

GETTING STARTED: Performance Management for Local Government

Second Edition



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Preface

*This e-book is a revised and expanded edition of ICMA's e-book **Getting Started: Performance Measurement for Local Government**. It is intended as an introduction to performance measurement and management for local governments that have not yet started measuring their performance or that have taken the first steps but found that reaping meaningful results can be a challenge. While the text follows a chronological outline from planning and development to implementation and refinement, readers are encouraged to link back to the table of contents to select topics of particular interest.*

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT WORK

In this book you'll see how performance measurement has helped:

- Bellevue, Washington, to make decisions on fire station staffing and golf course operations
- Santa Barbara County, California, to determine which operations to outsource and which to reengineer
- Austin, Texas, to establish forward-looking business plans for its departments
- Williamsburg, Virginia, to reengineer its help desk management and cut response times significantly
- Cartersville, Georgia; Clayton, Missouri; Fort Collins, Colorado; Albany, Oregon; and many others to share balanced scorecards or performance dashboards with their residents.

More generally, with performance data you can:

- Understand interrelated aspects of your current performance
- Look beyond budget at the larger outcomes you're trying to achieve
- Identify benchmark jurisdictions and obtain comparable data for core operations
- Guide discussions within departments and among elected officials around precise goals and verified data, rather than anecdotes and "common knowledge"
- Engage the community in long-term visioning that's informed by resident surveys, digestible amounts of data, concise analysis, and as much backup material as they care to download.

The following individuals contributed to the writing, review, and design of this publication:

Octavio E. Chávez, Alizah Epstein, David Gottesman, Annalisa Haskell, Benoy Jacob, Debbie Johns, Robert Layton, Victoria Lewis, Dawn Martin, Daniet Moges, Jason Molino, Barbara Moore, Randall Reid, Meredith Roark, Mike Sell, Brent Stockwell, Erika White, and Guo Yonggang. Additional appreciation to Kira Hasbargen, Michael Lawson, Tad McGalliard, and Wayne Sommer.

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Gerald Young
Senior Research Associate, ICMA



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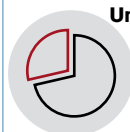
Who Collects Performance Data?¹

Over 50,000 population

83%

Under 50,000 population

33%



1 ICMA Innovation Survey, 2016.

Through Open Access Benchmarking and resources like this e-book, ICMA's goal is to help all jurisdictions adopt performance management practices, regardless of population size.



Implementation

Performance management is laden with baggage—preconceived notions of the level of effort that may be required to collect data and put it to use. Those stereotypes aside, performance management need not consume all your staff resources, and it should not focus on counting paperclips. Implemented correctly, it can be a critical tool for better understanding your organization, improving your service delivery, and communicating with the public.

WHAT IS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?

Performance management includes identifying, collecting, analyzing, and reporting on indicators that show how well the organization performs, both internally and in the delivery of services to the public, and how that performance compares with its targets or with peer organizations. More importantly, as a management tool, performance data is intended not as an end result, but rather as a means to more informed decision making and a more engaged community.

WHY MEASURE PERFORMANCE?

How do you know whether you're doing a good job? Without some regularly occurring method of measuring your performance, it can be very difficult to know how you're doing currently, much less relative to past performance or future goals. In many jurisdictions, these performance measures take a very simplified form:

1. Did we come in under budget?
2. Did we maintain the un-appropriated fund balance?
3. Are the elected officials happy, and do I still have a job?

Getting to the question of why to measure performance, you really need to look at your goals. Take drunk driving as an example:

If the only goals you had were coming in under budget and maintaining the fund balance, you might be able to do that by laying off the entire police department. But if you also want to achieve goal number 3, the no-spending approach might not get you there.

Assuming that you want to maintain a police force and achieve some results centered on drunk driving, you might set up a task force to operate checkpoints or initiate an awareness campaign. But again, if your

only criteria are financial, you don't know whether you're having an impact. So the initial *performance* questions are often:

- How many arrests were made?
- How did that compare with the number of checkpoints and the staff time committed to the effort?

Those are great questions. You might learn, for example, that you arrested 20 people at 4 checkpoints, having dedicated a total of 20 staff hours. One arrest per hour sounds like a good use of the officers' time, and 20 arrests certainly sounds like you got some dangerous drivers off the streets.

But what's missing?

Well, we still don't know how many impaired drivers you missed. Did you target the right intersections at the right times? Are the rates of alcohol-involved traffic accidents and fatalities still high?

WHY MEASURE?

Here are five good reasons to measure performance:

1. If we don't measure, we won't know whether we're accomplishing our goals.
2. Collecting "outcome" data helps tie reporting more directly to strategic planning.
3. Performance management need not be an all-at-once or large-jurisdiction-only endeavor. Every jurisdiction and department can take steps to improve.
4. It may take time to collect actionable data, but the investment is worth it in more informed decision making.
5. Transparent reporting further engages staff, elected officials, and the public around shared priorities.

Current arrest or accident data aside, we also don't know whether your trends are going up or down. How does that performance compare to prior years?

And even if your incidence of drunk driving is decreasing, is it decreasing as much as it might be? Are other jurisdictions able to achieve even better results, and if so, how?

For more on the guiding principles of local government performance measurement, see [A Performance Management Framework for State and Local Government](#) from the National Performance Management Advisory Commission.

WHERE DO WE START?

The focus of this e-book is "getting started." In part, that's because performance management can seem intimidating, full of potential pitfalls. If your jurisdiction is among those not yet measuring, then here's some quick advice:

1. **Don't be afraid.** Measuring your performance is the first step in driving organizational improvement. And if you don't measure out of fear that some of the numbers might not show your jurisdiction performing at its best, then you're missing the opportunity to learn about those issues.

2. **Start small.** Don't feel that all departments need to measure everything all at once. Overwhelming your staff by ramping up too quickly will just lead to internal opposition down the road. If they're already collecting data for some activities, start with that, and work toward building a culture of transparency.
3. **Build in follow-up.** Including performance data in the budget or on the website, then ignoring it for the next 12 months is a sure-fire way to tick off the staff who took the time to collect the data in the first place. Instead, schedule regular discussions with department staff and elected officials (perhaps quarterly) to review the data, determine what results are being achieved from prior program decisions or appropriations, look honestly at areas where performance is falling short, and work together toward action strategies to achieve your goals.
4. **Avoid making it adversarial.** Budget time lends itself to zero-sum thinking, where each department is competing for scarce resources. That's all the more reason to think of performance as a year-round focus independent of the budget. In addition, reinforce the understanding that finding an issue with a department's performance is not cause for punishment, but rather is a starting point for continuous improvement.
5. **Copy the best ideas.** Yours is not the first jurisdiction to be taking these steps, and there's no reason for you to build your program from the ground up. This e-book includes examples throughout from jurisdictions that have drafted measures, set targets, linked to strategic plans, benchmarked with others, built dashboards, or leapt into big data. Browse the report, follow the links, and share with your staff.

WHAT IS THE MANAGER'S ROLE?

A local government manager or CAO holds a unique role as not only the administrative head of the organization, but also the champion of professionalism and the implementation of leading practices. As such, while he or she often delegates to staff in budget, finance, or other departments to oversee the mechanics of performance management, the manager:

- **Outlines** a vision for how performance data can be used in planning and decision-making
- **Communicates** that structure to staff, elected officials, and the public, whether in budget hearings, transmittal letters, town halls, or stat program meetings.
- **Reinforces** the commitment to a performance-oriented organizational culture, whether via training, recognition, transparency initiatives, or an emphasis on the continuity of the performance management program.

Where the manager/CAO makes that organizational commitment to performance management and focuses attention on the data, it contributes to a more successful performance management implementation.

The profession of local government management recognizes both the education and training that foster [effective management](#) and the commitment to adopting leading practices and evidence-based decision-making.

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PROVIDE? WHAT'S THE DEMAND?

Looking beyond the drunk driving example, consider recreation classes.

Many jurisdictions that operate recreation programs offer classes to their residents, ranging from art to Zumba, swimming to sewing. Those classes are typically supported by a registration fee, which either wholly or partially pays the operating costs. While there may be a conscious decision to subsidize some programs (e.g., children's water safety instruction), there's generally a keen eye on how many people enroll and how much of the cost is recovered. If the wood-working class doesn't break even, it may be dropped or restructured the following year.

While decisions about elective fee-for-service programs can be easy to make, it's more difficult when it comes to other local services. But with performance measurement, it doesn't need to be.

Let's bring up those elected officials again. How often does the decision to add a stop sign come down to the number of people who show up at a public hearing to yell about it? How do we try to steer that debate? We do it with traffic studies, levels of service, and accident rates. While it may be tempting to join the shouting match and tell those people they're wrong, with performance measurement the data says that for us. The data doesn't always win, but at least it informs the decision.

Sometimes, the demand for services is masked by the way our offices and service systems are structured, so that we don't see the complete data right away. Local services have often been provided from roughly 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. That works for some people, but not necessarily for people who work those same hours. As jurisdictions have flexed their inspection hours, added online permitting and class registration, or facilitated e-library downloads, their customers have been able to see both greater access to those services and faster processing times, while the government often benefits by greater efficiency and resident satisfaction. A demand is expressed (or in the case of e-services, perhaps just better understood), a program implemented, and results can be measured.

As [Jim Collins](#) shared at the 2012 ICMA Annual Conference, when you're faced with a challenge, such as sinking the enemy ship that's fast approaching, you can put all your limited gunpowder behind a single cannonball (and likely miss), or you can test fire a few times (just like when reviewing quarterly results), calibrate the right trajectory, adjust your aim, and then proceed. It's performance data at work.

The volatile issue, of course, is not adding or amending services, but cutting them. For more on that, see the section *How do we use the data in decision making?*

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?

While the terms "performance measurement" and "performance management" are often used interchangeably, performance measurement is a preliminary step. Based on the data gathered through performance measurement, jurisdictions can understand their operations better and begin to *manage* their performance.

Unfortunately, the mere collection of performance data neither lends itself to achieving instant results nor creates instant management insights. And just because you're collecting *something* does not mean you're collecting the right data to drive decision-making. This is a challenge in both the United States and other countries, as Octavio Chávez notes in his review of performance management efforts in Latin America in Appendix B.

Where budget pressures are driving the need for cost savings or elected officials are looking to campaign on quick results, it can be difficult to advocate patience. Still, in starting down the road to performance management, it is crucial to set clear expectations for the timeframes that might be required to plan a program, complete the initial implementation, fine-tune the metrics and the data collection methodology, ensure that they remain aligned to strategic goals, and evaluate the data and trends as they become apparent.

The fact that performance management is a multi-year commitment may not be what those standing for imminent re-election want to hear, but that doesn't mean that you can't recognize interim achievements and milestones along the way. Very valuable short-term benefits can be achieved through performance measurement. For starters, the act of measuring performance begins a process of considering precise definitions, goals, and tasks that help define what is core to an organization's goals and what is not. In addition, the preliminary data gathering can lead to realizations about the reliability of data sources and the interdepartmental nature of customer service—neither of which may have been apparent when looking strictly at the account structure inherent in the budget process.

