were needed and why. When people wanted more information, it was often related to who used a service and the level of need, seeking to put a human face on who would be affected by budget cuts.
People wanted to preserve core services.	All	Group members worked to define the services that were core to the mission of county government. Typically, core services were considered roads and public safety. Several groups, though, said that supporting economic development was also a core service because it helped pay for everything.
Small reductions don't attract much support.	Most	The small dollar reductions did not impress most focus groups as being worth the sacrifice that the department would need to make. People tended to focus on big-ticket items with more impact, where they felt they could cut the least to save the most money.
People want to retain the high quality of life in Johnson County.	All	While people made a distinction between core services and amenities, each group valued the services that helped Johnson County sustain a high quality of life. One person called the county "idyllic," and another called it a "shining city on a hill." People were less interested in balancing the budget if it meant a significant decline in the quality of life that attracted residents and businesses to the county in the first place. They were, however, willing to accept temporary cuts needed to take care of the current budget situation, with the understanding that funds would be restored when the economy improved.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People make choices based on values.	All	In each group, people made most of their choices based on their deeply held values. (In some cases, though, there was also strategy involved in balancing the budget.) Sometimes an individual wrestled with conflicting values. Sometimes different individuals held values that were in opposition.

People trust Johnson County government

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People feel that government provides a high quality of services.	All	People were proud of the services provided by Johnson County government. They expressed confidence in the quality and, almost always, the efficiency of County government and its staff members. Only one group said it thought government could find significant new opportunities to be efficient.
Johnson County government is generally efficient.	1	The government is already pursuing all reasonable options to be more efficient.
Be very careful about privatizing services.	4	The group was in favor of coordinating services, but said that privatizing would reduce the quality of essential services.

Many would support raising taxes

Theme	District	Notes and comments
<p>Many people wanted the option to raise taxes. While most tried to cut the \$5 million target, others did not, on purpose.</p>	1	Johnson County has the lowest tax rate in the state and can absorb a levy increase and still be the lowest. The group said we should increase taxes before we reduce the budget. They were concerned, though, about the ability of lower income residents to pay for the county's excellent services, and the potential impact of their choices on the county's poor.
	2	The group was passionate about Johnson County services and willing to pay a premium to live in the county and enjoy things like libraries and parks.
	3	Several participants wanted the option to raise the mill levy to support services they believe are essential.
	4	Several said that Johnson Countians expect and will pay for a high level of services, particularly if the services help to maintain property values.
	5	The group would vote for higher taxes to avoid cuts in schools, to pay for health and human services, and to maintain Johnson County's high quality of life.
	6	This group was more focused on finding creative ways to increase efficiency, reduce costs and raise revenues. It didn't discuss raising the mill levy.

People wanted new, better ways of doing things

Whenever people face a difficult decision, wishful thinking and denial are likely to appear. It's just human nature. Sometimes, when people said they wanted more information or they wanted to seek creative solutions, it appeared that they were trying to make the best difficult choice that they could. Other times, it appeared that people hoped to avoid making a difficult choice altogether, as with one group that felt if we were creative enough we could avoid having to cut the budget. Before acting upon requests for information or creativity, leaders should evaluate whether it is an avoidance mechanism, a symptom of wishful thinking, or a legitimate stepping stone to a better decision.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Use technology and creativity to be more efficient.	Most	People looked for technological solutions to help make services, especially general government services like voting and DMV, better and less costly. One group saw citizens as a potential source of creative ideas for being more efficient or innovative. Another felt that the county still had many efficiencies that it could realize.
Look for ways to increase revenue.	Some	As one person said, "The budget has two sides, revenue and expense." People were interested in finding creative ways to add revenue.

Groups wanted more information

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Information can put decisions into context, group members said.	1	The group asked to see the entire budget so they have more options and can see the impact on the whole spending plan.
	2	Are there unmet needs for some services? What are attendance figures for attractions?
	3	The group wanted more context and wider choices that reflect more of the county budget.
	4	They group wanted a trends study on the increase in poverty and the aging population, as well as data on how many people use the library at particular times.
	6	The group wanted information about ridership on The JO and on the amount the County spends to serve illegal immigrants.

Culture & Recreation sustained cuts but also was viewed as vital for quality of life

The Culture & Recreation category included museums, parks, recreational programs and library sites, hours and collections.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People valued parks and libraries as important amenities.	All	Groups wanted to hold onto the high quality of life in Johnson County and viewed parks and libraries as important amenities to maintain. Parks were viewed as family-oriented and libraries were seen as cultural and educational. One group said a one-year cut might be palatable, but was reluctant to reduce budgets and thought that the small savings might be unjustified.
Opinions varied about the right way to approach the library budget.	Most	While people generally viewed the Johnson County Library as a valuable resource, they varied based on where they might be willing to cut. Some said they could live with fewer hours, while others would tolerate cuts to collections or locations. There was not a consensus on the best approach. Any cuts were generally considered painful. One group expressed strong support for the library but said it would cut library hours and locations if necessary to preserve funds for mental health and aging services.
People questioned the value of the museums.	Most	Very few focus group participants had visited the museums or knew anyone who had. Those who had visited the museums or whose children had visited were less likely to cut than those who hadn't. In conversation, people questioned why the county operated museums.
Raise recreation program fees but offer scholarships.	5	The group was willing to raise recreation fees but said no one – especially children and teenagers – should be denied access due to lack of funds. The group favored scholarships for those who could not afford the fee.
Access to regional attractions contributes to Johnson County quality of life.	1	The focus group in northeast Johnson County valued the fact that they had access to regional attractions. They said it was a factor in why they chose to live in Johnson County and especially in the northeast sector.

Culture & Recreation	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Museums – facilities & hours	2.1	1.9	2.6	2.1	2.4	2.0	2.2
Safety & outdoor education	2.4	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.5	2.1	2.6
Park maintenance & development	2.6	3.0	2.8	3.1	2.9	2.3	2.8
Recreational program fees	1.9	2.0	2.5	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.4
Library hours	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.2	2.5
Library locations	2.8	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.2	2.4
Library collections	3.1	3.0	2.7	2.8	2.6	2.4	2.7

Public Safety & Emergency Services category was viewed with some skepticism

An explanation: In all of the other budget categories, if you cut the dollars spent on that category it meant that you were cutting staff or stuff, like buildings or collections. In this category, though, if you wanted to cut costs you would invest money in programs that keep people out of jail. The reasoning is that, because it costs so much to keep someone in jail, you can reduce total costs by spending money on work-release programs, mental health crisis responders, etc., which reduces jail time.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
The cuts were easy to make	Most	When groups were looking to do the least harm, cutting spending for public safety was an easy choice. Some participants noticed that they could cut the bulk of the \$5 million from the public safety category, thereby saving other services. Many said that cutting costs here would provide public safety services that accomplished something positive. In general, participants were supportive of the goal of rehabilitation, apart from saving money.
People weren't buying the idea that you could spend more to save money.	Most	Groups questioned whether the logic was sound, that you could really spend more to reduce the cost for public safety and emergency services, or whether it was a way to avoid making real and difficult cuts. Most people felt public safety was a core service, but were skeptical of the validity of this budget method. One group, though, supported the idea that rehabilitation and work-release were effective in cutting costs. This group also did not want to see juvenile offenders put in jail. Another group wanted to see the steps that would need to happen between spending more for rehabilitation and reducing total costs. One participant said she was willing to cut the public safety budget, but didn't find a viable option in the simulator.
The type of criminal put on the street made a difference	6	People supported the idea of getting those who could be rehabilitated back on the street, and some felt the County jails too many juveniles for petty crimes. The group supported using the jail for hardened criminals who pose a threat to public safety.
Public safety raises a chicken-and-egg question	1	One group discussed whether the community is safe because we have a public safety infrastructure in place, or whether we have over-built an infrastructure in response to a perception that the world is a scary place.
People supported funding the new crime lab.	All	People felt that the new facility was important and supported hiring new staff. They said timeliness was critical in trying cases and examining evidence and the crime lab would help speed things up. (In this case, a high number means adding funds.)

Public Safety & Emergency Services	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Mental health crisis responders	2.5	2.2	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.4
Work release	2.0	2.1	1.8	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2
Re-entry programming	2.2	2.3	2.0	2.5	2.2	2.3	2.4
Juvenile offenders	2.5	2.5	2.1	2.3	2.6	2.2	2.4
Criminalistics laboratory (* added after the first focus group was held)	3.5	3.7	3.4	3.4	3.8	*	3.2

Health & Human Services is central to the desire to care for those in need

The Health & Human Services category included licensing of child care, a multi-service center, and services related to family health, supported employment, intake/outpatient mental health, and aging.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People were extremely reluctant to cut services to those in need.	All	If roads and public safety are core services, and libraries and parks are valued amenities, health & human services are viewed as vital to caring for the poorest and neediest Johnson Countians. The central value in choosing what to cut was the desire to avoid harm to vulnerable populations. One participant said a society is judged by how well it treats its most vulnerable members. While this category sustained fewer cuts than the others, some groups were willing to reduce budgets.
Human services contribute to the quality of life in Johnson County.	All	People recognized that changing demographics were producing greater need for services. Filling that need by providing robust human services would contribute to the quality of life and would be increasingly important in the future. People were especially concerned about the increase in poverty and in the need to serve the growing elderly population. One group cited the need for a homeless shelter as one that the County should fill.
People were interested in long-term savings through early interventions.	Most	People wanted to understand the human impact of budget decisions, particularly the long-term savings possible with early interventions. One group suggested that if early investments in public safety could reap savings in the future, the same could be true with human services. Early interventions, such as helping the elderly stay in their homes or providing health care to children, can reduce long-term costs.
Johnson County should not provide the only safety net.	Most	People talked about the County as a provider of last resort, or as just one part of a group of providers of safety-net services. People wanted to know what other providers were available and if they were more efficient. One group said the County should provide a safety net but not a handout. Another encouraged the County to consider the impact of any budget cuts on other providers of safety-net services.
Mental health services affect public safety.	Most	Several participants said that providing mental health services increased the safety of the general public.

Health & Human Services	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Child care licensure	3.0	2.6	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.7
Family health services	3.4	2.7	3.3	2.9	3.2	2.7	2.8
Supported employment services	3.0	2.3	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.4	2.7
Intake/Outpatient mental health services	3.1	2.8	3.1	3.0	3.0	2.3	2.8
Aging services	3.4	2.7	3.4	2.8	3.1	3.1	2.9
Multi-service center	3.4	2.5	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.6

Infrastructure questions cause re-thinking of public transit

Infrastructure includes snow removal (in unincorporated areas only; cities handle snow removal within their boundaries), and The JO, Johnson County’s bus service.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People value good public transit.	All	Focus group participants generally like the idea of public transit. They view it as vital to sustainable development and future growth, and appreciate the way it connects the county with the rest of the metro area. They also see public transit as an extension of human services; without public transit, many working people can’t get to jobs. In addition, it is viewed as a vital service for the growing elderly population.
Cuts to The JO reflect dissatisfaction with a flawed system.	All	People talked about The JO as not being a good fit with Johnson County. Many people talked about seeing empty buses on the streets and few had ever taken the bus themselves. Those who did ride The JO appreciated the roundtrip to work in downtown Kansas City, Mo., for \$4. Others said there were not enough times or routes to be useful and the county was too spread out to make a bus system practical. There was a sense that money spent on The JO is insufficient to produce a robust system and isn’t configured to fit the county’s development patterns.
People wanted to re-think public transit and the way it is provided through The JO.	All	People were interested in a closer look at ridership and at the needs of Johnson Countians. They wanted to explore alternatives such as \$10 taxis, smaller buses, light rail and other alternatives to the current system. There was also interest in bus rapid transit and in adding more routes like the popular bus to Lawrence on K-10. People felt that The JO should focus on getting commuters to work during peak times. A few favored eliminating The JO entirely. Many people expressed an interest in more information and deeper engagement related to The JO.
Cutting snow removal would be palatable.	All	Most people considered snow removal to be one of those occasional needs that can be considered matters of convenience. They thought people could handle leaving snow on the streets a little longer if it meant they could avoid cutting more vital services. Most did indicate that there were limits to how long snow should stay on the road.

