

WHAT WORKS

An Effective Practice
Case Study from the ICMA
Center for Performance
Measurement

Featuring

The City of Rockford,
Illinois



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Rockford, Illinois Saves Money & Time with Frequent & Consistent Analysis of Performance Information

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Through its RockStat program, the city of Rockford, Illinois, demonstrates that consistent review and application of performance information promote cost savings and other operational successes. The city also emphasizes the importance of evaluating not only results, but the measures themselves.

Introduced in 2007, Rockford's program is based in part on the CityStat model developed by the city of Baltimore and adapted by numerous mayor-council, council-manager, and other types of local governments across the United States. The city's model incorporates measures from the ICMA Center for Performance Measurement and measures developed in-house.

Measure, Assess, and Refine Measures, If Necessary

The city implemented RockStat, using a step-wise process that initially included just two departments and gradually added others. City leaders pursued an incremental approach to allow testing, assessment, and retooling (if necessary) of the program on a small scale, before applying it citywide.

Rockford selected the police and public works departments as the first participants in RockStat. The police department was chosen because of its extensive experience with collecting and reporting statistical information; public works was chosen because it had room to grow in this area.

The police department quickly embraced the program, but the public works department experienced challenges. While the public works department had begun using customer relationship management software (CRMS) several months earlier, personnel were unable to extract basic service provision information like service times for pothole repair and graffiti removal. Also, some personnel, including the department director and some managers at the time, were not enthusiastic about beginning to do so.

When it became clear during the first year of implementation that city officials were committed to RockStat, some of the less enthusiastic employees chose to leave the department. The city hired a new department director with a strong orientation toward performance measurement and improvement, as well as four new managers. They tweaked the department's CRMS to allow tracking and reporting of service times, customer satisfaction, and other measurements. After just three years of performance measurement, the public works department is now a leader in service-delivery improvement in the city.

Case Profile

Population:

151,441

Square miles

62.0

Median household income

\$38,689

Form of government

Mayor-council



For additional information about the practices described in this case study, please contact Rockford deputy city administrator Julia Scott-Valdez at Julia.Valdez@Rockfordil.gov, or 815-967-6779.

Careful Analysis Can Reveal Potential Cost Savings & Other Improvement Targets

One recent example of public works' performance measurement success is a \$1.1 million reduction in snow removal expenditures between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 snow seasons. Most of the savings resulted from a reduction in contractor expenditures from approximately \$1.5 million to \$500,000. Snowfall also declined during the period—but only by 19 percent. The department attributes the achievement to detailed expenditure tracking and analysis encouraged through RockStat. The analysis revealed potential cost savings by

- Recompeting the contract for private snow removal assistance
- Minimizing the use of contract snow removal staff
- Deploying in-house and contract snow removal staff more strategically (e.g., assessing the type and rate of snow falling and choosing surface treatments rather than plowing when possible).

As reported in the *Rockford Register Star*, the city also enjoyed a 60 percent drop in the number of snow removal complaints between December 2009 and December 2010.

“...a deliberate approach, which allows for application, evaluation, and often, revision of measures is critical.... the cycle is continuous—but the learning and improvement that result make the process worthwhile.”

In 2008, the fire department entered RockStat. The human service and community and economic development departments followed the next year. Internal service departments enter later in 2010.

Another success story, from the police department and community development department, relates to the use of sick leave as compared to total hours worked. In 2009, the city used CPM data to calculate sick leave usage as a percentage of total hours worked across a city-selected peer group and found the group's average to be approximately three percent. At the time, the city's average use topped five percent. Not satisfied with their performance on this measure, the police and community development departments established plans to monitor and encourage appropriate use of sick leave with a goal of reducing usage to the peer mean of three percent. By February 2010, usage in the two departments dropped to an average of two percent—exceeding the goal.

Monthly Meetings Help Departments Maintain Focus

Hallmarks of Rockford's program include:

- Monthly meetings that feature analysis—not merely presentation—of performance results to the mayor and management staff
- Discussion of plans to maintain or improve performance as appropriate
- A standard reporting format designed to steer departments toward true analysis
- Examination of the measures themselves
- An open meeting format, broadcast on public access cable and streamed on the city's website.

Performance Measurement Can Sometimes Be Tough, But Don't Become Discouraged

Most departments have adapted well to the use of input and output measures. However, some have struggled with development, analysis, and application of higher order efficiency and effectiveness measures.

To struggling units, deputy city administrator Julia Scott-Valdez provides support, meeting with personnel to help them prepare for the monthly meetings and refine their printed materials. When departments advance to the point that they can prepare on their own, they do so.

Scott-Valdez notes that one of the most important lessons the city has learned through RockStat and performance measurement in general is not to be discouraged by—or avoid—the cycle of measure selection and reevaluation:

- Choose measures
- Collect data
- Assess results
- Reevaluate measures
- And sometimes, return to the drawing board.

Valdez advises, “Don’t feel bad if [the original slate of measures] goes wrong, and you have to reinvent.” She recommends a deliberate approach to performance measurement that focuses on results and the tools used to assess them. She also reminds that measures may have to be revised more than once—but the learning and improvement that result make the process worthwhile.

In 2010, the city also undertook development of a strategic plan, integrated with RockStat, and looks forward to sharing results and lessons learned.