From the public's perspective, the development of a performance culture underscores the organization's commitment to transparency and accountability. Even absent any instant cost savings, efforts in this direction can be perceived as a positive, trust-building first step.

IT SOUNDS GOOD, BUT WHAT'S ALL THIS GOING TO COST?

Those hesitant to get started with performance measurement often start with the misconception that it will cost them significant time, effort, and funding. Yes, there may be an opportunity cost to collecting performance data rather than working on other projects. And there may be a hard cost associated with implementing some software systems to better understand your operations. But to say that these are a sunk cost of performance measurement understates the value to be gained.

For instance, if you weren't using a computer-aided dispatch system, would you fully understand the trends in your emergency responses? And in the absence of data about any department's accomplishments, efficiencies, or lack thereof, would you be making the best decisions regarding the budgets and priorities for the following year? While it's appropriate to consider staff availability, up-front investments, and phased implementation, don't ignore the savings from avoiding ill-informed decisions.

Often, when jurisdictions use performance data, they use it to justify a proposed expenditure, such as during budget consideration. A complementary approach can be to revisit expenditures one or more years after approval to determine what impact that expenditure has had on operations:

- Was there an identifiable savings in staff time or money?
- Was it a wash?
- If it failed, what lessons did you take from that?
- Was it a worthwhile concept that needs some tweaking?

Addressing those questions not only contributes to better management, it also helps to quantify the benefits derived from tracking performance data. The city of Olathe, Kansas, for example, reports on the impact of investment from prior budgetary decisions.

Fire		
Investment	Fund	Year
Addition of 2 squads: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Fire Captain 4 Firefighter/Paramedics 	General Fund	2016
Impact of Investment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Squad #52 travel response time averaged 22 seconds faster than the fire truck and has responded to 316 medical calls since deployment in April 2016 ✓ Squad #55, deployed in October 2016, has responded to 105 medical calls 		
Additional Information		
Squads are designed as 2 person units (staffed with at least one paramedic) utilizing a smaller truck to respond primarily to medical calls. 2 squads are now in service Monday through Thursday from 7 AM to 5 PM at Fire Stations #2 and #5. Service times and locations for the squads were determined using information regarding peak service demands. Squads have enabled the fire department to better match resources to call types by sending the squad to respond to more routine medical calls instead of the large fire truck.		

Impact of investment, Olathe, Kansas.

The city of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, used a third party to evaluate its Contextual Analysis of Crime project and determined that for every \$1.00 spent on crime mapping, they were able to achieve at least \$1.60 in Social Return on Investment.

A [2015 study](#) pegged three years' worth of city and state investment in evidence-based decision-making at \$152 million, with a benefit of \$521 million, or a 340% return—not to mention the indirect up-side in terms of enhanced management insight and public accountability.

A more in-depth review of the potential [return on investment](#) is contained in a report by Arizona State University and the city of Scottsdale.

HOW DO WE MANAGE PERCEPTIONS?

Even if you have never implemented performance measurement before, you'll have to overcome many misperceptions. The term comes loaded with images of stopwatches, bureaucracy, and bean counting to the detriment of actual productivity.

Your predecessors may have tried it, or employees may have experienced it at other workplaces. Either way, you may encounter a host of doubts and complaints just waiting to be voiced. Rather than ignoring these viewpoints, you're better off facing them and hearing the other criticisms as well. You're going to succeed only if you can convince your staff that this is a well-considered and worthwhile effort.

Here are some common complaints—and suggested responses:

- [*We tried it before, and it didn't work.*](#)
- [*This is the priority today, but next year, it will be something else. \(We'll just drag our feet and wait you out!\)*](#)
- [*There are too many unmeasurable outside factors influencing our performance.*](#)
- [*The elected officials will still make decisions for their own reasons.*](#)
- [*You're just doing this to cut or punish staff.*](#)
- [*The media will have a field day if our performance isn't the best.*](#)

To top off that list, the ultimate critique is: **You can't compare us to other agencies, because we're not like anybody else:** We'll take a look at this argument later (see the section *How do we compare to others?*).

Once you do commit to performance management, the related challenge you'll face is reporting the data in all its unvarnished glory. Attempting to cherry-pick or report only the positive results will make it appear you're viewing the data through rose-colored glasses and not being truly transparent.

And where performance has fallen short of goals, be honest about what it will take to turn that around—whether that's an updated software system, a pending capital project, a staffing request, or even a multi-agency effort to restructure a complex process. If you know the timeline, that should be discussed as well, so there's no expectation of an overnight fix.

Another big part of managing perceptions is dealing with the fact that your agency's performance is not top of mind for most of your audiences. If you haven't communicated with them since the previous year's budget hearings, they will likely have forgotten anything you may have already reported. Sharing monthly or quarterly updates is no guarantee your critics will be paying attention either, but updates can go a long way toward ensuring that those who wish to engage can see the progress you're making.

HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE PERFORMANCE DATA TO OUR VARIOUS AUDIENCES?

The structures and requirements that constrain local government have been set up to ensure accountability, legal compliance, and internal controls. They are intended to create predictability and transparency in accounting procedures. The problem is that even though most of your residents are not accountants, there are precious few efforts to translate the content of operating and capital budgets, comprehensive annual financial reports, or other bureaucratic documents into a language the lay person can easily digest.

If you're serious about measuring performance, one of your first considerations has to be the end users. What measures might they be interested in seeing? How might you best communicate with them? How much background and context do you need to include? And if the data is too complex to explain, does that say something about the processes or programs themselves?

This does not mean that all performance measurement should be geared toward the lowest common denominator. Some technical measures might be perfectly appropriate if the end users of that data are the engineering staff or the water quality technicians. But if you're planning to present data to the public, you might want to tailor your list of measures to the handful of concerns you hear about most frequently at your town hall meetings and make your reporting format look more like an infographic than the Code of Federal Regulations.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office emphasizes engagement via multiple data formats, data dictionaries, robust search tools, and user feedback.

WHAT ARE PROJECT AND TASK ACCOUNTING?

Accounting structures are great for pigeonholing expenditures, down to a particular building, office, or employee. But in today's more fluid and agile local government organization, few staff may be working exclusively within a single account code.

Even in a more traditional hierarchy like the fire service, a firefighter might work on fire suppression, fire prevention, public education, special events, emergency operations planning, development plan review, and various grant-funded projects. With mutual aid, urban search and rescue/disaster response, and other out-of-area strike teams, a large percentage of that individual's time may not relate directly to fighting fires. Considering that most departments also provide emergency medical care—at least for first response, possibly also for patient transport, a nonbudgetary level of tracking seems appropriate.

If your jurisdiction has a timesheet reporting system that allows for multiple projects or tasks to be recorded, this may facilitate your understanding of the employees' varying time commitments. You may, for instance, be able to track the time that a planner spent working on each type of permit or each developer's reimbursable requests. You may also be able to assign standardized or custom task codes to track specific sub-projects of interest (e.g., how much time did that planner spend on public outreach related to a major capital improvements proposal?).

Other software may provide similar task data. In fleet management, the work order system or fueling station may track the expenditures on specific vehicles, as well as the non-billable time spent on training, cleanup, or other organizational priorities. Within public safety, the dispatch systems and incident response databases are a font of information on how calls are dispatched, what personnel responded, and what the end results were in terms of arrests, fire containment, response time, or other measures.

In smaller jurisdictions, timesheets may not be used for anything beyond sick leave and vacation. Even here, however, you may be able to begin capturing time spent on key tasks, and this need not entail a multi-million-dollar software solution. You could just as easily collect the information on an Excel spreadsheet, tablet computer, or a truck-cab clipboard. If you wish to set manageable goals for yourself, you might start by saying, "How much time are we spending on special events?" and ask your departments to track that for jurisdiction-sponsored festivals, privately organized 5-K runs, block party street closures, and the like. That information can help determine whether a permit fee might be in order and can also help explain what impacts the event may have on other departmental workloads.

Figure 1 shows two other examples of what additional project codes might reveal. The totals in each case need not reach 100%. There will always be some tasks that are not measured, nor should they all be (see the section *What's not meaningful?*). But even if you set your sights low and measured just special events, residential plan review, and street sweeping, you could have three new pieces of data that would help you to understand how your staff time is being spent throughout the year.

FIGURE 1 | Examples of tasks that might be tracked with additional project codes.

PLANNING	MAINTENANCE
Residential plan review	Design
Commercial plan review	Drainage
Other permits (environmental, right-of-way)	New construction
Advance planning/general plan updates	Pavement rehabilitation
	Right-of-way acquisition
	Signalization/traffic engineering
	Snow plowing
	Special events
	Street sweeping

HOW ARE KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND POLICY ISSUES IDENTIFIED?

Before deciding on a set of measures, you might want to consider the larger policy environment within which the program operates. Questions you might want to consider include:

- Who funds this program?
- Who developed the policies for this program?
- Who benefits (or should benefit) from this program?
- What persons not directly targeted by this program could be significantly impacted by it?
- Will the public-at-large have an interest in what this program accomplishes? For example, all residents and businesses may be considered stakeholders in a program to address blight, even if their properties are not directly impacted.
- What factors make a stakeholder eligible to participate in or receive notice about this program?
- What factors that interfere with performance (“restraining forces”) are too difficult to change or may be most readily changed? What can you do to influence those outcomes?
- What “driving forces” (individuals, programs, or interests) may help the performance measurement effort succeed?
- How might action involving either restraining or driving forces have negative impacts on other aspects of the operation?¹

In Coral Springs, Florida, a similar analysis is conducted as part of the budget season warm-up. Mission statements, core processes, measures, and customer expectations are all scrutinized for potential changes in focus, and once staff have completed the review, they can better identify performance gaps and strategies to address them. For their dedication to continuous improvement, the city was the first local government recognized with the [Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award](#). Subsequent recipients include [Irving, Texas](#), and [Fort Collins, Colorado](#).

¹ Measurement for Results, Implementing Performance Measures in Local Government, Jane G. Kazman, International City/County Management Association, 2000, pg. 24-25, 110-112.

Such analysis may lead you to conduct focus groups with special-interest populations, such as seniors or aquatics program registrants. It may lead to broader discussions with developers, councils of governments, environmental quality agencies, and economic development administrators. Or it may lead you to postpone implementation of certain hot-button measures that are more short-term trouble than they're worth.