Infrastructure	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Snow removal (unincorporated Johnson County)	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.6
The JO hours and trips	3.3	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.3	2.4
The JO routes	3.0	2.4	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.4

General Government cuts were the easiest to make

General Government includes vehicle tag renewals and titles, distance to voting locations, and voting wait times.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People can suffer a little inconvenience in order to save vital services.	All	Every group, without exception, chose to cut first (although not necessarily most) from the General Government category. They figured that people could stand in line longer to vote or register their cars, or drive farther to voting places, because those activities didn't happen often and there were alternatives. This, most said, was the easiest decision.
Technology reduces inconvenience.	All	People also reasoned that if you didn't want to register your car or vote at the polling place, you could almost always handle the transaction early or by mail or online.
Some were concerned about the impact on voting.	All	Several people said that before the discussion, they voted to save the voting-related line items because they thought voting was important. After taking part in the discussion, most said they would change their minds and cut the voting line items. The general agreement was, if you want to vote you'll be willing to work a little bit harder to do it. People were also interested in finding new ways to make voting more convenient, such as Saturday elections and online voting.
If you have to stand in line at the DMV, it's your own fault.	All	People said the only time that people might be seriously inconvenienced was if they waited until the last day of the month to go to the DMV. In that case, people who find themselves standing in line should have planned better.

General Government	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.4
Distance to voting locations	2.5	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.7	1.8	2.2
Voting wait times	2.7	2.0	2.6	2.3	2.5	2.0	2.4

Section 3: Key findings from youth focus groups

The key findings offer common themes, a few unique results, and a little about what we heard in the six districts. The findings are summarized so they can be understood quickly. The complete focus group report from each district is contained in an appendix.

The youth focus groups were intended to give young people a voice in the same decisions that adults were being asked to make. Along with those budget questions, we asked the students to talk with us about Johnson County, why their families lived there and what would make it more likely that they would choose to live there as adults.

Students approached the exercise in ways that were similar to and different from adults

We asked students to take the simulator at home, using a special URL for that class, so that we could use all of the class time for discussing the results. Students took the simulator anywhere from a day to a couple of weeks prior to the focus group.

We met with seniors in a government-related class at a high school in each district.

- *District 1: Shawnee Mission West High School*
- *District 2: Mill Valley High School*
- *District 3: Spring Hill High School*
- *District 4: Blue Valley Northwest*
- *District 5: Olathe Northwest High School*
- *District 6: Gardner Edgerton High School*

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Students were surprised by the role of county government.	All	Students said they did not understand the role of county government and the complexities of budget decisions before taking the simulator. They expressed surprise at the range of services, like mental health and jails, handled by the County. One class said they had talked about budget cuts related to their school district, so they were somewhat prepared.
Like adults, the easiest choice was to cut convenience.	All	Every class found it easiest to cut items like DMV wait times and polling locations because they viewed it as producing just a minor inconvenience.
Students cut some items on the simulator that they supported in conversation.	Some	The simulator results sometimes don't match the contents of the discussion. Students cut some items to the bone, such as libraries and parks, then voiced strong support for those items during discussion. One interpretation is that students are used to being assigned tasks, and did their best to cut the budget even when the cuts went against their values.
Students were one step removed from most services.	All	When students felt like a budget item had an impact on their lives, they were typically talking about parks and libraries, along with the general safety of the county. They acknowledged that their perspective was likely to be different from people who were paying taxes and using more of the services.

Culture & Recreation drew very different levels of support

The Culture & Recreation category included museums, parks, recreational programs and library sites, hours and collections.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Students use and strongly support Johnson County parks.	All	Students often included parks among services with a direct impact on their lives and expressed support for the parks system. For example, Mill Valley students said they were proud of their well-maintained parks and many used the trails and exercise areas to promote wellness. Spring Hill students said free parks were important to families and that urban areas benefited from parks and open space. A student in Gardner said her family is composed of outdoor people who use the parks as a vehicle for interacting with each other.
Student attitudes about libraries varied wildly from school to school and, to a lesser extent, within classes.	All	Student opinions ran from one end of the continuum to the other regarding the value of libraries to their lives. Some said that the internet made libraries obsolete, others spoke eloquently about libraries as a safe space that encourages learning and creativity. Some students said they used the school library and their computers at home and rarely used the public library, while others used it extensively for research on databases and as a safe, quiet place to study and work on group projects. Attitudes tended to be fairly similar within classes. For example, Gardner-Edgerton and Olathe students had little interest in the public library, while Blue Valley students said they used it often and wished it was open from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. when they did their homework. Spring Hill students said library hours had already taken a hit and shouldn't be cut more.
Cuts to libraries on the simulator didn't reflect support for libraries in discussion.	Some	While public libraries underwent severe cuts on the simulator in one or two classes, they had strong supporters among some of the students. Several students said they might not have cut it so much after the discussion. Students who didn't use the library themselves often spoke in support of their younger siblings or those in the community who needed internet access.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People were more willing to cut hours than other resources.	Many	People reasoned that you could temporarily cut hours for libraries, parks and museums without doing permanent harm to the institutions. When students talked about closing branches, it was so that funds could be used to beef up the remaining libraries with more hours and resources. Students in Olathe said parks should be open during the day but closed in the evening because they aren't safe after dark.

Culture & Recreation	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Museum facilities & hours	2.2	2.7	2.8	2.0	2.7	2.1	2.2
Safety & outdoor education	2.4	3.1	3.1	2.6	3.2	2.3	2.6
Park maintenance & development	2.5	3.4	3.3	2.8	2.9	2.6	2.8
Recreational program fees	2.4	2.9	3.0	2.6	2.6	2.2	2.4
Library hours	1.9	2.6	2.9	3.2	2.3	2.1	2.5
Library locations	2.1	2.6	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.4
Library collections	2.3	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.8	2.1	2.7

Public Safety & Emergency Services cuts viewed as promoting a benefit

An explanation: In all of the other budget categories, if you cut the dollars spent on that category it meant that you were cutting staff or stuff, like buildings or collections. In this category, though, if you wanted to cut costs you would invest money in programs that keep people out of jail. The reasoning is that, because it costs so much to keep someone in jail, you can reduce total costs by spending money on work-release programs, mental health crisis responders, etc., that prevent people from spending more expensive time in the county jail.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Students complained less about the reversed scoring system than adults did.	All	Students were a little confused by the fact that, for this section, you would hire people and beef up programs in order to cut total spending. They seemed more comfortable than the adult focus group participants. This may be because they were able to take the simulator at home and could spend extra time on it. Adults took it during the focus group session.
Students thought rehabilitation was a worthy goal, but wanted proof.	All	Students understood the Public Safety premise and made their choices based on the goal of reducing jail populations and allowing better re-entry into society for prisoners. They were less concerned about reducing costs and more in support of the idea of rehabilitation. One group discussed balancing public safety with the desire to provide a second chance. Another group said the county should evaluate the effectiveness of its programs. They liked the idea of prevention over incarceration but were skeptical about its effectiveness and wanted proof that it worked.
Safety was considered a major benefit of living in Johnson County.	All	Safety is a core quality-of-life issue and a strong attractor to life in Johnson County. Spring Hill students, for example, said that without safety, not much else matters, and that lack of safety spurred their parents to move from an urban environment to Johnson County. Students supported crime lab funding because they thought it would improve safety. One student, though, said increasing spending for safety could make people feel less safe by implying there was a need for greater security.
Students didn't focus on juvenile offenders.	All	The Olathe Northwest group spoke on behalf of spending money to rehabilitate juveniles because young people have more potential to be rehabilitated. They said some young people commit crimes out of boredom or even get arrested on purpose, but generally believe that most young people would take advantage of rehabilitation services. This was the only group that spoke to the issue of juvenile offenders.

Section 3: Key findings from the youth focus groups

Public Safety & Emergency Services	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Mental health crisis responders	2.7	3.1	2.5	1.9	2.6	2.5	2.4
Work release	2.1	2.9	2.2	2.2	2.5	1.9	2.2
Re-entry programming	2.5	2.9	2.8	2.2	2.7	2.4	2.4
Juvenile offenders	2.2	2.7	2.9	2.2	2.5	2.2	2.4
Criminalistics laboratory	3.0	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.2	2.9	3.2
Library locations	2.1	2.6	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.4
Library collections	2.3	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.8	2.1	2.7

Health & Human Services saw student support for child services

This category included a multi-service center and child care licensure, and services related to family health, supported employment, intake/outpatient mental health, and aging.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Students valued health & human services.	All	Every class said that they wanted to avoid cutting health & human services because they have a direct impact on people's lives. Shawnee Mission West students were both surprised and pleased that their fellow students agreed about the value of these services. Spring Hill students said it was important to help those suffering in the economic downturn, and this was basic to keeping families well.
The safety and welfare of children mattered most.	Most	The Mill Valley students cut little from the child care licensure category because people needed to be able to trust that their children were safe. In general, they said, the county should have the welfare of children as a high priority. The Olathe Northwest students said if it were a choice between serving the aging and serving children, they would favor more services to children.
Students placed different value on aging services.	All	Spring Hill students said that aging services would be important to the elders in their families as well as for themselves when they reach that age. Blue Valley students, particularly those of Asian descent, felt strongly that family should take care of their elderly members, so some were willing to cut funding. Others said services should be available to those without family. Gardner Edgerton students only cut a little from aging services, which they said was a selfless act. They acknowledged the responsibility to take care of the community's elderly.
Providing services locally was viewed as important.	4	Students felt health care should be a local concern, with services provided by the community and faith-based organizations rather than the government.

Health & Human Services	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Child care licensure	2.9	3.5	2.9	2.8	3.0	2.5	2.7
Family health services	2.6	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.9	2.8
Supported employment services	2.7	3.1	3.0	2.8	3.1	2.3	2.7
Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.6	3.0	2.9	2.4	2.8	2.3	2.8
Aging services	2.6	3.0	3.0	2.2	2.9	2.7	2.9
Multi-service center	2.4	2.8	2.9	2.4	3.0	2.6	2.6

Infrastructure shows support for public transit

The Infrastructure category includes snow removal, The JO hours and trips, and The JO routes.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Students like the idea of public transit.	Most	Students generally liked the idea of public transit, even when they questioned the value of The JO. For example, students at Shawnee Mission West had experienced public transit in other U.S. cities and in Europe, and supported efficient, high-usage public transit. Others said public transit was important, but more for urban than suburban and rural areas.
Students don't see the need for The JO and are willing to cut funding.	All	Students were generally critical of The JO. Few had ever used it or knew anyone else who had used it. One exception was students at Blue Valley Northwest, who said they used the bus to Lawrence, and some Gardner Edgerton students, who said bus service had a direct impact on their lives. The big question for students was whether The JO was needed at all. They questioned the number of riders and many said they saw empty buses on the streets. Most students did believe it was important, particularly when it allowed low-income residents to get to work. After discussion, some were willing to be more supportive of The JO.
Students like snow days.	All	Students acknowledged that snow-filled streets might make it more difficult to get to jobs, and thought that adults might put a higher priority on snow removal. Students weighed that against the joy that is the snow day, and the snow day usually won. The Gardner Edgerton class cut snow removal quite a bit, and one student suggested that it was because it was easier for them to understand what it was that they were actually cutting.

