

# City works with university to conduct tax survey of Lincolmites

By Adam Zielger  
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Lincoln citizens will have a bigger say in how their tax dollars are spent thanks to a new collaboration between the mayor's office and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center and UNL's Bureau of Sociological Research will work with the city to conduct a scientific phone survey of 600 randomly selected Lincolmites to get their opinions on how the city should spend tax dollars.

The survey is part of Mayor Chris Beutler's desire to move Lincoln to outcome-based budgeting, said Diane Gonzolas, the public information officer for Lincoln's citizen information center. Outcome-based budgeting is a system using citizen feedback to guide government spending.

The city sent a request for proposals to several firms in Lincoln, and chose the policy center and bureau because of their experience conducting similar public surveys, said Alan Tomkins, the director of the public policy center. The center and bureau both perform analytic studies on a variety of topics, and have collaborated on several past projects.

The bureau is finalizing the list of questions for the survey, Tomkins said, and will give them to the bureau who will conduct the actual survey. Tomkins said the city hopes to begin the survey before the end of the month, and will end it as soon as they survey 600 people. He said anyone who's called should take the survey so the data can be collected as soon as possible.

The center will analyze the bureau's data, and submit a report to the mayor. While citizen opinion will play a role in the decision process, Gonzolas said Mayor Beutler will still have the final say in how city funds are allocated.

The upcoming survey isn't the first time the policy center has worked with the city. From 2001 to 2004, the center conducted a survey on how the city should align health and human services projects, and in 2006 the center surveyed Lincoln residents about water issues.

UNL has also worked with the city on several other high profile projects, including the Antelope Valley Project and work in the Haymarket area. Gonzolas said the university's ability to provide experts in a variety of subjects makes it an ideal partner.

"The city feels fortunate to have an excellent university right in the middle of the

community and we'd be foolish not to use them," Gonzolas said.

Nearly every academic unit on campus works with the city in some capacity Tomkins said, and many departments value the chance to serve the community.

"We want to be a service and we want to be engaged and we see this as part of our mission," he said.

Gonzolas said if the survey is successful this year the city and UNL will likely do a budget survey next year, and the city will continue to look for new collaboration with the university.

"The city and the university found a lot of ways to partner up and I'm sure they will be more in the future," Gonzolas said.

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