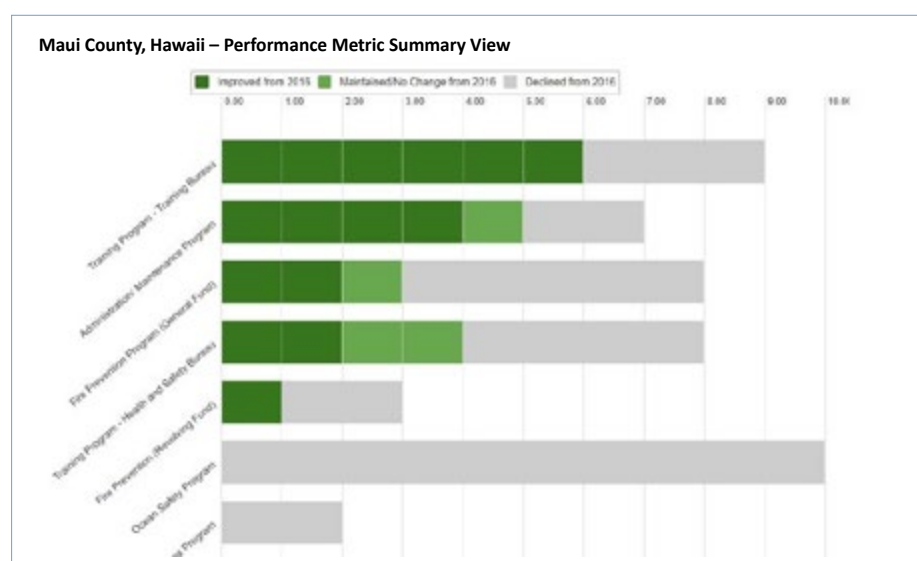
HOW ARE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS MEASURED?

Engagement is not something to be done as an afterthought, such as running an advertisement the week before the public hearing at which the budget is to be approved. Rather, as Kathleen Weisenberger, chief performance officer of Missouri City, Texas, noted in ICMA's publication [18 on 2018](#), engagement should be a metric as well.

Both public engagement and the performance management process itself can be incorporated into your list of metrics to ensure that you're not just going through the motions of collecting data that's destined to sit on a shelf. Process questions to consider include:

- How is your jurisdiction tracking public outreach and involvement?
- Is this limited to outputs (e.g., number of press releases sent) or focused on outcomes (e.g., number of groups engaged and the number of stakeholders actively participating)?
- Are you measuring the use of data itself (e.g., the percentage of the time are you making decisions with the relevant numbers in hand)?
- Is there a checkbox on agenda reports that indicates whether performance data has been evaluated and included?
- For items that recur or come back for reauthorization, is there a requirement that updated performance data be reported, or that action plans be considered where performance is not up to expectations?

Some jurisdictions, like Maui County, Hawaii, track the share of measures improving, stable, or declining as one process or "meta-measure" in their performance dashboard.



Maui County's display of metrics improving or stable.

HOW SHOULD KEY GOALS AND MEASURES BE SELECTED?

Assuming you began measuring your street sweeping effort this past year, a good question to ask would be, “What are we hoping to accomplish?” The employee doing the sweeping might reply that they want to serve all their designated routes and do so with a minimum of complaints. The supervisor might add that they want to optimize the routes to minimize miles driven and coordinate with solid waste on effective fall leaf pickup. The manager or administrator might want to maintain downtown and neighborhood aesthetics, ensure compliance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requirements, and coordinate effective two-way communication with the public over routes, schedules, and no-parking times.

All of those are legitimate goals, but to make them meaningful in a performance measurement sense, it’s necessary to quantify them, as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2 | Examples of measures that can help quantify general goals.

GENERAL GOAL	MAINTENANCE
Serve all designated routes	Number and frequency of lane miles swept
Minimize complaints	Number of complaints received (per lane mile swept)
Optimize routes	Total miles driven (including miles swept and not swept and miles where routes may overlap); Staff hours dedicated to street sweeping
Coordinate on fall leaf pickup	Tonnage of yard waste/leaf collection; number of storm drain cleanouts performed
Maintain community aesthetics	Resident satisfaction ratings of street sweeping service; satisfaction ratings from downtown business surveys
Manage two-way communication with the public	Number of jurisdiction social media followers; number of car tows required and/or parking tickets issued on street sweeping days

While compliance with state or federal laws may be an important focus of your operations, that may not translate into a quantitative performance measure. More likely, compliance measurement would be a yes/no indicator. Or, it could be so technical that the general public might not easily relate to it. For example, while water quality measures expressing contaminants in chemical formulas and parts per million may be part of mandated reporting, you may decide to place your focus of your public communications elsewhere.

Thinking about it from the perspective of a polling company phone call, would you be likely to stay on the line if the recorded voice said, “We have just 300 performance measures we’d like to explain to you”? You would probably hang up before the caller finished the sentence. So if you’re looking to report performance data to the public, it may be most effective to focus on a shorter list of measures for each service—key performance indicators, core measures, strategic indicators, or the like.

As you determine what types of measures to track, keep in mind these considerations:

- **Appropriateness and validity:** Does the measure relate to the government objectives for that service and does it really measure the degree to which a customer need or desire is being met, including minimization of detrimental effects?

- **Uniqueness:** Does it measure an outcome characteristic that no other measure encompasses?
- **Comprehensibility:** Is the measure understandable?
- **Controllability:** Is the condition being measured at least partially the government's responsibility? Does the government have some control over it?
- **Cost:** Are cost and staffing requirements for data collection reasonable?
- **Timeliness of feedback:** Can the data be obtained quickly enough that managers and staff can act on it before the information becomes obsolete?
- **Accuracy and reliability:** Can sufficiently accurate and reliable information be obtained?
- **Completeness:** Does the set of measures cover all or at least most objectives?²

ICMA has tracked performance data for key measures across common local government services since 1995. Most recently, in 2017, ICMA launched [Open Access Benchmarking](#), which collects data on a short list of 80 key performance indicators and 54 additional county measures. The jurisdictions participating in those efforts have helped select and refine the measures over the years, both eliminating measures deemed no longer relevant and emphasizing those seen as “core comparisons.”

WHAT TYPES OF MEASURES ARE MOST MEANINGFUL?

The primary measure types to consider are:

- Input
- Output
- Efficiency
- Outcome
- Descriptive.

Input. A budget is basically a set of input measures: how much money and how many staff you're dedicating to a particular program. These are important measures, but on their own, they tell you nothing about how well you're providing services.

Output. When a jurisdiction first starts measuring performance, the measures tend to focus on outputs. These tell you how much of something was accomplished—for example, how many arrests were made, permits approved, classes conducted, books circulated, or fires suppressed.

Efficiency. Relating outputs to inputs can provide efficiency ratios. How many code enforcement complaints were investigated per full-time equivalent employee? How much did the jurisdiction spend per purchase order issued? These measures can be a great way to communicate with the public to show them how frugally you're managing their money, but they don't tell you everything the public may want to know. For instance, you can show that you're spending only \$0.01 per capita for library services, but that may be because your library has not purchased any new books in five years or has not invested in the technology that would make the collection more accessible.

Outcome. Taking a step beyond outputs and efficiencies, outcome measures indicate how well a jurisdiction is providing services. These may include indicators of timeliness, quality, or customer satisfaction. They may also relate directly to strategic plan goals.


² How Effective Are Your Community Services? © ICMA and the Urban Institute, 2006, pg. 3.

In many ways, outcomes are the gold standard of performance management in that they tell you whether you're accomplishing your stated goals. For this reason, various communities have also centered their efforts around the concept of Budgeting for Outcomes or Managing for Results. Here's an example from [Fort Collins, Colorado](#).

Managing For Results: Advanced Performance Measurement

FOCUSING ON RESULTS

The focus of performance measurement is results and outcomes. All the activities associated with the County's performance measurement process are driven by a desire to achieve results and outcomes that benefit the residents of Fairfax County. In the overall context of performance measurement, it is important to maintain focus on the purpose of why we measure. The output, developing performance measures, surveying for customer satisfaction, and the measurement process, however, is to achieve results (outcomes) that focus on and improve processes, products, programs and services to meet the expectations insofar as they are feasible within reason. Consequently, it is to measure performance, but to also manage performance for results. In many good enough. The following chart illustrates this point quite clearly:



If 99.9% Is Good Enough, Then...

- 12 newborns will be given to the wrong parents daily
- 18,322 pieces of mail will be mishandled every hour
- 2,000,000 documents will be lost by the IRS this year
- 315 entries in Webster's Dictionary will be misspelled
- 20,000 incorrect drug prescriptions will be written this year
- 103,260 income tax returns will be processed incorrectly this year
- 3,056 copies of tomorrow's *Wall Street Journal* will be missing one of the paper's three sections
- 880,000 credit cards in circulation will turn out to have incorrect cardholder information on their magnetic strips
- 291 pacemaker operations will be performed incorrectly
- What does a 0.1% error rate mean to your County agency's performance measurement metrics?

Among the jurisdictions taking an outcomes/ results approach are Fairfax County, Virginia (shown here); Austin, Texas; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Gunnison County, Colorado. [Click on the image to view larger.](#)

One distinction that can often be drawn between inputs on one hand and outputs and outcomes on the other is timeframe. Inputs are often characterized as “leading” measures, indicators of what you might expect to happen. Outputs and outcomes offer you an after-the-fact look at what's happened as a result—well illustrated in Scottsdale, Arizona's rearview mirror (see below).

Depending on the complexity or intangibility of the desired outcome, it may be necessary to consider some intermediate or proxy measures, rather than direct data gathering. Quality of life is a notoriously ambiguous goal many jurisdictions seek. While you may not be able to measure that directly, you might be able to track related measures, such as resident satisfaction ratings or participation rates in community activities.

Even a seemingly straightforward goal like diminishing the incidence of drunk driving might be hard to measure directly. For instance, if your chosen measure is the number of DUI citations issued, you might achieve a result of zero either by implementing a truly effective public awareness campaign or by neglecting to do any enforcement. Either way, you still wouldn't know whether an “un-cited” driver happened to be drunk or not. To see the true impact of your efforts, you might need to look at several interrelated measures, such as the number of alcohol-involved traffic accidents and fatalities, the number and duration of checkpoints, the number of citations issued to establishments that do not discourage inebriated patrons from driving, and the participation in alternative transportation programs such as free or subsidized transit around major holidays.

Descriptive. Although input, output, efficiency, and outcome measures provide excellent quantitative data, descriptive measures add the appropriate context. These may include community characteristics (e.g., college town, military community, commuter suburb), demographic data (daytime population, unemployment rate), and information about the way services are being provided (centralized procurement, self-insurance for liability coverage, one-stop permitting). Such measures are crucial when undertaking benchmarking against other jurisdictions.

So as you're setting up new measures, what should you consider? All of the above. See the sample suite of measures for facility maintenance in Figure 3.