Infrastructure	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Snow removal	2.1	3.0	2.6	2.2	3.0	2.1	2.6
The JO hours and trips	2.2	2.5	2.4	2.1	2.5	2.3	2.4
The JO routes	2.4	3.0	2.1	2.2	2.4	2.2	2.4

General Government was easiest to cut

The General Government category included vehicle tag renewal and titles, distance to voting location, and voting wait times.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
A little inconvenience was a small price to pay for avoiding other cuts.	All	Like the adults, students viewed cutting voting and DMV services as an easy choice. They were willing to experience the inconvenience caused by standing in line a few minutes longer or driving a little bit farther. They said it didn't happen often and that preserving services for people in need was much more important.
Some were concerned about the impact on voting.	Most	When students said they were concerned about reducing people's willingness to go to the polls, other students said that people who wanted to vote would drive a little farther or stand in line a little longer. Students talked about elections as special events that happen rarely.
Technology can reduce inconvenience.	Most	Like adults, students saw technology as a solution to any potential inconvenience caused by budget cuts. For example, they thought the DMV should text people so they didn't have to stand in line at the facility to get new car tags.
Personal experience makes a difference	2	Mill Valley students hadn't voted yet, and said it was impossible to judge the service at polling places.

General Government	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Online
Vehicle tag renewals and titles	2.7	2.9	2.4	2.1	2.7	2.0	2.4
Distance to voting locations	2.3	2.6	2.2	2.1	2.4	2.1	2.2
Voting wait times	2.4	2.9	2.8	2.1	3.0	2.6	2.4

Students appreciated Johnson County and most would be willing to raise a family there

We asked students to talk about why their families chose to live in Johnson County and whether they would be likely to return to Johnson County if they left for college.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
Students liked growing up in Johnson County.	All	Students said they valued the schools, particularly their own school, and said they felt safe and protected in the county. People talked about their families moving there to escape violence in other areas, or their parents returning to Johnson County after they had children. They appreciated the job opportunities that were available to their parents. Gardner Edgerton students said their families valued the small-town feel and the outdoor lifestyle.
Education drives people to Johnson County.	All	The single biggest factor in people's decisions to move to or stay in Johnson County was the quality of the education available there.
Students saw the county as a great place to raise a family.	All	When they were ready to settle down and raise a family, most students said they were likely to return to Johnson County.
As young adults without children, they prefer to live somewhere more exciting.	All	Between graduating from high school and starting a family, most students wanted to live in a faster paced environment where there is always something going on and lots of opportunities for nightlife and recreation. One student said she felt county life was sheltered, and another said it was cookie-cutter, and both did not want to return. Spring Hill students said the county could use more urban appeal and bike lanes, and that Kansas City was too far away to be used regularly.
Jobs would pull students back.	1, 4	Students in one group described a wide range of jobs, many in science fields, which would draw them back to Johnson County. Blue Valley Northwest students said they were worried about the kinds of jobs that would be available to them after graduation.

Section 4: What adults and youth said about the engagement

Theme	District	Notes and comments
People liked face-to-face engagement.	Adults and youth	Focus group members liked the chance to talk in person about the decisions they would make. As one participant said, "I think local government is the best level to solve real problems and to have meaningful engagement and dialogue. You can have a real dialogue with the community and not just speeches with something gauging whether a listener likes or doesn't like what is being said." One adult focus group said it wanted to get together with members of other focus groups after the online simulator results were available.
People were interested in more information and the chance to dig deeper.	Adults and youth	Both adults and young people had specific questions that they wanted answered, most of which had to do with the impact that cuts would have on other human beings. Several adults said they wanted the chance to focus on a particular area and learn more before offering an opinion.
People saw the value of engaging the public and appreciated the opportunity.	Adults and youth	Two of the adult focus groups were especially adamant that engaging the public is a chance to reap creative ideas that can help government raise revenue or find ways around barriers. Both adults and youth appreciated the opportunity to weigh in and took the results of the engagement seriously. One group of adults pushed elected officials to aggressively promote the online simulator to make sure thousands of residents participated. One student group said all government classes should take the simulator because of its educational value, and another group said it was a rare time when young people were asked to give an opinion and they appreciated it. As one adult said, "Johnson County is one of the few counties in the country with a AAA credit rating, and I feel honored that they have asked me to participate in this exercise."
Students wanted to understand more about how the budget affected their lives.	Youth	Some student groups had a hard time connecting with some of the budget choices because they felt the items had nothing to do with their day-to-day existence. For example, if you haven't voted, how do you know how well the system is run? Some students wanted more background on how the budget affects their lives. One group said that college students would better understand what was at stake. Another said that the biggest push should be to educate adults, whose tax dollars pay for services. But, they said, even younger people will vote soon and the simulator shows how a small decision can affect the budget.

Theme	District	Notes and comments
<p>People want to know how the engagement affected the final outcome.</p>	<p>Adults</p>	<p>Focus group participants were very interested in learning whether and how the commission’s choices were affected by what they heard from the public. They were interested in feedback on why commissioners supported one or another decision. People also said that it didn’t matter so much if their opinion carried the day. They wanted to understand, when it didn’t, why leaders made a different choice.</p>

Section 5: Consensus recommendations

The Consensus team appreciated the chance to work with the Johnson County Budget and Financial Planning Department and the Citizen Engagement Committee on engaging the public. After this experience, we understand why Johnson Countians place such faith in government leaders and staff members to be skillful and efficient.

After this first year, the department will have the chance to do some fine-tuning. We offer a few suggestions for coming years.

Continue to engage residents face-to-face.	If the online simulator shows <i>what</i> people would do, the focus groups uncovered <i>why</i> they would do it. That background is vital for officials who have to make choices and want to be informed by the values of local citizens. For example, it would be easy to assume that cuts in The JO mean that people are opposed to public transit. In fact, residents – students especially – are very interested in public transit but don’t feel The JO is the right configuration for Johnson County.
Continue to engage young people.	It is so unusual for governments to engage young people along with adults. Doing so was a powerful statement that Johnson County values young people not just as future taxpayers, but as people whose voices matter today.
Use mail for recruiting a random sample of citizens.	Initially, the committee had intended to mail invitations to local residents. Because time was too short, and based on past experience filling focus groups in Johnson County, we suggested that random phone calls would fill focus groups faster. Next time, we suggest returning to the original model, making sure to leave enough time for people to RSVP and to choose a random sample of respondents.
Consider focus groups with specific populations.	The project called for one focus group in each district. Along with the geographic distribution of focus groups, it would also be interesting to meet with specific populations, such as young parents or Hispanic residents or people who have moved to the county recently, who might be expected to have a distinct point of view.
Keep building the simulator.	Overall, the simulator worked very well and people had few questions about how to use it. In coming years, the County could use gaming technology to make it even more clear and understandable. It could also make the consequences of cuts more clear, so that people would have a sense of the human cost of reducing funding, the area where people had the most questions, and the values that were held by people who made different choices.

<p>Let adults take the simulator the day before.</p>	<p>There were good reasons for asking adults to take the simulator during the focus group this time around. It might work even better to let them take it on their own the day before. People spent from 15-35 minutes to complete the simulator during the focus group session, and many wanted more time to understand what was at stake. Given the strong sense of commitment to these groups, it seems reasonable to assume that people can be depended on to complete the simulator on their own.</p>
<p>Consider giving people the chance to dig more deeply and offer ideas.</p>	<p>Many people also wanted the chance to explore some budget items, to get a better sense of what was at stake and to have the chance to offer creative, potentially revenue-generating ideas. There are a variety of processes that could be used to engage Johnson Countians more deeply in learning about the budget, and it is worth considering this activity as a supplement to the focus groups and online simulator.</p>
<p>Partner with youth-based groups.</p>	<p>The high school government classes worked very well as the basis for focus groups. We found that students were interested in the simulator and learned a lot about government from it. The County should consider forming partnerships with groups like Kids Voting Kansas to build on the simulator as a teaching tool. In addition, the County could make the focus group questions available to teachers, along with a URL they can use to have their students take the simulator as a class.</p>

Appendix A

Focus group agenda and questions: adults

The agenda: assumes 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

- 6-6:15 p.m. Participants arrive, get dinner
- 6:15-6:25 Welcome. Facilitator leads introductions within the group and explains ground rules and the flow of the evening.
- 6:25-6:30 Opening remarks from the commissioner
- 6:30-6:35 Informational video and handout. Budget and Financial Planning Dept. staff
- 6:35-6:55 Individuals complete online budget simulator. Staff person compiles and prints copies of the group's responses.
- 6:55-7:50 Focus group discussion. Consensus Consulting facilitator. Notes taken by Johnson County staff person.
Commissioner observes.
- 7:50-8:00 Commissioner asks questions of the participants.

The following are questions that the Consensus facilitator asked of adult focus group participants. Questions in **bold** are most important, while other questions were asked if there was time.

1. **In a minute, we'll show you the group's results. First, we're curious about something. What is the one choice you think everybody else probably made differently than you did?**
2. You made decisions about funding for public safety, parks and museums, and other budget items. When you think about your choices, what was the easiest choice to make in terms of what should NOT be cut?
 - What made this such an easy call?
 - How does this service affect you personally?
 - How does it affect the whole county?
3. What was the easiest choice to make in terms of what SHOULD be cut?
 - What made this such an easy call?
 - How does this service affect you personally?
 - How does it affect the whole county?
4. **When you look at the services this group chose to cut and those it chose to keep, what impact do you see these choices having on the quality of life in Johnson County? [Focus on the 2 that took the biggest hit, and the 2 that were cut the least.]**

- What impact do you expect to feel personally?
 - What consequences worry you the most?
 - Could and should someone other than the county provide any of these services?
 - Are there opportunities to reduce the impact without spending more money?
 - What connection do you see between setting budget priorities and this being a better place to live? Does it matter for your quality of life? What about people who are older or younger than you?
5. What result surprised you? What result would you not have expected from this group?
- What made it surprising?
 - For people who made the choice, why did you make it? What was your thinking?
6. **You completed the budget simulator before talking with your fellow citizens. If you were to take the simulator again, what choices would you make differently as the result of this conversation?**
- When you look at the choices this group made, can you live with these choices? How confident do you feel that these are the best possible choices?
7. **In the future, when you think about how Johnson County residents should be involved in setting budget priorities, what would you like that process to look like?**
- When should residents be involved?
 - Online? Face-to-face? Both?
 - What kind of information would you like to have?
 - What would prove to you that your voice was heard?
 - When you think about decisions that affect the county, is there anything you want to have the chance to have a voice on but you haven't been given the opportunity?

Focus group agenda and questions: students

The agenda

- 5 min: Opening remarks from the commissioner.
- 60 min: Focus group discussion.
- 10 min: Commissioner asks questions of the class.

The focus group discussion

1. **I'd like to start with a very broad question about your relationship to the county budget. Before using the simulator, did you ever think about the county budget and its impact on your and your family? Do you think differently about it after using the budget simulator?**
2. You made decisions about funding for public safety, parks and museums, snow removal and other budget items. When you think about your choices, what was the easiest choice to make in terms of what should NOT be cut?
 - What made this such an easy call?
 - How does this service affect you personally?
 - How does it affect everyone in the county?
3. What was the easiest choice to make in terms of what SHOULD be cut?
 - What made this such an easy call?
 - How does this service affect you personally?
 - How does it affect everyone in the county?
4. When you look at the results, what surprised you? What result would you not have expected from this group?
 - What made it surprising?
 - For people who made the choice, why did you make it? What was your thinking?
5. **When you look at the services this group chose to cut and those it chose to keep, what impact do you see these choices having on the quality of life in Johnson County? [Facilitator will focus on the one or two that took the biggest hit, and the one that was cut the least.]**
 - What impact do you expect to feel personally?
 - What consequences worry you the most?

- 6. You completed the budget simulator before talking with your classmates. If you were to take the simulator again, what choices would you make differently as the result of this conversation?**
 - When you look at the choices this group made, can you live with these choices? How confident do you feel that these are the best possible choices?
7. Most of the people who complete the budget simulator will be older than you. What impact do you think age will have on people's budget priorities? Are students likely to make different choices than adults?
- 8. We'd like to take a few minutes and find out more about how you feel about Johnson County as a place to live.**
 - Why do you think your family chose to live here?
 - How has this been as a place to be a young person?
 - What would make it more likely that you would choose to live in Johnson County as an adult?
 - How do the budget choices affect whether Johnson County is the kind of community you want to live in?
- 9. When you think about how Johnson County residents, including students, should be involved in setting budget priorities, what would you like that process to look like?**
 - When should residents be involved?
 - Online? Face-to-face? Both?
 - What kind of information would you like to have?
 - What would prove to you that your voice was heard?

Appendix B

Focus group reports

District #1: Adults

Date	Wednesday, February 15, 2012
Location	Sylvester Powell, Jr. Community Center, Mission
Participants	14 Adults
Commissioner	Ed Peterson
Moderator	Dan Blom

Professions of Participants

We asked the panelists to tell us their names and what they do for work. The group described themselves as the following:

- Leawood resident
- Health care company vice president
- Prairie Village resident – commercial real estate
- Prairie Village resident – works in Wyandotte County
- Downtown Overland Park development
- Business consultant
- Business owner
- Currently looking for employment
- Teacher in the KCMO School District
- UMKC library
- Community volunteer
- Market research
- KU professor
- Prairie Village resident

Individuals registered after receiving information about the focus group from their local chamber, school, neighborhood or a civic organization. The group included seven females and seven males.

After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
<p>Raising taxes was an option the group would have supported.</p>	<p>The participants overwhelmingly wanted the option to raise revenues as part of the simulator experience. Members pointed out that the video showed Johnson County with the lowest tax rate in the state, and that it could absorb a mill levy increase and still be the lowest. One member said voters should be asked to decide if raising taxes is an appropriate path to supporting services. Many in the group would have chosen a tax increase over budget reductions.</p>
<p>Some cuts are just minor inconveniences.</p>	<p>Fewer voting places and motor vehicle wait times are inconveniences the group is willing to put up with to lower costs, primarily because the interaction is infrequent and both offer a variety of options for completing the transaction. Mail and online options for licenses, absentee and early voting can alleviate the waiting time or driving time. Some participants said they were troubled by the concept of making voting more difficult (because of its central role in democracy), but recognized the alternatives to in-person voting made the cut palatable.</p>
<p>Personal experience dictates initial reactions. But, discussion would influence final decisions.</p>	<p>Many of the choices participants made were based on personal experience or a personal connection. People who relied on a particular county service or who had a family member who used the service – such as mental health services or utility assistance – or who worked in the field were staunch advocates of those services. Perspectives were altered, however, after discussing the cuts with others. Most participants said they would have changed some of their choices after hearing the different perspectives.</p>
<p>Small reductions don't attract much support.</p>	<p>Some participants said they felt rushed by the time allotted to take the simulator. If they had more time, they said, they would have refined their choices and probably have gone back to restore many of the small cuts. The small dollar reductions did not impress the group as being worth the sacrifice that the department might need to make. Some said they skipped those options to focus on big ticket items that had more substantial impact.</p>

Theme	Explanation
Supporting people who have encountered problems is a fundamental value.	Human services garner considerable support among the group as a whole. In fact, taking care of people is considered a value that should guide decisions. One participant said a society is judged by how well they treat their most vulnerable members. While many participants said the county is the provider of last resort and must meet that obligation, one participant suggested that families should contribute towards the cost of some human services if they are able to pay. Overall, though, a strong sentiment prevailed that robust human services contribute to quality of life in Johnson County and will become more important in the future because of changing demographics and an increased need for services.
Public safety cuts are both confusing and easy to make, but create skepticism.	The prospect of adding staff to actually reduce the budget cost made the public safety reductions simple to support. However, some in the group questioned whether the logic behind the budget reductions (by increasing support) was sound – would the resulting savings actually occur if more support personnel are added? Others found the choices confusing because reducing the number on the budget scale was increasing the amount of support. To many the choices were counterintuitive.
Quality of life is important, but what is the definition?	The high quality of life underpins why people choose Johnson County. The county budget should support the services, amenities and basic government functions that maintain such a high standard. Opinions vary about core attributes of quality of life. Infrastructure and public safety are basic components, but recreational and family-oriented amenities are important as well. Others said there is a cultural aspect, which includes libraries, that is valued in Johnson County. Another member cited the county’s investment in the future – specifically the research triangle – and said Johnson County is building a base for learning, care and life as it changes into the future.
More information is suggested to help put the budget decisions in context.	Going forward, participants want more information to put their choices in context. And, they would like to see the entire budget rather than just a few choices, so more options are available and they can see the impact on the entire spending plan. They also want to have a way to quantify and qualify the impact of their decisions on county residents.
The county is going to be forced by federal and state budget cuts to take a bigger role.	Participants felt that the county will be forced to step forward, as state and federal budgets shrink in the future, to protect the interests of its citizens. They believe the county budget may be under more pressure to provide the services that are necessary to maintain Johnson County quality.

Theme	Explanation
Access to regional amenities contributes to quality of life in Johnson County.	While it is not part of the budget consideration, participants said the access to regional attractions is a contributor to why people choose to live in Johnson County and especially in the northeast. County decision-making should take note of that.
People who have used a particular support service have great regard for the help and don't want to see them cut.	Personal experience with a county service is a powerful driver to keep those services intact – especially those in the human services area. Even in public safety, one participant suggested that people who had been victims of a crime are going to have a much stronger affinity for bolstering those public safety expenditures.
Public transit has a connection to human services and sustainable development.	Several participants expressed support for public transit and for The JO. One participant said public transit is a key component for future growth and sustainable development, so it needs more support. Others saw it as an extension of human services – for disadvantaged to get to jobs and appointments. Another saw it as a counter to sprawl and a way to connect communities. However, others cut the service because they feel it is flawed in its current form. One person said it could lower expenses by cutting mid-day route coverage and beefing up its commuter service.
Participants projected the effects of their decisions to people of lower income.	Many participants wondered how people of lower income would react to the same budget challenges. The library budget is a prime example. One participant said she would gladly pay more for the 'excellent' library services in Johnson County, but knows that others could not afford to pay. The concept of projecting how others of lower income might be affected applied to other services as well. The group overall values Johnson County services, believes they are worth paying more for, but worries about lower income ability to pay more or not have the availability of the service. By example, one participant pointed out the number of people who rely on the computers in the libraries.
Public safety raises some chicken and egg questions.	Is the community safe because we have a public safety infrastructure in place or have we over-built an infrastructure in response to a perception that the world is a scary place? That was the question of one participant. However, public safety was an area they would be reluctant to cut because they feel it is an essential service and believe that the good public safety infrastructure has created the safe environment in the county. One participant said she would be willing to cut the public safety budget, but did not find that a viable option in the simulator.
Johnson County still is missing some services that it should be providing.	There are changes occurring in Johnson County that are not yet being faced and will become more challenging as demographics in the county continue to change. One participant cited the lack of a homeless shelter as an example of a new challenge not being met. The county should consider its gaps as well as just maintaining current service.

Theme	Explanation
Accountability and efficiency versus what it costs us in the long run.	The group acknowledged that choices can be difficult because fiscal accountability is necessary to balance needs and wants. Would you cut museum hours to open up a homeless shelter? That is difficult, the participant said. One member expressed trust that managers are employing all possible efficiencies and said it is important to be fiscally responsible while providing the services that make the county attractive. Others said that understanding the human impact of budget decisions would help them, especially if they could understand the long-term savings of earlier interventions.

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.5	Snow removal	2.4
Work release	2.0	The JO hours and trips	3.3
Re-entry programming	2.2	The JO routes	3.0
Juvenile offenders	2.5	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.5	Child care licensure	3.0
Culture & recreation		Family health services	3.4
Museum – facilities and hours	2.1	Supported employment services	3.0
Safety & outdoor education	2.4	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	3.1
Park maintenance & development	2.6	Aging services	3.4
Recreational program fees	1.9	Multi-service center	3.4
Library hours	2.7	General government	
Library locations	2.8	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.0
Library collections	3.1	Distance to voting locations	2.5
		Voting wait times	2.7

District #2: Adults

Date Thursday, February 9, 2012
 Location Johnson County Public Library/Shawnee
 Participants 13 adults
 Commissioner Jim Allen
 Moderator Mary Jo Draper

Two participants were recruited by random cold calls and the remainder registered after receiving information about the focus group from their local chamber, school, neighborhood or a civic organization. After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
It's ok to increase waiting time at polling places and DMV as there are ways to avoid the wait.	The group said it was ok to increase wait times at polling places because they have the option to vote in advance or absentee. They felt if individuals had to wait in line to vote it was their own fault. They also think the wait times for registering a vehicle can be avoided by getting a text when their number comes up. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wait time doesn't matter as much because people don't vote or register a car very often. • Individuals should bear responsibility for waiting until the last day of the month and having to stand in line.
Participants were confused by some of the simulator language or felt they needed additional details.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They wanted to know if there was an unmet need for mental health services or whether demand is currently being met. • They wondered why there was only one question about the museum but three each on parks and libraries. • They wanted attendance figures for the museum. • The public safety questions were confusing.

Theme	Explanation
The county needs to take special care of the elderly.	They said public transportation is an important service for the poor and elderly. This group did not want to cut funding for the JO, since they said some people really rely on it. One said the county should provide quality public transportation, but the group worried it would be too costly. The group saw value in providing a bus service in order to keep people from leaving the county. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
The group favored cuts that cause people inconvenience rather than cuts that impact the vulnerable.	For instance, the group would cut in the general government area rather than reducing the JO. Several were willing to pay more for preserving services to the vulnerable. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The county should keep in mind that the population is aging and prepare for it.
Cutting hours at the museum would not have a great impact.	Although one participant had been on the museum board, most had never visited. They thought limiting hours would be ok because people could schedule their visits when the museum was open. Another participant said it was ok to raise fees because the museum is not an essential service.
Technology could make the county more efficient.	Participants like the use of texting when spots are available at the DMV.
The county might need to make some temporary cutbacks until the economy improves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be ok to defer parkland acquisition until the economy improves. • They favored cutting hours now and expanding services when the economy improves. • They were also ok with deferring the growth of the JO until revenues go up. • Library hours could be cut.
Library hours could be cut but not library collections.	The group favored maintaining collections but cutting hours if necessary.
The group favored increased funding for the crime lab.	One participant said this was a no brainer as timeliness is critical in trying cases and examining evidence. Another said now that the county has a facility, it needs to add staff.
The county needs to live within its means.	Several participants said that with low home values and high unemployment, the county needs to live within its means. But another said he was unable to make cuts to get a 5.8% target reduction rate and he didn't see how the commissioners could either. Another said local government faces increased demand for services when times are hard, which makes it more important not to cut services now.
The group did not consider itself to be typical of Johnson County.	They felt they were "power users" of county services and more knowledgeable than the average citizen.