[Scottsdale, Arizona's rearview mirror.](#)

Figure 3 | Sample suite of performance measures for facility maintenance

SAMPLE SUITE OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES: FACILITY MAINTENANCE	
Input	Expenditures and staffing for custodial maintenance and repair; number of facility users
Output	Square footage maintained; number of emergency and nonemergency repairs completed
Efficiency	Square footage maintained per full-time employee; expenditure per square foot; utility usage (BTUs) per square foot
Outcome	Internal and external customer satisfaction with the quality or timeliness of custodial services; response time to emergency work requests
Descriptive	Civic Center is a LEED-certified facility and includes courthouse, library, community theater, and food court. Custodial is provided via contract. Facility users include other county residents. Average number of patrons per day and hours of operation. Annual heating/cooling degree days for metro area.

Beyond the recurring performance measures, you may also want to consider process, engagement, and equity:

- Have you mapped tasks and scheduling via Gantt charts or Lean process reviews?
- Does the service make most effective use of customer relationship management (CRM) or other technologies?
- Has there been outreach to and response from a representative sampling of customers and other stakeholders on standards of service and follow-through?
- Are services being provided equitably to all customers or neighborhoods?

For instance, you may be able to show that road quality and satisfaction for the downtown business district are high, but if you haven't set up a process for managing requests from outlying neighborhoods or demonstrating responsiveness, the data may be masking an underlying discontent.

In addition to providing a more robust sense of how you're performing, adopting a suite of related metrics for key programs helps to avoid the potential gaming or manipulation of the data (see the section *How do we ensure nobody is "gaming" the measures?*).

WHAT'S NOT MEANINGFUL?

Workload data is important, but the temptation can sometimes be to measure every task that's performed. Thus, some jurisdictions may track:

- Number of quarterly reports completed: 4
- Number of council meetings staffed: 50

- Percentage of violent crimes investigated: 100%
- Percentage of time IT network is running during normal business hours: 99.99%

Actually, to say that those measures are “tracked” is a misnomer. In all likelihood, the staff knew the answer without needing to collect any data. They might have wanted to be able to justify the time they were spending, demonstrate their compliance with policy, or simply fill the page with performance data to show that they were fully implementing management’s direction.

Before any of those get passed along in a report to elected officials or the public, you might want to ask:

- **Do you already know what your performance will be next year?** If you already know there will be four quarterly reports next year too, you could set that as a goal, graph it, and have a wonderfully consistent trend line. It just wouldn’t mean anything. If the department really feels the need to explain their “other duties as assigned,” perhaps this could be part of a narrative accompanying the report, rather than taking up valuable space in the data table.
- **Does this tell you anything actionable?** If the network up-time is always going to be in the 98-99% range, are you going to make any decisions on that basis? Would it be more helpful to know the duration and timing of actual outages? What about the number of network-related help desk requests? Are employees satisfied with the network services they’re receiving? Is the reliability for public safety systems any better?



Before you even start collecting the data, consider what a high, medium, or low value would mean. If you asked a question of the Magic 8-Ball and received an answer of “Reply hazy, try again,” you could turn it over and have a new answer within seconds. Unfortunately, the timeframe to collect government performance data is so long that if you don’t collect the data the right way the first time, you may have to wait until next year until you get to see the picture any more clearly.

- **Does the data presentation cause the reader’s eyes to glaze over?** Having lots of data is great. Those of us who are data geeks love it. Most residents don’t. So while you could show budgeted, projected, and actual data for ten years across 40 measures, you’d end up with a font so small and with so many numbers that it would be indecipherable.

Figure 4 shows one real-world example (jurisdiction name withheld). Out of context, that example may look absurd. Actually, it was printed on a page with 19 other measures just like it. So how is a member of the public to interpret that data dump?

Could the data have benefitted from a graph? Probably. It could also use some descriptors to tell us whether the scope of services changed significantly in Year 3 when the total costs more than doubled. Beyond that, some narrative might also help explain whether we expected the annual variability, whether the targets were met during any of those years, and if not, what steps might have been taken to improve performance.

Figure 4 | Example of too much data or not enough context for public reporting.

	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5	YEAR 6	YEAR 7	YEAR 8
Total Costs	\$566,368	\$671,268	\$1,429,834	\$1,648,836	\$1,492,329	\$1,467,533	\$1,658,218	\$1,726,604

Local government staff are often so close to the services they provide that we think the meaning is obvious. But for the layperson, does reading that building permit valuation was \$64,347,563 last year and \$61,423,934 this year really tell them anything? If not, then why overwhelm people with all those extra digits? One easy step would be to express those figures in millions of dollars. Others would include showing:

1. How does that performance compare to targets, trends, or peer jurisdictions?
2. What major projects or staffing changes may have led the numbers to spike?
3. Does falling below a threshold level of performance serve as an “early warning” that more attention is warranted?

HOW SHOULD WE MEASURE RESPONSE TIME?

The classic image of performance management is of Frederick Winslow Taylor or another early time-and-motion proponent holding a stopwatch to chart the time spent on every task. In many ways, built-in sensors and software have replaced the stopwatch, but there are still some significant questions you should consider before you start tracking and reporting response times:

Do seconds count? When considering public safety, response time should be tracked as precisely as possible. But it's crucial that the clock start times and end times be tracked carefully and consistently. If technology allows, be sure tracking is automated, so that dispatchers and first responders do not need to remember to press an extra button when they should be focused on the incident at hand.

What are the response time components? If it's possible to break out the various parts of your response time, doing so can help determine where a bottleneck might be occurring. If overall emergency response is taking too long, for example, tracking the components separately can help you determine whether that's occurring at the public safety answering point, the dispatch center, or en route to the incident.

What about waiting time?

- **Before being served:** When a contractor comes to the front counter to get a plan processed, are you tracking how long they have to wait to be served? Thinking of the stopwatch model, you could imagine a rather burdensome data collection process. An alternative might be to follow the supermarket model and commit to adding counter service staff whenever more than two people are waiting for service. An even better approach would be to make more of the permitting processes available online.
- **While being served:** When a case has been opened—whether for permitting, code enforcement, or another service—there are often starts and stops along the way. Sometimes that will be because the customer is reconsidering changes that were requested during the process. Other times, it might be because you're waiting for another agency to give its approval too. If you're tracking the days your jurisdiction has worked on a case, be sure to set consistent standards for which time periods will be included or excluded.
- **On weekends and holidays:** Depending on the service, it may be important to track response times in calendar days (e.g., for child welfare) or business days only (e.g., for inter-library loans).

When is the work completed? If a utility customer calls for an emergency water main repair, are they satisfied when the crew shows up, when the water is turned off, or when the pipes are back in working order? In all likelihood it's the last of those, but that's not always the way agencies track their time. They might say they “responded” within a given time period, but that doesn't necessarily lead to a satisfied customer. The same concern comes up internally with fleet maintenance. You might be glad to see that your car is in the maintenance bay, but that doesn't mean you can drive it yet. If, however, there are pool

cars or reserve vehicles available, it might be that the fleet staff can report that the driver once again has a serviceable vehicle as soon as that exchange is made, no matter how long the repair itself may take.

What is fractile response time? Where a target has been set for response times, sometimes staff will report their response time as a percentage within that time period. This is common, for instance, in fire departments, which may note the “fractile percentage” of calls within 4 minutes, 8 minutes, or some other time period. NOTE: In interpreting such figures, pay close attention to how the standard is phrased. If the standard is 90% of calls responded to within a given time period, and 91% were within 4 minutes, that might be phrased as 91% meeting the 4-minute standard or 100% compliance with the (90%) standard. That brings us to this last point about response times...

What about outliers? When tracking response times, it can be tempting to throw out exceptional circumstances, such as bad weather, a traffic jam, or multiple simultaneous calls. Alternatively, these may be your best source of business intelligence. A Pareto chart can array your data according to the most common causes of adverse outcomes and help you identify the areas where further action would enable the greatest improvement in your performance (see example below).

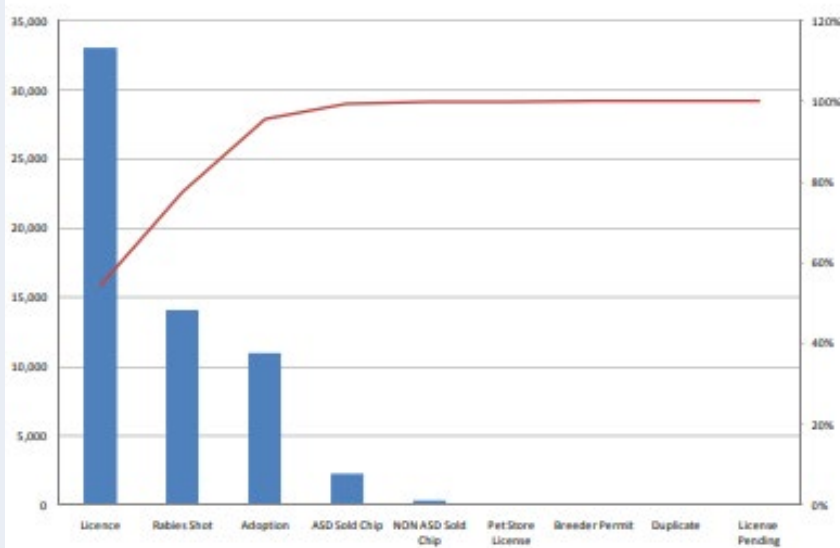
DO ALL DEPARTMENTS NEED TO BE INVOLVED?

No. There's no reason performance management cannot start in a single department. In all likelihood, it already has.

Police departments are already reporting crime statistics to the F.B.I. Fire departments are tracking response times. Librarians are tracking circulation patterns. And individuals in other departments are undoubtedly keeping track of the data that's most meaningful to them—from overtime and sick leave usage to workplace injuries to printer malfunctions. The problem is that these initial efforts are taking place independently and without any overarching focus on what data is most meaningful.

If you're not sure the organization is ready for a top-down performance measurement mandate, then starting with one or two departments might be best. Talk to those who already measure their performance. These may be the ones with the most hierarchical organizations (public safety) or the ones with

Animal Services Pareto FY08-09



PARETO CHARTS

Pareto charts can help organize data according such factors as manufacturing defect rates, causes of sub-optimum response times, or workload (shown here for Miami-Dade County, Florida, animal services).

the most up-to-date software. Discuss the concepts of outcome measures, target-setting, and post-collection data analysis. Nurture those efforts until their data is ready for a wider audience. Then encourage them to share that experience with their peers and act as the resource for others to emulate.

WHAT IF A CONTRACTOR PROVIDES THE SERVICE?

Where a service is provided by a contractor, it can be more difficult to access the range of performance data you might be interested in reviewing, but this need not be the case. At the very least, when the contract comes up for renewal, consider requiring the contractor to share with you the same type of routine performance reporting that they are undoubtedly doing internally. This will not expose any trade secrets on their part, and if it's disclosed as part of the RFP itself, will become a routine expectation for anyone providing service to the jurisdiction.

The data the contractor provides will enable you to assess the relative costs of in-house vs. contract provision in the future. And even if you're committed to staying with a contractual set-up, you may be able to include performance incentives, penalties, or liquidated damages to ensure that response time is optimized, services are provided according to schedule, repeat work orders or customer complaints are minimized, and quality of service standards are met. Queen Creek, Arizona, used this approach in structuring its [recycling contract](#).