This group values services and is willing to pay for them.	Participants said they are passionate about services and willing to pay a premium to live in Johnson County. They said they value things like libraries and parks and are willing to pay for them.
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The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.2	Snow removal	2.6
Work release	2.1	The JO hours and trips	2.8
Re-entry programming	2.3	The JO routes	2.4
Juvenile offenders	2.5	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.7	Child care licensure	2.6
Culture & recreation		Family health services	2.7
Museum – facilities and hours	1.9	Supported employment services	2.3
Safety & outdoor education	2.8	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.8
Park maintenance & development	3.0	Aging services	2.7
Recreational program fees	2.0	Multi-service center	2.5
Library hours	2.7	General government	
Library locations	2.5	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.0
Library collections	3.0	Distance to voting locations	2.1
		Voting wait times	2.0

District #3: Adults

Date Wednesday, March 1, 2012
 Location Johnson County Library, Leawood branch
 Participants 12 Adults
 Commissioner David Lindstrom
 Moderator Dan Blom

Members of the group registered after receiving information about the focus group from their local chamber, school, neighborhood or a civic organization. After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
Fundamental core services should be preserved first.	Core services include public safety, roads and other basics. “If you don’t take care of crimes, it doesn’t matter if you have a library,” one participant said. Everything else is an amenity that may be valuable, but not essential. The fundamentals need to be provided first and then the components that make Johnson County an attractive place to live. Services that allow the economy to function would be considered core.
Some government service can be pared back with minor inconvenience.	The few times per year that a person votes or needs to go to the DMV makes any reduction a minor inconvenience at most. Participants pointed out that the alternatives available to renew vehicle tags by mail or online and to vote in advance or my mail, alleviated most of the inconvenience associated with these reductions. Especially with DMV interactions, users should be incented to move to online or mail to avoid the need for personal appearance at the office.
Public safety choices were confusing, but easy to make.	While public safety attracts support on its own merits as a core government service, the choices in the simulator were confusing because adding personnel led to a reduction in county expenditures. The structure of the choices made it easy to reduce the budget, but left the group skeptical of the actual validity of the method.

Theme	Explanation
Human services also can be a preventive that saves money.	If investments in public safety can reap savings in the future, it seems human services could do the same by preventing costlier outlays for people who don't get the service they need to avoid deleterious results. Besides the potential savings generated by intervention services, providing a safety net for people who need help – who may be outliers from the general population - is a fundamental value that should guide budget decisions, according to several of the participants. Aging services is an area where participants said keeping people in their homes would produce long-term savings for the county. Human services, in general, garnered support throughout the discussion.
Since we have built an excellent criminal lab, we need to support its operation.	Participants also thought that raising support for the lab was worth it due to the time it reduced processing for criminal cases. If we spent tax dollars to build it, then we should spend the money to support its operation, one participant said.
Raising taxes is an option that should be given to the group.	Several participants thought they should be given the option of raising the mill levy to support the services that they believe are essential. One participant countered that the low mill levy in Johnson County may be a factor that attracts people to live here.
Parks and libraries are two services that have supporters.	Participants would like to avoid cuts to these areas because they are popular amenities for Johnson County residents. Several agreed that park maintenance and security are important to keep the parks useful: without them, the parks would deteriorate or be unsafe. One participant said a one-year cut might be palatable. Libraries are another amenity that participants are reluctant to cut and believe the small dollar savings may not be justified. These are both seen as significant quality of life issues.
More information would help participants go deeper into budget areas.	Participants described the simulator exercise as broad and shallow (but a worthwhile undertaking) and suggested that future engagements could allow citizens to choose a few areas to probe more deeply with significantly more information. In general, participants expressed a desire for more context and wider choices that reflect more of the entire county budget.
The JO draws mixed reactions – supporters and detractors.	For some participants, The JO is not a core public service and the development patterns in the county make it difficult for public transit to make a real difference. For others, however, The JO supports growth, ties Johnson County to the larger metro area, and takes care of people who must rely on public transit to live their lives.

<p>Snow removal may be better than citizens have a right to expect.</p>	<p>For people living in rural areas, snow is cleared very quickly, maybe sooner than they should expect since they made the choice to live where they do. There is a point, though, when it would become a problem if the snow stayed on the roads too long. Some judicious cutback could be justified.</p>
<p>Schools count in Johnson County.</p>	<p>Schools are a driver in the decision to move to Johnson County and decisions around county budgets should keep in mind this primary value and motivator.</p>

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.0	Snow removal	2.7
Work release	1.8	The JO hours and trips	2.8
Re-entry programming	2.0	The JO routes	2.7
Juvenile offenders	2.1	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.4	Child care licensure	2.8
Culture & recreation		Family health services	3.3
Museum – facilities and hours	2.6	Supported employment services	2.8
Safety & outdoor education	2.8	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	3.1
Park maintenance & development	2.8	Aging services	3.4
Recreational program fees	2.5	Multi-service center	2.8
Library hours	2.6	General government	
Library locations	2.4	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.2
Library collections	2.7	Distance to voting locations	2.3
		Voting wait times	2.6

District #4: Adults

Date	Monday, February 13, 2012
Location	Central Resource Library
Participants	14 adults
Commissioner	Jason Osterhaus
Moderator	Jennifer Wilding

Professions of participants

We asked the panelists to tell us their names and what they do for work. The group included the following:

- Insurance agent
- Financial planner
- Two attorneys
- Entrepreneur
- Manager
- Environmental Protection Agency employee
- Two nonprofit executive directors
- Home remodeler
- Retirees – one retired from a large corporation and the other retired as a social worker

The group included 14 individuals who registered after receiving information about the focus group from their local chamber, school, neighborhood or a civic organization. The group included seven females and seven males.

After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
Strategy mattered when cutting costs.	People looked for where “they could move the needle the most.” Several focused on where they could cut the least to save the most money. Two noticed how much could be saved by increasing services in Corrections. One person cut 93% of the target from that category. Others said they were confused by that category.
Whether we use a service also matters.	This group cut from museum services and hours. People who had visited a museum, or whose children had visited, were less likely to cut than those who hadn’t.
People also cut depending on whether a service was considered central.	One person said education, roads and safety were the most important government services. Another said that cultural amenities mattered less in Johnson County. (“I don’t think quality of life is going to be had because we have a museum...It is not for the cultural amenities. They can find better choices for that over in Jackson County.”)
The JO could and should be reconfigured.	Poorer segments of the population need public transit to be able to get to work, but The JO doesn’t have enough routes and isn’t sufficient to serve the county. Some felt that The JO should be beefed up. (“The County needs to try and built a successful brand like Kansas City’s bus rapid transit and build on the success of routes like K-10.”) Others felt that the County should consider alternatives like \$10 taxis and other choices. (“I feel we need to scrap the current JO and start all over. There do not seem to be enough routes and the whole thing needs to be revamped.”) One or two felt that The JO could be eliminated completely.
Voting was an easy choice to cut because it could be made more efficient.	Having a number of options for how people can vote, such as absentee and mail, reduces pressure on voting sites. Make it as easy to vote as possible, perhaps by considering online voting or letting people vote on the weekend. People who want to vote will travel an extra mile or two to get there.
Johnson County should raise taxes to keep the level of service high.	Several members said Johnson Countians expected a high level of services and would be willing to pay for them. One man said that he put in his address and figured that if he cut nothing, it would raise his taxes by \$100. “I am willing to raise my taxes and would gladly pay more to keep Johnson County as the light at the top of the hill.” One person said it was about maintaining property values. (“People are willing to pay more to maintain quality if it means it is able to increase value.”)
It’s important to consider how well we are providing services.	DMV services should be reconfigured, one person said, to deliver services smarter.

Theme	Explanation
Group members were concerned about cutting services to people who needed them.	The group didn't cut much from health and human services. One person said he/she was worried about the impact of cuts. ("We keep cutting and cutting and while that has satisfied the fiscal conservative side of me I do start getting worrying about the services...I am not sure I want to see us make further cuts to health and human services.") Another said "I worry about encountering someone on the street who needs mental health services and who doesn't have a means to get them." The group saw the County as a safety-net provider, but also wanted to know what other resources and providers were available, and if these other providers were more efficient.
Some were interested in outside-the-box solutions	People see citizens as a potential source of good ideas for being more efficient or innovative.
The group was hesitant to promote privatization of government services.	They were interested in making sure we weren't duplicating services and in cooperating. ("Someone's ox is sure to get gored if you use the term privatize, but I do think coordination is something that everyone could get on board with.") One person said never privatize food inspectors, and another said Meals on Wheel delivery could be contracted out. Another person said privatizing reduced the quality of the service. ("I have fears about privatization as the quality of services when you take it away from government go way down. They just don't seem to have the same level of responsibility that government does.")
They would have made choices differently after the conversation than before it.	Group members said they would have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut less from services they don't use themselves, like libraries and museums; • Chosen not to cut so much or kept funding levels the same as they are now.
People were interested in additional information.	The group wanted a trends study that would provide information about the increase in poverty and the aging population. They also wanted data on how many people use the library at particular times.
Values include innovation, efficiency, core services, and keeping good workers	One person said changes to snow removal will not have a big impact because it's only needed a few times year, whereas changes to mental health could have a much larger negative impact. Innovation can help with DMV and voting services by allowing technology to increase efficiency. One person said Johnson County should look into innovations such as consolidating city governments, like Wyandotte County did.
Some were also interested in raising revenue, not just cutting the budget.	The budget has two sides: revenue and expense. "Maybe the library should look at increasing book fines to get more revenue."

Theme	Explanation
The group liked face-to-face engagement in budget decisions.	“I like the ability to meet with those who are making the decisions, as I think more engagement makes for better government.” And “I think local government is the best level to solve real problems and to have meaningful engagement and dialogue. You can have real dialogue with the community and not just speeches with something gauging whether a listener likes or doesn’t like what is being said.”
The group wanted to know how the engagement affected the final outcome.	Several people said they wanted to know how the simulator results influenced decisions that were made. “Knowing that the information is being used or not used and why would be good.” “I would love to receive feedback from those making decisions to explain support for one position over and another and why.” They wanted the County to aggressively promote the simulator.

The following chart shows the average scores for the District 4 focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.5	Snow removal	2.4
Work release	2.3	The JO hours and trips	2.7
Re-entry programming	2.5	The JO routes	2.5
Juvenile offenders	2.3	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.4	Child care licensure	2.6
Culture & recreation		Family health services	2.9
Museum – facilities and hours	2.1	Supported employment services	2.7
Safety & outdoor education	2.9	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	3.0
Park maintenance & development	3.1	Aging services	2.8
Recreational program fees	2.3	Multi-service center	2.8
Library hours	2.6	General government	
Library locations	2.4	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.3
Library collections	2.8	Distance to voting locations	2.3
		Voting wait times	2.3

District #5: Adults

Date Monday, March 12, 2012
 Location Sunset Building
 Participants 12 adults
 Commissioner Michael Ashcraft
 Moderator Mary Jo Draper

The group included five females and seven males.

After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
Increasing waiting time for voting and vehicle tag renewal is an easy decision.	The participants agreed that longer wait times for vehicle registration and voting would be acceptable to them, although one worried that long wait times would make other people “go postal.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group favored mail in or advanced voting as cost-effective options. • They like on-line registration at the DMV.
This group favored increased rehabilitation and decreased jail time in the law enforcement area.	This group was initially confused by the law enforcement section, but said they understood that work release and rehabilitation programs could allow the county to cut its law enforcement budget. They group agreed in general that rehabilitation would prevent recurrence of crime. The group also did not want to see juvenile offenders put into jail. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most in this group found they were able to avoid raising taxes by increased funding for work release and rehabilitation programs.
The group supported increased funding for the crime lab.	This group felt the crime lab was important, but expressed concerns about a backlog in the court system and how long it sometimes takes cases to go to trial.