Even in situations where the service provider is a loosely regulated franchisee, there may be some capacity for regular reports concerning performance criteria or mutual goals that can be tracked together (e.g., waste diversion percentages; effectiveness of jurisdiction/utility coordination on capital improvements and trenching).

Performance Measures


- Collection & Disposal Contract- RAD
- Customer Service- In-House

Performance Measures

- Result Based
 - Complaint Volume
 - Surveys
 - Response Time
- Monitored & Gauged
 - Vehicle Inspections
 - On-site Inspections
 - Field Inspections



Line Description	Oct-10	Nov-10	Dec-10	Jan-11	Feb-11	Mar-11	Apr-11	May-11	Jun-11	Jul-11
Direct Disposal or First Contract										
Solid Waste	471	632	487	689	429	537	535	436	404	199
Transferload										
Solid Waste	72	81	69	62	43	102	60	61	61	18



ICMA

Performance measures in the recycling contract in Queen Creek, Arizona. Click on the image to see more detail.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE COLLECT AND REPORT DATA?

Whenever a national election approaches, pollsters make calls to swing-state voters several times per day. While we wouldn't recommend that any local government conduct satisfaction polling nearly that frequently, the opposite extreme is often the case. Performance data is seen as important or as an expected part of a budget document, but that's the only time it sees the light of day. Going by that standard, you might as well commit to a new diet to start the new year, then say that you won't weigh yourself again until the following New Year's Eve. Yes, the attention span and patience of your audience should be one consideration, but the value and timeliness of the data should be another.

Decatur, Georgia, holds monthly meetings to discuss the performance measurement process, share departmental case studies, preview presentations to council, and inject some fun into the sessions as well. This allows performance problems to be aired early and potentially corrected long before any planned data reporting to the elected officials or the public. For more information, check out this [case study](#).

Sometimes the nature of what you're measuring dictates the frequency with which you should track it. Golf course numbers should obviously be considered at least seasonally. Crime statistics may make the

most sense when tracked by the day of the week or hour of the day. And if truancy figures were evaluated only annually, then by the time you reviewed them, the students captured in that data would have already dropped out of school.

Could you share that data monthly? Sure. Sterling Heights, Michigan, produced a community calendar that not only provided the dates of upcoming city events and recreation program registration procedures but also included a selection of jurisdiction-wide performance graphs. So in one mailing, the city was able to reach people throughout the year. Other jurisdictions send something more timely as a utility billing insert or an e-notification. [Bayside, Wisconsin](#), provides an opportunity on its website for residents to request automatic notifications.

On the micro level, jurisdictions with customer relationship management (CRM) software or 311 systems can often enable local residents to track individual complaints and the time to resolution, with employees able to update task status via their own wireless devices.

And in terms of open data transparency, [Albany, Oregon](#), [Austin, Texas](#), [Fort Collins, Colorado](#), and [Durham, North Carolina](#), have provided interactive, drill-down access to their financial systems and related performance measures so data is available close to real-time.

Even if a fully online system is years away for you, monthly performance discussions can at least raise the profile and shelf life of your performance measures beyond the standard duration of a New Year's resolution.

IS SAMPLING APPROPRIATE?

Sampling can be problematic if performance might vary throughout the day or year. Would you sample golf course users only in October and November? What about response time to police and fire calls only after rush hour? Are personnel recruitments more common in the first months of a new fiscal year, while purchasing activity increases closer to fiscal year end?

On the other hand, sampling can help to point out potential lapses in service quality or timeliness when the volume of work is too high to track every case or incident. As long as cases are randomly chosen for review and are sufficient in number, the quantitative data that results or the more in-depth quality assurance reviews/audits that follow may help to point out issues that need to be addressed.

WHAT ROLE DO SATISFACTION SURVEYS PLAY?

Some would argue that satisfaction measures are the only ones that matter. Or as elected officials might argue, being re-elected is in itself a satisfaction measure and an endorsement of their performance.

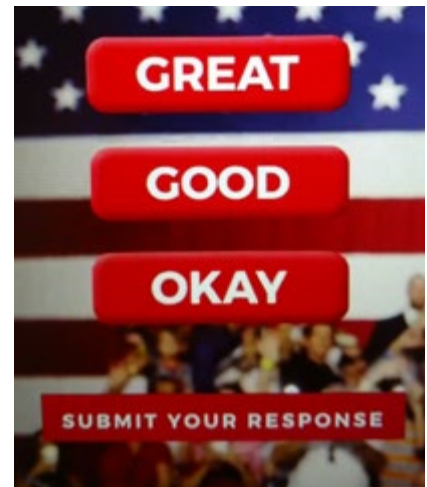
From more of an operational perspective, satisfaction surveys can act as an effective double-check of what you're seeing in your operational data. For example, data from a public works department's pavement condition index could show that the roads are meeting quality standards, but if you conduct a survey of local residents, you might find broad dissatisfaction with road quality. This may point to methodological issues with your data collection (e.g., was a sufficient sample of roads assessed?) or even misunderstandings on the part of respondents (e.g., if a particularly bad road is the responsibility of a neighboring or overlapping jurisdiction).

But no matter what form of satisfaction surveys you use, they will only succeed if you are open to the feedback you'll receive.

If the data remains confidential, if the survey includes no tough questions, and if only favorable items get reported, then you're missing the opportunity to learn from what the people have to say. Or you're missing the chance to ask the follow-up questions that will help you understand why the desired outcomes might not have been achieved. And while ignoring potential dissatisfaction might make for blissful ignorance in the short run, chances are the voters will share their unedited feedback the next time they go to the voting booth.

Keep in mind that there may be multiple stakeholder groups worth surveying:

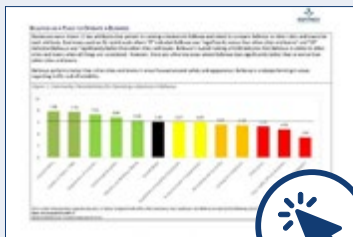
- Residents (as a whole or by neighborhood)
- Customers (e.g., users of parks, libraries, or utilities)
- Businesses
- Employees
- Special demographic groups (e.g., seniors, youth, non-English-speakers)



As you design your satisfaction survey questions, ensure that the phrasing does not inadvertently skew your results.

SATISFACTION SURVEYS OFFER BROADER PERSPECTIVES

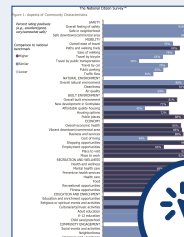
Click on each image to view.



*Bellevue, Washington,
business survey*



*San Francisco
city survey*



*Scottsdale,
Arizona, city survey*



*Oklahoma City
utility survey*

Surveys may be conducted by phone, by e-mail, or in person, or even via quick and creative applications of technology. The statistical significance of the results will vary with your methods.

Many jurisdictions conduct surveys every few years so they can track changes in satisfaction over time. Here are some general considerations on [survey methodology](#).

HOW DO WE GET BUY-IN, AND FROM WHOM?

In any performance management initiative, it's important to have buy-in from staff, elected officials, and management.



*SeaTac Airport collects user data
at the point of service.*

Staff. One of the big “Yes, but...” comments relates to the importance of performance measurement. Is it a top priority in concept? Yes, but.... the staff do not have time to collect all that information. And if management did force them to do so, resistance would be so strong that the effort would be doomed to fail.

Why are people wary or resistant? Often, they feel that performance measurement is a precursor to downsizing. That fear can have two consequences: fudged data or lack of cooperation, stretching from department heads down through the rest of the organization. Instead of allowing such a negative mindset to take hold, make the acts of measurement and analyzing the results part of their job expectations. No, this is not the same as taking punitive action on the basis of departmental performance data, much of which is out of the individual employee’s control. Rather, you can create incentives for all staff to take part in the performance measurement effort by making that participation itself a consideration in the annual review process. Figure 5 shows metrics that are recommended (and not recommended) for inclusion in performance evaluation).

Figure 5 | Employee evaluation: How to incorporate performance management.

NOT RECOMMENDED (Quantitative metrics beyond the individual employee’s control)	RECOMMENDED (Process and timeliness metrics)
Increase permit revenues by 5%	Did employee develop or fine-tune outcome and efficiency measures for each core service?
Reduce response time below jurisdiction target	Did the employee collect and report assigned performance data as scheduled (e.g., on a monthly or quarterly basis)?
	Did they include data analysis in each core service program update or budget request?

Self-interest is a key motivating factor in performance management, in part because department staff are skeptical that any initiative imposed from above will be both benign and helpful. Rather than setting up performance tracking as one piece of the management toolbox without relating it to the rest, managers should consider how to integrate that effort more fully.

At the 2018 ICMA Annual Conference in Baltimore, Robert Layton, city manager of Wichita, Kansas, led a roundtable discussion about how to motivate staff who might be hesitant to engage. Here are some of the **key strategies for engaging staff** that emerged:

- Explain why you’re measuring what you’re measuring and what the next steps are. If you don’t have a “use case” for the data, then it’s not worth the time to collect it.
- Involve front-line staff in developing their own measures. Ensure that they also clearly define the formulas or measurement methods so that data can be collected consistently from year to year.
- Link measures to strategic objectives so the two can be discussed together in any meetings with management, elected officials, or the public.
- Align your messaging. Is your data model punitive? If your organizational culture has historically called out negative results, it will be difficult to get people to collaborate on performance data collection and honest discussions. Instead, work toward and support a culture of transparency and continuous improvement.

- Revisit performance reporting throughout the year. Schedule regular follow-up so staff can see that the focus is not to fill in a blank on a budget form (and ignore it the rest of the year) but to better understand performance and drive more informed decision-making.
- Support training and related software to help everyone understand the goals and process.
- Reward consideration of longer-term return on investment, rather than taking shortcuts to one-time budget savings.
- Consider accreditation or benchmarking as ways to reinforce a focus on results or to obtain an outside corroboration of the data being collected.
- Start small. If you've got certain operations that are ready to lead the way (e.g., fleet maintenance), encourage those staff to form working groups with peer agencies to lead the discussion.
- Celebrate successes by departments that effectively make their case using data, that revisit prior decisions to show the performance results that have been achieved, or that outline clear action steps to correct areas where they've fallen short. Promote this as a practice to be followed by others in the organization as well.

So how do you put those ideas into practice?

- **Amnesty.** In 2001, Reno, Nevada, assumed that some of the data they had collected might be inaccurate. Whether or not there was any intention to fudge the numbers, they knew that employees might be reluctant to come forward with corrected figures. So they devised an amnesty program that encouraged staff to report and correct bad data even if it was several years old. Such initiatives help to ensure the reliability of time-series comparisons and long-term projections.
- **Business planning.** Jurisdictions interested in linking their longer-term strategic plans to annual budgets often adopt departmental business plans. Miami-Dade County, Florida, is among those that has posted its [two-year business planning](#) guidelines.
- **Employee appraisals.** Phoenix, Arizona, considers employees' work in performance measurement as part of their annual appraisals. In Broward County, Florida, new analysts are subject to a [performance agreement](#) detailing both their responsibilities and the related training they are expected to complete.
- **Accountability standards.** Whether in the form of an [ordinance](#), [resolution](#) or a policy, setting accountability expectations can go a long way toward instilling both a performance culture and a routine schedule for consideration of the most current data.
- **Accreditation.** Check out [CPSE](#), [CALEA](#), or other state or national agencies.



For more ideas, you can also check out the ICMA blog, such as [this contribution](#) from David Ammons at the University of North Carolina.

Elected officials. Two primary challenges when dealing with elected officials are:

- Receiving their explicit or implied agreement with the performance measurement approach
- Convincing them to consider performance data in decision making.

While performance measurement itself might be considered a management responsibility, allocating funds for the staff or systems to carry out that measurement may require approval by the governing body. Considering that the fruits of such expenditures may not be reaped within their terms of office, this can sometimes be a hard sell.

Officials might be tempted to simply cherry-pick the data and report only what makes the jurisdiction (and them) look good. It's important when starting the performance management effort to make clear that you're looking to build a culture of continuous improvement, not one that will be perfect from day one.

There may be opportunities for the ribbon cuttings and other celebrations, but the more important roles they can play are in supporting and reinforcing the process. For example, elected officials in New Orleans, Louisiana; North Hempstead, New York; Kansas City, Missouri; and Tamarac, Florida, [all play a role](#) in data analysis discussions and in injecting data into the larger dialogue with the public.

As far as the public is concerned, all their tax money goes in one side of the organization, and some mix of services comes out the other. In between, the process is often obscure or misunderstood. Their opinions about this process are also affected by their perceptions of government generally:

- *The government spends too much on overtime!*
- *Permits take too long to approve!*
- *I could fix those cars cheaper myself!*
- *I'm not getting enough value for all that I'm paying!*
- *Congress is a mess, and by extension, local government can't be much better!*

Performance measurement helps gather the data to explain those internal processes—to management staff, elected officials, and the public. Thus, the next time staff are fielding a complaint from a constituent, they can know that they have data to help respond to any concerns. The routine questions could be answered in standard performance reports or tweets. Others could at least be researched more quickly if the organization already had a system in place to capture the raw data.

So, assuming the elected officials agree that a performance measurement effort is a good idea, how do you convince them to act on it? Every jurisdiction has examples of elected officials not acting on the data. For instance, a stop sign is proposed, traffic studies are conducted demonstrating that the numbers do not justify it, and yet on the basis of vocal constituents who attend the public meeting, the sign is approved.

Is this an indictment of performance measurement? Hardly. Even if the decisions are not always based on the available data, the fact that the traffic study is consulted first is key. The more routine performance measurement becomes in a jurisdiction, the more likely the public and the elected officials will look at any proposal before them and say, "Where's the performance data?"

Management. One significant source of dissatisfaction among staff can be the perception that while they are being asked to manage with data, management does not hold itself to the same standard. While performance metrics are common in direct-service departments, they're less commonly reported among

city/county management, elected officials, attorneys, and clerks. This creates a great opportunity to lead by example.

Unfortunately, some of what gets published stops at the very rudimentary level of outputs, such as the number of board/council meetings staffed (usually 50-52)—not exactly actionable data, as noted earlier.

The metrics you choose for your own operation will depend on what tasks fit under the administrative umbrella, but they should be guided by a broad range of measure types—some focused on internal functions, and others on the jurisdiction’s performance as a whole. Figure 6 lists some measures you can apply to administrative performance.

Figure 6 | Sample metrics for administration.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: SAMPLE METRICS FOR ADMINISTRATION	
Input	Full-time equivalent employees (FTEs)
Output	Number of interagency agreements or smart community initiatives implemented
Efficiency	The ratio of administrative cost to overall jurisdiction expenditures
Outcome	Percentage of strategic goals met or metrics where performance is improving Resident satisfaction with the jurisdiction as a whole Staff satisfaction Staff turnover rate
Responsiveness	Average response time to requests from the public (FOIA) or elected officials
Fiscal Stewardship	Budgetary and fund balance goals met
Quality	CRM/311 ratings of service quality Number of workers’ compensation claims per 100 FTEs
Equity	Satisfaction ratings by district or neighborhood
Organizational Effectiveness	Percentage of staff completing key training and development activities
Economic Development	Number of site selector visits hosted Jurisdiction investment per job attracted or retained
Transparency and Engagement	Number in attendance at town hall meetings or resident academies Number of community groups engaged Unique online site visits by the public to key projects/programs Social media followers Percentage of departments for which performance data is available online

Whatever your metrics, model the behavior you want to see from the line departments—share the data, discuss areas where performance has fallen short, and talk about next steps to drive improvement.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD DATA BE REPORTED TO ELECTED OFFICIALS?

As discussed earlier, you may want to have a monthly snapshot of performance in each department, but this may or may not be a level of detail that your governing body desires. It may be that the pyramid concept comes into play.

Division managers and line staff in fleet maintenance may keep close track of each vehicle and its relative costs. The department head may want to know about trends by vehicle type. The manager may want to discuss overtime, vehicle downtime, and key data by exception (e.g., are some high-cost vehicles ready for replacement?). Elected officials, particularly those who also hold full- or part-time jobs outside of government, may not have the time for regular, detailed spreadsheets, but they may want to see a one-page summary of key indicators across all service areas. For fleet, that might include a once-per-year report on the maintenance cost per vehicle, annual mileage, and the vehicle accident rate. For police, that might mean a monthly or even weekly crime report.



The level of detail in performance reporting may follow a pyramid model or allow for online drill-down

The pyramid concept does not mean that the elected officials are uninterested in more performance data, just that their routine consumption of those statistics is more likely to be of a summary or cyclical nature. No matter what that format or schedule, encourage elected officials to discuss the data just as you do. This helps to reinforce the importance of the data to the departments and fosters the focus on data-informed decisions.

HOW DO WE ALIGN THE LONG-TERM HORIZON OF PERFORMANCE TRACKING WITH THE INTERESTS AND FOCUS OF ELECTED OFFICIALS?

Performance management can be unglamorous and require patience in the examination of trend data. As a result, you may feel that elected officials will not be supportive. If so, it may help to recall that long-term vision is a key interest of elected officials, and it's one of the factors that helps drive communities forward. So for those who may be the program's elected champions, the focus might be the key benefits of performance management in the shorter term:

- **Justifying expenditures:** When new programs, staffing, or facilities are proposed, the inclusion of performance data can show both the experience to date and the projected results over the coming years. This can facilitate better decision making by elected officials among competing priorities.
- **Making government accountable:** Residents participate in strategic planning efforts and town halls, but it's through performance metrics that elected officials can point to progress on each goal. And where expenditures have previously been approved for a new program, regular follow-up on those metrics (via dashboards, stat programs, or public hearings) is a way for those officials to demonstrate their oversight responsibilities.

- **Achieving and celebrating efficiencies:** Through performance management and process improvement initiatives, jurisdictions can achieve concrete results in terms of staff time saved, quicker turn-around times, energy efficiency, and lower costs. While it is true that those results are not achieved overnight, each can be highlighted in a way that reinforces the value of the investment the elected officials have made in professional management and a performance focus.

HOW DO WE DETERMINE WHETHER WE HAVE THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE AND STAFFING?

No special skills are required to collect performance data. The principal limiting factors are time, and in some cases, software. At the most rudimentary level, performance data may be collected manually, such as through turnstile counts at recreation facilities, fuel logs in vehicles, and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) injury reporting.

If departmental data systems already exist, you may need to mine the data or craft new reports that express the figures in the way you desire. For instance, if the planning department is capturing the date of permit application and the date of permit issuance, the processing time can be calculated from individual records or it may be programmed for a new recurring report.

If staff time is at a premium, as it usually is, a first step might be to sample your data. You might choose one month that experiences typical permit activity (avoiding seasonal peaks or slowdowns) and track all the processing times for that period. If the results are satisfactory, you might postpone further action. If they are not, it might be worth committing the time to program a new report so that you can track it on a regular basis.

Larger jurisdictions may be able to assign a full-time staff person to performance measurement, but generally, an already busy staff is simply assigned one more hat to wear. If you start small and focus on the most meaningful data, you may find that the impetus to grow the effort comes from the departments themselves.

Tracking software can likewise range from expensive, customized packages down to modest spreadsheets. Rather than invest in a new system during the initial phase of data collection, look first to existing timesheets, work order systems, public safety dispatch, financial data, and information technology network information.

WHAT IF OUR JURISDICTION IS TOO SMALL?

Your jurisdiction is not too small. Yes, some larger jurisdictions are rightly recognized for their robust performance management systems, and they may also have the resources to deploy bells and whistles on an interactive online dashboard. But that doesn't mean that smaller jurisdictions or those with more limited funds available can't be just as successful. In fact, more than 30% of the organizations receiving ICMA's [Certificates in Performance Management](#) are under 50,000 in population.

On the performance metrics themselves, smaller jurisdictions may actually be more nimble—able to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities as they arise. They may, in fact, perform much better on turnaround times for recruitments, purchasing, return to work following an injury, or permit processing. In emergency services, lower levels of traffic congestion may speed overall response time. In satisfaction surveys, a higher sense of community identification and engagement may contribute to higher ratings. And when performance is considered on a per capita basis, the cost per local resident may be more economical as well.

BENCHMARKING IN SMALLER COMMUNITIES

Benchmarking is “the practice of comparing performance with standards or the performance results achieved by others”^{*} and it is not a new concept to many local governments. Following the Great Recession many places, including the city of Decatur, Georgia, began looking for ways to do more with less. This challenge presented a unique opportunity to review internal and external processes and workflows in an effort to make cost-effective and efficient improvements.

In the fall of 2013, the city’s Performance Management Team embarked on a project to identify communities around the United States that were similar to the city of Decatur in order to make comparisons and learn best practices. As a starting point, comparable places were drawn from a list of jurisdictions that participate in the National Research Center’s citizen survey program and ICMA’s benchmarking efforts. Each location was selected based on criteria that included population, proximity to a large city in a metropolitan region, and a council-manager form of government, plus a few extras such as the presence of an independent school system and location as a county seat. The Performance Management Team also used this survey as a way to learn about what other places are doing in areas that aren’t traditionally reported in benchmarking efforts, such as organization of special events and types of social media platforms that are being utilized.

Each year we send survey requests to 20 cities across the country that met our initial criteria, and we have received as few as eight responses and as many as twelve. The [data gathered and shared](#) by the yearly cohorts tell a unique story about community engagement, transparency, and people. And even though we range in size from 15,000 to 40,000 people, our residents do not share the same amount of living space or even the same make-up. However, each of the participating cities demonstrates that it cares about the public it serves, and we find out that we have much we can learn from one another if we are willing to share data.