Theme	Explanation
Funding should remain stable for family health services.	The group said it is important to ensure everyone in the county has access to health care. They said that the county should take a long-term view of funding for this area, in that not providing adequate funding now would lead to greater costs in the future. They also thought that the county had already experienced a funding cut from the federal government and that it should return to a higher level of service. They said the county should not increase funding but maintain the pre-HHS cut level of service.
Services to the aging population are important.	This group said society is obligated to take care of the aging.
The county should offer a safety net but not a handout.	The group thinks the county has a hidden problem with homeless children. They said the demand on food pantries is huge, showing that there are poverty issues in Johnson County. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group thinks of Johnson County as a small town with Midwestern values.
The group would support a tax increase for certain services.	They would vote for higher taxes for the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To avoid cuts in schools • To pay for health and human services • To maintain Johnson County's high quality of life
Cutting library hours would be painful but might be necessary.	This group said libraries are very important to people in all walks of life. They think Johnson County has a "fantastic" library system. However, they said they would make cuts in library hours and locations in order to preserve funds for mental health and aging services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries serve as heating and cooling centers for those who don't have adequate access to utilities. • Libraries add to the vibrancy of the community • On participant said she initially cut library services but after the discussion she changed her mind. • Some felt the library provided services and internet connections to those who don't have them at home, but one said there are plenty of free Wi-Fi areas outside of libraries
Most participants don't know much about the Jo.	Although several participants had ridden the JO, others were not familiar with it. One participant said some routes are used extensively but others are not. Most felt that people in Johnson County had other transportation options. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One participant said people with children in day care can't use mass transit because the need to drop off and pick up children at specific times. • Users in this group use the JO to get downtown or to Crown Center. For those who work in downtown Kansas City, a \$4 bus ticket is better than \$12 a day for parking.

Theme	Explanation
The county could raise recreation fees but should have scholarships for those who cannot afford the fees.	The group said no one should be denied access to recreation because they lack funds. They said it was especially important for children and teenagers to have access to parks and recreation.
The county should continue to provide a high level of services,	This group said it is important for the county to invest in the future. One said economic develop is critical. The group felt Johnson County was an idyllic place to live with walking trails, parks, and a clean and safe environment. They said the county is far ahead of other areas that that leads to positive economic growth.
After discussion, some people would have made different choices.	
The survey tool and focus group were effective.	Participants said they learned more about the budget through this activity. They expressed a desire to get together with the other groups members after the results of the simulator are gathered. They also said they were glad the county had decided to involve young people.

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.5	Snow removal	2.6
Work release	2.2	The JO hours and trips	2.5
Re-entry programming	2.2	The JO routes	2.5
Juvenile offenders	2.6	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.8	Child care licensure	2.5
Culture & recreation		Family health services	3.2
Museum – facilities and hours	2.4	Supported employment services	2.7
Safety & outdoor education	2.5	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	3.0
Park maintenance & development	2.9	Aging services	3.1
Recreational program fees	2.1	Multi-service center	2.6
Library hours	2.5	General government	
Library locations	2.4	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.5
Library collections	2.6	Distance to voting locations	2.7
		Voting wait times	2.5

District #6: Adults

Date	Wednesday, February 8, 2012
Location	Johnson County Administration Building
Participants	13 adults
Commissioner	Calvin Hayden
Moderator	Jennifer Wilding

Professions of participants

We asked the panelists to tell us their names and what they do for work. The group included the following:

- Technician
- Business owner
- Nonprofit executive
- Consultant
- Retiree (formerly in social services field)
- Owner of a small catering company
- Someone who was recently laid off
- Police officer
- Mechanical designer
- Two corporate employees

The group included five individuals who were contacted via cold calling and the rest registered after receiving information about the focus group from their local chamber, school, neighborhood or a civic organization. The group included six females and seven males.

After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
People walked in with ideas about what they would and wouldn't cut based on their own lives.	When asked about what choices were the easiest, people drew connections with their work lives and interests. Someone who worked in social services said she wouldn't cut there, and another person with background in economic development would spare anything that promoted jobs and economic growth, for example.
Increasing efficiency was the solution. There are more efficiencies that can be realized.	The group was pretty much unanimous that efficiencies could diminish or eliminate the shortfall. In particular, they cited technological advances like on-line motor vehicle renewals and electronic materials at the library as offering cost savings. When asked if they felt there were still a lot of efficiencies to be realized in Johnson County government, the group said yes. One example related to public safety was the fact that Johnson County jailed more juveniles than any other county in Kansas.
Technology is not always the answer, however.	When discussing a line item under "health & human services," one panelist felt that technology could help reduce costs. Several individuals with experience in the field said that technology could create savings, but that the health field is an area where human contact and the personal touch is crucial and necessary.
Cut based on doing the least harm.	<p>The group cut voting wait times (2.0) and distance to voting locations (1.8) the most. Group members reasoned that this would do the least amount of harm. Voting doesn't happen every day. There are other options, including advanced voting and voting by mail. Two miles further to drive to a voting site doesn't make much difference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was some disagreement about the impact on voting. One panelist said that some people might not vote at all if they have to drive further. Another replied that if it makes a difference, then maybe they aren't the ones you want voting. • One participant said his polling place had moved several times in the last ten years and each time it has been within a mile of his house. He concluded that there are many people who can walk to their polling location.
Consider the impact of cuts on other entities in the county.	Another area that was cut significantly was intake/outpatient mental health services. One panelist said that there are other health-care options such as the Health Partnership Clinic. "If funding is reduced at the County level, it is possible that others will pick up the slack." The group agreed that budget cuts would likely have an impact on other entities.

Theme	Explanation
Public safety & emergency services section was confusing.	<p>The group cut significantly from the public safety section, with averages at 2.2 and 2.3. (An exception was mental health crisis responders at 2.6.) In this section, cutting total costs required adding employees to do preventative work that would keep offenders out of jail. The group was confused by the fact that cutting here was the opposite of cutting in other categories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When making choices, one panelist said the goal was to have Johnson County be a safe place to live, and then getting people back to work faster and leaving the jail open for harder criminals. • Others said that people won't move where they don't feel safe and that the county jails too many juveniles for petty crimes.
People would make different decisions after talking with others.	<p>Everyone agreed that to some degree their choices would have been different after the discussion with fellow residents. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person would have cut from voting locations and wait times rather than trying to avoid discouraging voting. • Someone who was focused on using technology to reduce costs would have cut less from human services. That is a result of hearing about the vulnerability of people who receive the services.
Values drive decisions about what to cut, and the values differ.	<p>When people decided what to cut, different goals or values were most important to different people. Here is a sampling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety of the public • Bringing businesses and jobs to the county • Protecting vulnerable populations • Safety of basic services like roads, drinking water and bridges
There is no tension between the need to take care of people and to serve businesses.	<p>The group agreed that Johnson County's quality of life was driven by its ability to maintain a thriving business community, whose taxes helped support the government and nonprofit services needed to take care of vulnerable populations. One panelist suggested streamlining processes like permits to make it easy to retain and attract businesses.</p>
Instead of cutting, look for creative alternatives.	<p>Several group members were frustrated by the idea that they were being asked to cut funding when they felt other options were available. They encouraged the county to think outside the box and to ask residents for creative ideas to reduce costs and increase the tax base.</p>
Future citizen involvement should go deeper into budget areas.	<p>This group expressed an interest in being engaged more extensively in future budget choices. Group members suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding a series of focus groups and discussions. • Offering more targeted discussions, such as dividing groups by program area and then drilling down. • Asking residents for creative ideas for reducing costs and increasing income.

Theme	Explanation
The group expressed a desire for more information.	Several group members said they wanted more information about specific items in the simulator. There was interest in information about The JO's ridership, as sometimes people see empty buses and sometimes the buses are full of riders. One participant was very concerned about what the County spends on services to illegal immigrants.

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.6	Snow removal	2.5
Work release	2.2	The JO hours and trips	2.3
Re-entry programming	2.3	The JO routes	2.3
Juvenile offenders	2.2	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory		Child care licensure	2.5
Culture & recreation		Family health services	2.7
Museum – facilities and hours	2.0	Supported employment services	2.4
Safety & outdoor education	2.1	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.3
Park maintenance & development	2.3	Aging services	3.1
Recreational program fees	2.1	Multi-service center	2.6
Library hours	2.2	General government	
Library locations	2.2	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.4
Library collections	2.4	Distance to voting locations	1.8
		Voting wait times	2.0

District #1: Shawnee Mission West High School

Date Wednesday, February 22, 2012
 Participants 23 students
 Teacher Lisa Benge
 Commissioners Ed Peterson, Chairman Ed Eilert
 Moderator Dan Blom

Discussion Highlights

After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
Simulator helped students understand responsibilities of county government.	Most of the students had little understanding of the role of county government and of the complexities of the budget decisions before taking the simulator and watching the video about county government. The exercise gave them insight that connected taxes to services that affect their lives.
Cutting services such as the DMV and polling locations does not seem onerous.	Waiting longer at the DMV or driving a little farther to vote seems to be a minor inconvenience to the students and makes those cuts a fairly easy call for them. This was an area of almost total agreement.
The JO gets little support, but it does not mean they oppose public transit.	The JO initially drew little support and a fair amount of criticism. Students said they drive and don't use it. One student's mother tries to ride The JO but finds it difficult and cumbersome. The students had questions about the number of riders and who use it; if it is important to impoverished residents then it might have more value. One student talked about seeing the bus full at a mall stop. Several students had experiences with public transit in other cities, including Europe, and support efficient, high usage mass transit. After discussion, The JO was an area where students would reconsider their initial stance and be more supportive.

Theme	Explanation
Libraries took cuts, but also have supporters.	While the libraries underwent some of the most severe cuts on the simulator, they actually had strong supporters among the students. Several said they might not have cut it so much after discussion. Others contend that libraries could reduce hours unharmed and that technology gives people other choices for accessing information.
Human services escape with fewer cuts.	The fact that human services, while taking cuts, took less than other areas both surprised and pleased many of the students. They said human services have an emotional appeal because they directly affect people’s lives. They found it surprising that so many others thought the same way. Childcare services are critical for working families to have a safe place for their children, one student pointed out.
Reducing park budgets surprised students.	Another area of surprise, according to the students, was the lack of support for parks in the simulator. During discussion, students expressed support for the parks system as an amenity they use.
Older residents would focus more on tax impact.	Students also expected older adults to gravitate more to protecting human services and less on culture and recreation, which students said younger people would support. Older adults also worry more about what impact the decisions have on their taxes.
Jobs, schools and safety draw people to Johnson County.	Good education systems, job opportunities and safe communities drew their parents to Johnson County and the students see it as a good place to raise a family. The parks, libraries, and housing are all high quality and it is well maintained. Many students would come back to live here and raise their families for these same reasons. However, many want to spend some time in a more fast-paced environment where there is always something “going on.”
A mix of different job opportunities would be a draw to return or never leave.	Students described a wide range of jobs that they find attractive and many of those are in science fields.
All government classes should take the simulator.	Students found the simulator and the discussion a positive experience. They recommend the process be included in government classes each year because of its educational value. They would expand the amount of information that was available to them before they take the simulator.

The following chart shows the average scores for focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.

- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.7	Snow removal	2.1
Work release	2.1	The JO hours and trips	2.2
Re-entry programming	2.5	The JO routes	2.4
Juvenile offenders	2.2	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.0	Child care licensure	2.9
Culture & recreation		Family health services	2.6
Museum – facilities and hours	2.7	Supported employment services	2.7
Safety & outdoor education	2.1	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.6
Park maintenance & development	2.5	Aging services	2.6
Recreational program fees	2.2	Multi-service center	2.4
Library hours	3.0	General government	
Library locations	2.1	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.7
Library collections	2.3	Distance to voting locations	2.3
		Voting wait times	2.4

District #2: Mill Valley High School

Date Wednesday, February 29
 Location Mill Valley High School
 Participants 20 students
 Commissioner Jim Allen was present
 Chair Chairman Eilert was present
 Moderator Mary Jo Draper

This group included students from teacher Pat Butler’s advanced placement government class.

Theme	Explanation
The students found it difficult to evaluate the impact of the budget on their own lives.	This group did not feel personally connected to many of the services in the budget simulator. They said they did not know juvenile offenders and did not really know “aging” folks.
The JO could be cut.	The students said they do not use the JO and don’t know anyone who does. Only one had used the bus and said that there were only three people on it when she did. Another said that even though it is not used very much, the bus is an important service. One student suggested if the JO were promoted better, it would be used more. They students agreed they do not know the routes or schedules.
The county should cut library hours but not library resources.	This group said they do not utilize the libraries because they have a school library and access to the internet at home and at school. They favored keeping the level of resources the same but cutting hours. They said the libraries should be open after school and work hours. However, one student said it was important to have libraries for those who don’t have access to the internet and other resources. The students also said libraries were a good palce to work on group projects.
The group had no opinion on voting.	The students said they had not voted so they had no opinion on services in polling places.
The safety and welfare of child should be a top priority.	This group said funding for child care licensing should be supported, because we need to be able to trust that young children are safe. As a group, they said the county should consider the safety and welfare of children as a high priority.

Theme	Explanation
The students use parks and value them.	Students said they feel pride about having well-maintained parks. The cross country team uses Shawnee Mission Park for practice. Several also use the trails and exercise areas. They think parks are important because they promote wellness. One student said he enjoyed Theater in the Park.
People feel safe and secure in Johnson County and should continue to do so.	This group favored increased funding for the crime lab because it encourages people to feel safe. They also value the feeling of safety and security in Johnson County. But one argued that it costs more and more to improve safety. He said the current level of safety is fine and increasing spending for safety could actually make people feel less safe by implying there is a need for greater security.
Museum hours could be cut.	The group does not utilize the museums. They said the museums may be more important for younger kids than for high school students.
Johnson County is a great place to live.	This group values the schools in Johnson County, especially Mill Valley. Several said their parents relocated to Johnson County for the schools. One student said her parents were raised in Johnson County and came back to raise their own children here. The group also finds Johnson County to be a friendly place and they said they feel safe and protected.
Some students would return to Johnson County but others would not.	Several students said they loved Johnson County and would definitely return after college. However, several said they preferred to live in either a more urban or a more rural setting. One said she felt Johnson County life was sheltered and she would like to experience other areas. Another said Johnson County is very cookie-cutter. One student said Johnson County needs more ice rinks.
Students think future budget involvement should be more tailor to their needs.	Students found the budget simulator confusing. They did not understand how changing levels of services impacted their lives. They felt they needed more background before taking the simulator.

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	3.1	Snow removal	3.0
Work release	2.9	The JO hours and trips	2.5
Re-entry programming	2.9	The JO routes	3.0
Juvenile offenders	2.7	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.4	Child care licensure	3.5
Culture & recreation		Family health services	3.1
Museum – facilities and hours	2.7	Supported employment services	3.1
Safety & outdoor education	3.1	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	3.0
Park maintenance & development	3.4	Aging services	3.0
Recreational program fees	2.9	Multi-service center	2.8
Library hours	2.6	General government	
Library locations	2.6	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.9
Library collections	3.0	Distance to voting locations	2.6
		Voting wait times	2.9

District #3: Spring Hill High School

Date Monday, March 5, 2012
 Location Spring Hill High School
 Participants 13 Students
 Teacher Curtis Allen
 Moderator Dan Blom

Discussion Highlights

After completing the budget simulator, the group discussed the experience and the results. The goal was to find out why people made the choices they made. What follows are the major findings.

Theme	Explanation
Parks in all aspects get student support.	Park safety and maintenance are important because parks in general rank very high with the students. They believe urban areas, especially, benefit from having more park space and open space. They also see parks as attractive to families and a prime reason a family might choose to live in Johnson County. Additionally, parks are free to use, which they see as important in difficult economic times. Many of the students personally use the parks.
Human services are important at all stages of life.	The students rank human services high on the budget priority for multiple reasons. They are concerned about aging services and believe that it may be important to elders in their family as well as for themselves when they reach that age. One student volunteers in nursing homes and connects these services with her grandparents, so it becomes personal. Health services provide the basics for families who are not doing well in the economic downturn. They view this level of support as basic to keep families well.
Public safety calculations threw some students, but safety ranks high.	The method for calculating public safety budgets was confusing, but they made choices based on the premise of reducing jail populations and allowing better re-entry into society for prisoners. Safety is a core quality of life issue and a strong attractor to life in Johnson County.
Light rail is preferred to The JO.	It is not public transportation that suffers in the students' minds, but The JO in particular. Bus service as it exists gets little support, but rail service would be embraced by many of the students. Bus service seems irrelevant to them in Spring Hill. Rail service gets higher environmental marks from them as well.

Theme	Explanation
Libraries have already taken a hit.	The students noted that library hours already have suffered from budget reductions and they are not open as often as they should be for convenience. While some students expressed strong support for libraries and reading, others said technology is replacing some of the face-to-face services.
Voting distances can be increased with no harm.	If you are not walking to a polling station, what difference does it make how far apart they are located, students asked. They see it as an easy cut without jeopardizing access to the polls.
Safety has the biggest impact on quality of life.	Without safety, not much else matters, students said. Several students cited safety as important in their parents' decisions to move to Spring Hill, especially those who had moved from urban environments that grappled with crime. Snow removal also made the list of quality of life issues.
Older residents would back The JO, but not parks.	The students anticipate older residents might see more value in the bus transportation and less value in parks – unless in the latter case they are families with children.
Johnson County has been a good place to grow up.	The students believe Johnson County has been good for their families and would be attractive to them as a place to raise their families. They say it is safe and offered better employment opportunities for their parents. However, it could use more urban appeal, shopping, restaurants, bike lanes. Kansas City has the urban amenities, but is too far away from Spring Hill to be used regularly. With those exceptions, students are able to articulate a list of amenities that make Spring Hill attractive to them.
Education is a driver.	Schools are good in Johnson County and that is the deal-clincher for many families.
Students are not usually asked their opinions.	This was a rare time, students said, when they were asked to give an opinion and they appreciated it. They are comfortable with online engagement, but would like more information beforehand (they did not understand some of the simulator choices) and they think it is important to democracy for them to be involved and have a say.

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.5	Snow removal	2.6
Work release	2.2	The JO hours and trips	2.4
Re-entry programming	2.8	The JO routes	2.1
Juvenile offenders	2.9	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.2	Child care licensure	2.9
Culture & recreation		Family health services	3.1
Museum – facilities and hours	2.8	Supported employment services	3.0
Safety & outdoor education	3.1	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.9
Park maintenance & development	3.3	Aging services	3.0
Recreational program fees	3.0	Multi-service center	2.9
Library hours	2.9	General government	
Library locations	2.7	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.4
Library collections	3.0	Distance to voting locations	2.2
		Voting wait times	2.8

District #4: Blue Valley Northwest High School

Date Wednesday, March 21, 2012
 Location Blue Valley Northwest High School
 Participants 17 students
 Commissioner Jason Osterhaus
 Moderator Jennifer Wilding

The students were members of Ken Thomas’s advanced placement government class.

Theme	Explanation
There was some awareness of the need for budget cuts.	The students said they had talked about budget cuts in the school district, so at least in small ways they were thinking about issues like this. People were generally surprised at the number and types of services, like mental health and prisoners, handled by Johnson County.
Students disagreed about cuts to voting.	One student increased spending for voting. Others said that voting was a special event and that people who want to vote will be willing to wait.
Public safety was easy to cut because it produced a benefit.	<p>Students like the fact that they could increase alternatives to incarceration but cut costs by reducing jail time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The stereotypical response would be to cut things like rehabilitation because it would be seen as negative, but my father, who was a victim of a random act of violence, actually supports these types of programs.” • “For me, mental health treatment was an important one not to cut because it becomes more expensive to deal with the problem of not treating the mentally ill.”

Theme	Explanation
Students strongly supported spending on the library.	<p>The students view the library as part of the educational system. They use it regularly for its materials, like databases and books for recreational reading, and also as a safe place to study and to meet their friends to work on group projects. The place of the library was very valuable to them and they wanted the library to be open much later, like from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. when they're doing homework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Libraries are one of the foundations for creativity." • "The library is a place that stimulates learning. If I'm working on my own I might end up checking Facebook, but if I'm at the library the environment encourages me to study." • "This society values education and a decrease in activities that promote learning would have a very negative effect on the community." • "It is a great place for me to take my little sister so I can tutor her."
Health and human services should be provided as close to the community as possible.	<p>The students felt health care should be a more local concern, with services provided by the community and faith-based organization rather than the government. "The more localized, the better," one student said.</p>
Students cut aging services because family should take care of the elderly.	<p>Some students, particularly those who appeared to be of Asian descent, felt strongly that family should take care of the elderly. Others said that not every family would be able to take care of their elderly relatives and that the aging needed services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My grandmother lives with us. I feel that it is the family who should help take care of the elderly." • "I think the government does have a responsibility to the aging population, but I agree it is more of a family matter." • "I can see the family reasons for cutting, but we do as a society care about the elderly. That was the whole reason for Social Security, so the elderly who could no longer work would not be forced to die on the streets." • "What about those without a family?"
Students cut The JO significantly because it didn't seem needed.	<p>Students said they didn't use The JO with the exception of the bus to KU in Lawrence. And they often see empty buses go by. Students disagreed about whether public transit was needed just in urban areas like Kansas City, or in the suburbs. They said that people who used The JO might feel differently than they do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I never see anyone on it." • "For me, cutting The JO was a matter of need versus convenience. I just don't see that many people riding or taking advantage of The JO."

Theme	Explanation
Snow removal was less important to students.	Students were eager to promote snow days. They said that adults, who care about getting to their jobs, would likely place a higher priority on snow removal.
Students view Johnson County as family-oriented, not so much oriented towards young adults.	<p>Students said Johnson County was a great place to raise a family and that it was family oriented. Students said it lacked the kind of nightlife that would attract young adults without children. They also worried about what kinds of jobs would be available to them after graduation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I like it better than Plano, Texas, but Plano is close to Dallas and Dallas has more jobs, so I might move back to Plano.”
Interested in engaging other students in the discussion.	<p>The Blue Valley students thought it was a useful exercise and that a wider group of students should take it, although there was disagreement about who that wider group should include. Some said that only serious students should take the simulator, not those likely to deliver random responses. Others said that college students would better understand what was at stake.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think this process is great as it lets us know about the issues now.” • “Our daily life experience shades the way we respond.”