While there is no community exactly like yours, there are plenty located around the country and the world that share similar characteristics. You just have to find them. Take some time to create a list of the criteria that are important to your community. Once you determine those variables for comparison, you have done the hard work. Because asking about the kinds of areas and metrics that your community treasures is easy and fun.

Meredith M. Roark, City Clerk, Decatur, Georgia

^{*} David Ammons, *Municipal Benchmarks*, Third Edition (M.E. Sharp), 2012.

To jumpstart your benchmarking efforts, small as well as large jurisdictions can access the data available at no charge and with no software requirements through ICMA’s [Open Access Benchmarking](#) program.

WHAT STAFF TRAINING IS NEEDED?

Budget or management staff need training in how to evaluate the data once it’s been collected. Training is recommended not just as a one-time seminar, but as an ongoing reinforcement of performance principles, so that both new and continuing staff can benefit from the theory, practice, and technology behind the jurisdiction’s data-informed management.

Here are a few approaches worth considering:

- Kansas City, Missouri's [Data Academy](#)
- San Francisco, California's [Guide to Good Measures](#)
- Fairfax County, Virginia's [Managing for Results Guide](#)
- Bellevue, Washington's [Business Case Analysis Training](#)

Depending on the size or resources of your organization, training can be customized, can be off-the-shelf, or can be conducted with other jurisdictions at a conference or other event. No matter what approach you take, a train-the-trainer element can be helpful in ensuring that a focus on performance remains a part of routine management and budgeting.

In smaller communities, that training doesn't need to take on the trappings of a formalized course. Pinehurst, North Carolina (population 16,000), for example, covers its balanced scorecard model as part of new staff orientation. The fact that this session is led by the assistant village manager emphasizes the importance of performance reporting as part of the organizational culture.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that just telling your staff to create some performance metrics does not mean they'll know how to select meaningful metrics. And it also doesn't mean they won't be apprehensive about potential ulterior motives behind an initiative to drive staff, service, or expenditure cuts. Having honest and up-front conversations about your goals will help to allay their concerns, as will reinforcement of that vision via the follow-up trainings and discussions about performance data that you may have during the year.

If your jurisdiction runs an "academy" program for area residents, you might consider whether staff should attend that as well. This can both give them a first-hand understanding of the public's attitudes and preferences around data and also help in the development of the program curriculum to better share their departments' stories through the program itself or through open data portals, newsletters, or other outreach.

IS A CONSORTIUM APPROACH THE WAY TO GO?

A performance measurement consortium can be an important aid in both data collection and analysis. Such a structure—bringing together communities in the same state or metro area, or those that share other similar characteristics—can help ensure the comparability of benchmark data and also provide a forum for sharing resources in the interpretation of results.

The ICMA [Open Access Benchmarking](#) program facilitates consortium formation and also data sharing among consortia, with no cost to participate or specialized software requirements to access the data.

As of this writing, consortia of varying sizes are in operation in metropolitan Chicago and [Phoenix](#), as well as [Florida](#), Kansas, Michigan, [North Carolina](#), [Tennessee](#), Washington, and Wisconsin, and through additional non-geographic working groups such as [What Works Cities](#).

After an initial implementation in Ontario, Municipal Benchmarking Network [Canada](#) in 2018 included 16 cities around the country. The [Association for Public Service Excellence](#) benchmarks across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. International benchmarking efforts are also underway through [Local Government Professionals Australia](#) in cooperation with peers in New Zealand and other countries. See Appendix B for additional international perspectives.

THE FOUR CITIES PROJECT

Following the reorganization of ICMA's performance measurement benchmarking program in 2015, there was a considerable amount of discussion regarding next steps for comparative benchmarking. One of the results of that collaboration was the Midwest Benchmarking Project.

Comparative performance benchmarking is a key part of the budget development process for the city of Wichita, so staff was very eager to participate in preliminary benchmarking discussions with other cities. That culminated in a group convening to discuss the issue during the ICMA Annual Conference in September 2016. In early 2017, Des Moines, Iowa; Kansas City, Missouri; Wichita, Kansas; and Fort Worth, Texas, made the commitment to move forward with a comparative benchmarking effort, and decided to engage an outside consultant to coordinate the process and collect data.

The first step was to identify service areas. Three of the four cities mentioned Code Enforcement, Fire, Fleet Management, and Police as the most important service areas for comparison. Those service areas, as well as service areas that were mentioned by more than one participant, such as Human Resources and Risk Management, were selected for data collection.

Collection of 2016 data began in 2017. In some cases, cities had been collecting and reporting data for internal review or external agencies. However, there were quite a few measures with incomplete responses or inconsistent data definitions. Looking back at a prior year for the first data collection process proved to be useful in defining the parameters for the benchmarking effort. Once data collection for the first year was complete, a conference call with city managers and performance measurement coordinators provided an opportunity to discuss results. The participants identified data discrepancies, possible outlier measures, and best practice opportunities. Field visits took place to study best practices in four service areas, to further discuss the data gathered, and to share best practices. So far, Wichita has hosted meetings on Police and Fleet Management services, and Fort Worth has hosted meetings on Code Enforcement and Fire.

Lessons learned:

- Provide the opportunity early in the process for service area managers to connect and share best practices; this was the case with the Fleet managers, and it made a big difference in their acceptance of a new program and process.
- When selecting measures, find a mix of measures that are already being collected and measures that are new.
- Once comparative measures are identified, leverage your existing data collection process to collect data at the same time.
- Establish a firm data submission and analysis schedule, recognizing that this information is needed for the budget process.

Robert Layton, City Manager, Wichita, Kansas

If you choose to participate in a consortium, keep in mind that the group's agreed-upon measures do not need to limit what you might track internally. If, for example, the group is focused on violent crimes, but your jurisdiction is also very concerned about car thefts, you can always track those additional items on your own. Likewise, if comparative data is available through the consortium on an annual basis, but you

want to track certain stats on a quarterly, monthly, weekly, or even hourly basis, that more frequent data then serves as just one more resource in your data toolkit.

Beyond the potential for data sharing, consortia enable jurisdictions to bring together task forces of service area specialists who may then discuss related issues such as process improvement, cooperative service agreements, or the evaluation of contractors or franchisees.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL PITFALLS IN DATA COLLECTION?

Suggestion boxes and comment cards are easy to place but do not necessarily generate reliable feedback, typically skewing toward the extremes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The results may also reflect some unintentional bias on the part of staff, who may be more likely to recommend a comment card when they hear someone say how satisfied they are.

Sample and survey data can be tempting alternatives to comprehensive tracking, but they can bring pitfalls as well. For instance, if you survey at a time or location that is missing a key constituent group, such as students, the elderly, or non-English-speaking residents, you might be receiving incomplete data about demand for service or level of satisfaction.

For a more reliable survey methodology, you might consider using your employee intranet, a do-it-yourself survey website, or a specialist in conducting statistically significant phone-based or mail-in satisfaction surveys. Experienced vendors also have the benefit of offering benchmark data from other jurisdictions, either by jurisdiction name or as general cohorts (e.g., jurisdictions within a given population range).

Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart once said he couldn't define pornography, but, "I know it when I see it." Some staff may indicate that they can't measure their department's performance, but they understand it by sight and by experience. Trained observer ratings can be valid if they follow rigorous, objective criteria (e.g., talking to your doctor about skin cancer if you see a mole larger than a pencil eraser). Often, however, such observational data is less systematic. A "dashboard survey" of street conditions may miss problems based on the angle of the sun or other distractions on the road. A more objective review might detail the depth of potholes or extent of cracking that might trigger a certain rating, whereas a laser-based pavement management study would not depend on the interpretation of the inspector. Either way, such studies should also be scaled or staggered to evaluate different arterials or neighborhoods every few years.

For customer service assessments, trained observer reviews might entail a "mystery shopper" who assesses responsiveness, courtesy, and timely resolution of requests. This may hold advantages over placing comment cards at a public counter, but such assessments might be accomplished better these days via a CRM or 311 app.

By far, however, the greatest pitfall to effective data tracking is inconsistency. If you were given a ruler and told to measure the diameter of your coffee mug, you could do so accurately time and time again. Unfortunately, when you're tracking performance, different people in each department each year will be involved in performance measurement. Even if you carefully define the measurement criteria, some will have different types of mugs. Some will have tapered Styrofoam™ cups—should they measure the top or bottom diameter? Some will drink soda. Others will have metric rulers. The rest may just guess.

While that example may sound absurd, it bears striking similarities to the challenges public works departments face in year-to-year measurement of lane miles vs. linear miles, tons vs. cubic yards of asphalt, miles driven vs. hours operated, and even such seemingly straightforward items as dollars expended vs. dollars appropriated or encumbered.

Two strategies to get around the problems of measuring things differently and not measuring identical things over time involve communication and delegation.

If you institute regular meetings with staff, talk about their methodology. They may be measuring consistently, but their comments might trigger the discovery of a problem in another department. Performance measurement user groups (with or without the department managers involved) can also foster an open dialogue on the details of the measurement process. Regardless of the formats such meetings and communications take, do not assume that a single kickoff meeting is sufficient. Talk about these issues often to ensure you don't arrive at a point 12 months later just to find the data your staff have collected is imprecisely defined and meaningless.

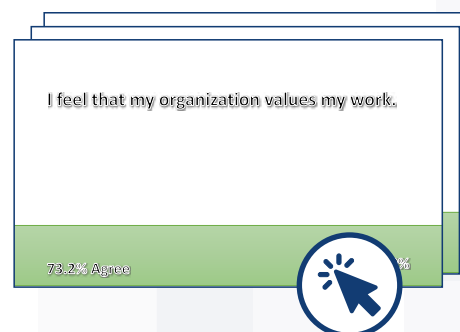
Concerning delegation, a data dictionary that specifies the "ownership" of measures can help to clarify definitions and avoid differing interpretations each year.

HOW DO WE KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING?

After you've collected data once, those who were not worn out by the experience may still ask, "Now what?" They will be curious about whether there's ongoing value in the exercise. If the point was to get that one-time snapshot, maybe not. But if you want to be able to spot trends, respond to issues before they become problems, take advantage of perceived opportunities, and understand the impact of decisions through before-and-after data analysis, then the effort needs to continue.

Motivation once again comes down to the employees seeing a direct benefit from their work. If the measures are collected each year without the benefit of analysis and follow-through, and if the data only sits on a shelf or in the PDF budget, then support for performance measurement will quickly fade. If the measures have meaning and factor in strategic planning, budget discussions, public forums, or even informal discussions with management, employees will be more likely to see those measures as the critical dashboard indicators that they are.

Algonquin, Illinois, [surveys staff](#) on how connected they feel to the village's mission. Knowing such engagement and satisfaction data can help determine whether strategic plan linkages are being internalized by employees.