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

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	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	1.9	Snow removal	2.2
Work release	2.2	The JO hours and trips	2.1
Re-entry programming	2.2	The JO routes	2.2
Juvenile offenders	2.2	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.2	Child care licensure	2.8
Culture & recreation		Family health services	3.1
Museum – facilities and hours	2.0	Supported employment services	2.8
Safety & outdoor education	2.6	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.4
Park maintenance & development	2.8	Aging services	2.2
Recreational program fees	2.6	Multi-service center	2.4
Library hours	3.2	General government	
Library locations	2.4	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.1
Library collections	2.7	Distance to voting locations	2.1
		Voting wait times	2.1

District #5: Olathe Northwest High School

Date Wednesday, March 21
 Location Olathe Northwest High School
 Participants 20 students
 Commissioner Michael Ashcraft
 Moderator Mary Jo Draper

This group included students from teacher Pat Butler’s advanced placement government class.

Theme	Explanation
Johnson County provides good services and should continue to have high standards	<p>The students said that Johnson County provides good services and offers residents everything they need. But one student said services seem to be at the right level and “don’t fix it if it isn’t broken,” meaning the level of service should stay where it is.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group supported increasing funding to the crime lab. They think Johnson County has a reputation for being on the cutting edge of solving crime and they would like it to stay that way.
In health and human services, the county should favor services for children over services for adults and the elderly.	<p>They felt it was important to keep up childcare licensing as children are especially vulnerable. They said if it were a tradeoff between serving the aging and serving children, they would favor more services to children. They would reduce the level of mental health services because they don’t think that many people need mental health services. They viewed this category of services as more important than other things like snow removal, which is an inconvenience, whereas cutting health and human services could impact people’s lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The students did not have much personal experience with this area of service.
Library services are not as important for high school students as they are for younger children.	<p>One student said the county should maintain the collections at libraries, but the group mostly agreed library services could be cut because they do not use libraries much. They have a good library at their school and most have smartphones, Kindles, laptops and iPads. They suggested that library hours could be reduced to, say, afternoon and evening hours but no morning hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They think libraries are more important for younger children who can go to programs and for adults. Their younger siblings use the libraries more than they do.
Museum hours could be cut.	<p>These students said they did not think cutting museum hours would have a negative impact. Few had been to the county museums.</p>

Theme	Explanation
Keep parks open during daytime hours but cut evening hours.	The students value keeping parks open during the day and on weekends, but not at night. They said the parks are not safe at night.
The county should continue to look out for lower income residents	The students said the county should make cuts in areas that don't impact people's health and welfare, such as snow removal, but the county should not cut health services to people without insurance.
People who are paying fees for things like recreational programs could probably pay a little more.	The students thought it would not be bad to increase fees for recreational programs, since those who can afford to pay could probably pay a little more.
They are willing to put up with a little inconvenience for things they don't do very often.	While the students find it annoying to wait to get new car tags, in general they would favor cutting staff at the DMV and utilizing technology such as texting to reduce the time they must spend waiting in the facility. They didn't think they would mind longer waits to vote since it doesn't happen often.
Students don't see the value of the JO.	These students do not use the Jo or know anyone who does. They think most people in the county have access to cars so they would be ok with cutting funding to buses. One participant said there are some areas where people do not have cars.
In the public safety area, the county should favor prevention and intervention over incarceration.	<p>In general, these students favor the approach of providing rehabilitation services rather than putting people into jail in every case. They favored putting more dollars into helping young people since they have more potential to be rehabilitated. They said some young people commit crimes out of boredom or even to get arrested on purpose, but they generally think most young people would take advantage of rehabilitation services. This group wanted to see statistics that would show these rehabilitation programs actually work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is more important to this group was to help youth over adults as they were younger and had more potential to be "saved" (rehabilitated). • One person does youth court and says she thinks most kids who have committed small crimes would welcome help. • One said young people should get an extra break because they don't always get the consequences since brains aren't fully developed.

Theme	Explanation
The county needs to make sure it is evaluating the effectiveness of its programs.	These students asked many questions about how programs were evaluated. They said they liked the idea of prevention over incarceration, but some were skeptical and wanted to see proof that the concept really worked.
Johnson County is a great place to live.	The students like the fact that they feel safe in Johnson County. They also value the good schools. One said it was scary to think of living anywhere else. When asked what services would make Johnson County better, one said a zoo.
The county could use more racial diversity.	One student said Johnson County lacks diversity. For instance, there are no African American teachers at Mill Valley High School. Many agreed that racial diversity is important to them and to the community. But one student suggested it is not the role of county government to promote diversity. Another said the lack of affordable housing could be a deterrent to minorities.

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

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- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.6	Snow removal	3.0
Work release	2.5	The JO hours and trips	2.5
Re-entry programming	2.7	The JO routes	2.4
Juvenile offenders	2.5	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	3.2	Child care licensure	3.0
Culture & recreation		Family health services	2.9
Museum – facilities and hours	2.7	Supported employment services	3.1
Safety & outdoor education	3.2	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.8
Park maintenance & development	2.9	Aging services	2.9
Recreational program fees	2.6	Multi-service center	3.0
Library hours	2.3	General government	
Library locations	2.5	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.7
Library collections	2.8	Distance to voting locations	2.4
		Voting wait times	3.0

District #6: Gardner Edgerton High School

Date Tuesday, March 20, 2012
 Location Gardner Edgerton High School
 Participants 24 students
 Commissioner Calvin Hayden
 Moderator Jennifer Wilding

The students were members of Derek Abromeit’s advanced placement government class.

Theme	Explanation
Increasing work release programs cut cost, provided a benefit	The students cut spending most by increasing work release programs. They felt that they could reduce the budget and provide a benefit at the same time. Some felt that criminals shouldn’t get jobs over others, and that the crime committed would be a factor in how they felt about criminals being back in the community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I don’t want some criminals fixing my bean burrito at Taco Bell. I don’t think we should entirely cut out the program but I am not sure I want some criminal out on work release anywhere near where I am when I’m out with my family.” Another student: “You think everyone working at Taco Bell is a criminal.” • “I thought it might be a good program that is helping give someone who needs it a second chance.”
Health and human services was hardest to cut.	Any service that provided help to people in need, from family health services to mental health services, were difficult to cut.
Voting locations and vehicle tag renewals easiest to cut.	Students said they would be willing to drive a longer distance and wait to voice their opinions.
Mental health services affect public safety.	Students were a bit more reluctant to cut mental health services because they said it would become a public safety problem. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You don’t want to make cuts in this area as people start doing some bad things when they get off their meds.”

Theme	Explanation
Snow removal was more complicated.	<p>While students took snow removal down to 2.1, they acknowledged that individuals with four-wheel drive vehicles it was easier to cut costs. A lot of snow would cause problems for people needing to get around.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think the reason we cut it in comparison to other items is that it was easier to understand what it was that we were actually cutting.”
Students cut library spending because they view the library as obsolete and/or think fewer branches can do the job.	<p>Some students feel that the Internet has made the physical library obsolete. Others felt that libraries provide important services, such as access to the Internet, a hang-out spot for youth, and a safe environment for kids. The group generally agreed that they should have fewer locations, but beef up those that remain with more books and hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Digital formats will not last as long as books will, and I think reductions in this area will end up leaving those who do not have access to the Internet behind.” • “My problem with getting rid of library locations is that it would leave a number of people with no place to go. I know the library in Edgerton is used as not only a place to study but a place to meet friends and gather.” • “If we were to cut library locations I would hope that they would do so selectively based on use. Get rid of the lowest use libraries and not the high use ones.” • The impact on my quality of life would not be “that drastic of a change as I know I would still have access to the information that I need.”
The services with a direct impact on their lives include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus routes (“I don’t have a car and would like to be able to get a ride to JuCo.”) • Recreation programs • Parks and outdoor activities (“My family uses parks as a means of doing things together, otherwise we find ourselves at home watching TV and not interacting much.”)
Gardner-Edgerton drew their families because of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-town feel, including the ability to walk to amenities • Quality of the school • Outdoor lifestyle • Close to Kansas City and its activities
The area is less appealing to teenagers.	<p>Some students said it was a boring place to live as a teenager. As a kid, they enjoyed the area but its amenities are mainly appealing to youngsters. Whether you like it as a teenager depends on whether you have transportation and money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As you get older there is less to do especially if you don’t have the money.”

Theme	Explanation
Why would you stay or come back?	<p>One student really liked the area, and would stay. Others wanted more variety of events and one said smooth roads for his motorcycle was important. Students said they felt safe and well-educated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I live five minutes from the lake and spend most of my free time there. I know the great thing about living in the south part of the county is the access to the great outdoors.” • “In the summer, Overland Park brings in jazz bands to play in the farmer’s market. I love attending those events, and only wish there were more free events and festivals like that year-round.”
Involving students in the future requires education.	<p>The students said that learning more about the budget was a benefit for students and for adults. They said the bigger push needed to be to educate adults, because their tax dollars pay for services. Even younger people will be voting soon, they said, and the simulator shows how a small decision can affect the budget. This gives young adults know-how and the sense that their voices matter.</p>

The following chart shows the average scores for the focus group. Here is how to read the table:

- A score of 3 means no change.
- A score above 3 means that people chose to add funds to that item.
- The lower the score, the greater the agreement among focus group participants to reduce spending.

	Average Score		Average Score
Public safety & emergency services		Infrastructure	
Mental health crisis responders	2.5	Snow removal	2.1
Work release	1.9	The JO hours and trips	2.3
Re-entry programming	2.4	The JO routes	2.2
Juvenile offenders	2.2	Health and human services	
Criminalistics Laboratory	2.9	Child care licensure	2.5
Culture & recreation		Family health services	2.9
Museum – facilities and hours	2.1	Supported employment services	2.3
Safety & outdoor education	2.3	Intake/Outpatient mental health services	2.3
Park maintenance & development	2.6	Aging services	2.7
Recreational program fees	2.2	Multi-service center	2.6
Library hours	2.1	General government	
Library locations	2.1	Vehicle tag renewals & titles	2.0
Library collections	2.1	Distance to voting locations	2.1
		Voting wait times	2.6

About Consensus

“We put the *public* in public policy”

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Sometimes people problems are really process problems in disguise...

Many organizations, governments and businesses need to get people involved. They have many reasons – to plan for the future, to solve problems, or to avoid the conflicts that occur when people don’t have a voice. But designing a process, planning the meetings and leading the discussion can be difficult and time-consuming.

That’s where Consensus delivers results. Consensus is a nonprofit consulting firm with decades of experience engaging stakeholder groups and helping people work through difficult problems. The organization works on behalf of the community in metro Kansas City, and for clients here and around the U.S.

We can provide assistance in strategizing how to engage clients, employees or other constituents in an important decision or process. We can tailor a process to your needs, so your group members can make progress together. We have a network of experienced facilitators who can provide extra support for large-scale planning processes. We can help by:

- Delivering in-depth research that helps you make informed choices.
- Planning and conducting focus groups that provide actionable insights.
- Devising multi-stakeholder involvement plans.
- Facilitating strategic planning discussion groups.
- Designing a process that engages diverse stakeholders without unnecessary conflict.
- Keeping meetings moving, on task and productive.
- Facilitating meetings so that challenging personalities play nice.

- Managing complex public planning projects.
- Writing clear, effective reports that people actually want to read.
- Giving you solid information on what the public or your stakeholders think and what they value.

Consensus has been in business since 1984, and working on behalf of clients since 2003. Our consulting team – Dan Blom, Mary Jo Draper and Jennifer Wilding - has worked for national and local clients such as:

- Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
- Mid-America Regional Council
- U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution
- Health departments of Independence, and Clay, Wyandotte and Eastern Jackson counties
- The cities of Gladstone, Shawnee and Kansas City, MO
- Kettering Foundation
- Libraries in Iowa, Indiana, Oregon and Washington State
- Johnson County Library
- Kansas City Kansas Community College
- Truman Medical Center
- *AmericaSpeaks*
- United Community Services of Johnson County
- MacNeil/Lehrer Productions and NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

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