Data in Hand:

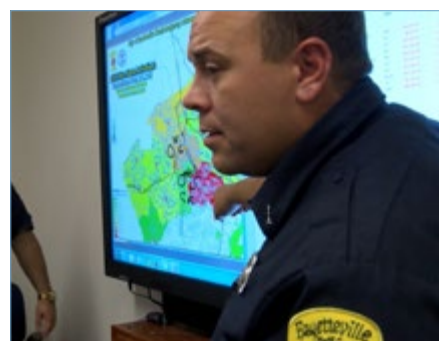
WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THE DATA ONCE WE'VE GOT IT?

The most important step in performance management is not mistaking the collection of data for the goal itself. Yes, the collection process can help to organize the ways in which we scrutinize operations, but unless we take concrete steps to apply the data once it's been collected, the data will have no value.

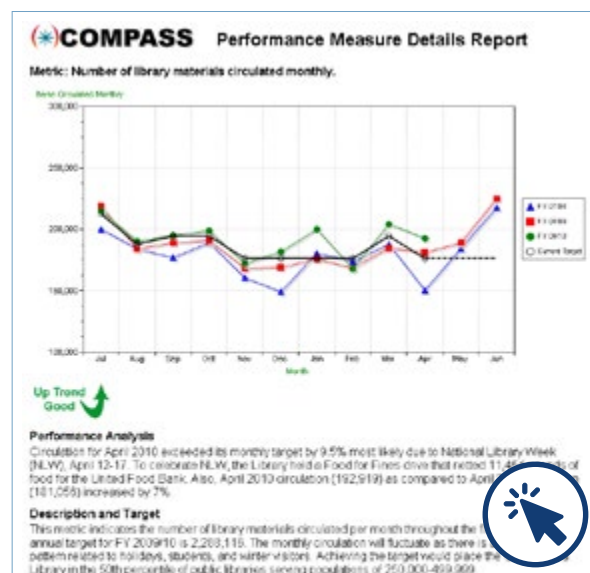
To begin with, you'll want to talk with your department staff to discuss the methods of data collection, the issues they may have encountered, and the plans for moving forward.

As noted earlier, performance measurement can be scary, and some staff are likely to be anxious about how the data will be used. A carefully considered discussion, with the initial data collection viewed as a preliminary step only, can help to allay some of those fears and cement the idea that the true goal is the departments' enhanced understanding of their own operations.

When you're scheduling that first post-collection meeting with departments, you should also consider when and how to incorporate discussion of performance measurement throughout the coming year. Most managers hold regular meetings with their department heads, but is performance measurement one of the topics on the agenda? When discussing policing, is the focus on that week's case blotter, or on how that month's trends compare with those of last month or last year? Is the public works discussion limited to the capital improvement project set to begin that week, or does it also compare new bids to prior awards, expenditures per lane mile, or performance in comparable jurisdictions? Does the human resource discussion dwell on current workers' compensation injuries



Source: Fayetteville North Carolina Police



Monthly trend reporting and comparisons to targets in Mesa, Arizona.

or employee grievances, or does it find time for consideration of safety training hours, worker days lost, return to work policies, and employee satisfaction surveys? Be sure to schedule time for these important discussions, not just the weekly crises.

Revisiting the data on a regular basis (monthly or quarterly) can build awareness of the activity and departmental buy-in to the process, identify trends before they become problems or when they raise opportunities, and help ensure that performance measurement is not just a rush task at budget time. Mesa, Arizona, includes monthly data in the city's data reporting and in considering annual trends.

For that effort to succeed, you may also need to dedicate staff time to crunching the numbers. Although the raw data can be interesting, it's often meaningless without context. If the figures your staff has reported lean too heavily toward current workload measures, perhaps it's worth challenging them to think in terms of how they can better measure their progress toward the department's strategic goals. Or, if the measures seem to point out a positive trend, make sure to consider how that trend looks in comparison to other jurisdictions. Is your agency chasing efficiencies in the processing of several thousand paper-based purchase orders when you could be managing a few hundred electronic purchasing cards? Just as the buggy whip manufacturers may have incrementally improved the quality of their products as automobiles entered the market, local governments may be tempted to do "slightly better" each year when they should be staying aware of changes in technology, state or national regulations, and new procedures that can enable them to revolutionize the way they provide services.

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT THE DATA ANALYSIS?

In jurisdictions large enough to have their own budget staff or audit divisions, their involvement might seem natural. For most smaller jurisdictions, such staff are not available. Regardless, the first and best resource is actually the closest to the operations—the line employees themselves.

Consider vehicle maintenance. While a budget director might have the best handle on overall expenditures for the public works department, the mechanics themselves are best able to interpret the mileage, preventive maintenance, tune-ups, transmission work, and other considerations that separate a viable asset from a vehicle that's ready for auction. If you left them out of the analysis, you'd get a rather one-dimensional picture of the fleet.

Remember that your goal is not to approach the data like an IRS official searching for gotcha moments. Allow department staff to identify trends or red flags in the data. Support them with whatever training you can provide, whether that's a related conference, an in-house workshop, or just a good professional journal. Their conclusions might still include requesting more staff or equipment, but that's where the budget or finance staff can offer their perspectives.

As they're taking their first tentative steps toward analyzing their own data, be sure to encourage their efforts, value their opinions, and push them to think about the issues in new ways. If they bring you workload data, ask them about outcomes. If they say a problem can't be solved, ask them to check with other jurisdictions or vendors on their approaches, or to consider how they'd rebuild their operations if they were doing so from scratch. Those discussions might not yield savings or solutions in that calendar quarter, but they may lead to a long-term plan for restructuring the fleet work order system.

WHAT STEPS CAN HELP ENSURE THE VALIDITY OF THE DATA?

As tempting as it may be to look forward to the next data cycle and the first time-series comparisons, you should focus just as much on the potential errors or statistical noise in the first collection.

- Was the data based on actual experience, budgeted figures, or estimates?
- Was performance sampled, and if so, did that sample reflect all work being performed?
- Did the staff collecting the data use the same terms, definitions, and formulas as those who would be analyzing the data?

Data Dictionary - Sarasota County, FL				
Measuring Measures	Data Owner	Data Source	Methodology	Comments
Outside Capital Leveraged as a Percentage of Total Funding for Low-to-Moderate-Income Housing	Cindy Emshoff/Jane Hindall	CDM (database)	Client Application data entered into CDM database; data exported to Excel	Loans & grants are awarded based on income eligibility and OHCD is not
New Low to Moderate-Income Housing: Number of new units completed per \$100,000 of public financial assistance	Cindy Emshoff/Jane Hindall	CDM (database)	Client Application data entered into CDM database; data exported to Excel	If a client is awarded downpayment assistance, OHCD typically is aware of the bank loan amount and the amount client is putting toward the house
FTEs involved in the provision of new housing, housing rehabilitation services, and home ownership assistance to low and moderate income residents		Computer calculated	$(Q8a + Q8b + (Q8c \text{ or } Q8d)) / 2080$	
Number of hours paid to housing personnel involved in providing new housing services	Cindy Emshoff	OHCD Timesheets		
Residential population of area served		U.S. Census Data, 2010	Check census data for Sarasota County detail	

Data dictionaries may list source documents, databases, formulas, timeframes and the individuals responsible for providing the figures. This is an excerpt from the data dictionary used in Sarasota County, Florida.

Data dictionary. One preliminary step in collecting valid data is to define the collection procedures in writing. A “data dictionary” can provide the necessary guidance. Such a document defines basic metrics, assigns a primary point of contact, specifies the data source and the formula for any calculations, and serves as a means of ensuring continuity if the responsible staff member leaves or is reassigned. With those clear lines of responsibility, questions about methodology, definitions, or exact calculations can be routed to the individuals most closely involved, and transitions to new staff can flow directly from the collected documentation. This avoids the need for each successive staff person to determine anew such issues as whether to use population data from the U.S. Census, the American Community Survey, local/ regional planning estimates, or state sources.

Extenuating circumstances. Along with defining the basic metrics, a data dictionary should provide guidelines for handling extenuating circumstances, such as:

- If there’s a traffic accident, bad weather, or a road closed on the way to an emergency response, should that response time be tossed out?
- If an information technology help desk request ends up involving a telephone or cable utility to fix a problem on their end, should that be taken into account as part of overall response time?

Such issues are not all going to be obvious as you’re setting up your metrics, which is another good reason you should not look at year one as the time to say you’ve got a finished product. Take the time to review your methodology as you’re collecting data, and stay open to making changes that will improve the quality and consistency of your results.

Clarity about time. If you are reviewing performance data from one period to another, a key consideration is how data are handled *between* those time periods. If a code enforcement case opened in the third quarter of the year, and it was still open in the fourth quarter, is it still being reported as a new case? If the case extended into the next fiscal year, was the time to case closure being tracked cumulatively, or did the

tracking method restart from zero? If funds were encumbered at the end of one fiscal year and spent in the next, when should they be counted, and would staff know to handle such situations the same way the following year?

Cherry-picking. Even with a data dictionary and clear formulas, there may be room for employees to interpret the metrics or carry out the data collection in their own way. This is not necessarily an intentional act. For instance, staff might have the time to track performance statistics only when they're not as busy on other projects or when they don't have a long line waiting at the public counter. If that's the case, you may end up with evaluations of customer satisfaction only from those times when employees were able to provide more responsive customer service, thus inflating your scores. This is all the more reason to avoid a manual data collection effort when possible in favor of something more automated or carried out by a third party.

Direct collection. Where possible, data should be extracted directly from source files, so that the possibility of human error is minimized. This may be accomplished through the capabilities of the primary databases (e.g., for finance, payroll, or dispatch), downloads from handheld devices, Internet of Things (IoT) wireless transmission, or application programming interfaces (APIs).

Outlier checks. For data that's entered by hand, formulas or conditional formatting should be applied to flag any figures that might be outside the expected range. For example, if percentages are expected:

- Do you anticipate they will be within 0-100%?
- Will these be represented by values between 0 and 100 or between 0 and 1?
- Will the actual range be narrower, such as an unemployment rate not generally exceeding 10% or 20%?
- Is it possible that the figure would exceed 100%, such as if all restaurants are inspected twice per year, yielding a ratio of 200% inspected?


Logic checks. Logic checks can help you compare one field to another. It may not be possible to say that the number of arrests in any given year has an absolute maximum, but you can use a rule of thumb to say that the number of arrests might generally not exceed the number of crimes reported. In programming any such checks, be sure to take into account the nature of your jurisdiction or the others to which you might be comparing. For instance, if you're comparing to a smaller community that has very few crimes reported each year, then a single incident with multiple perpetrators or a handful of arrests for crimes committed in prior years might exceed that 1-to-1 rule. If that's the case, then perhaps your rule of thumb should allow a little extra leeway (e.g., an expectation of no more than 1.5 arrests per crime) to avoid too many data points being flagged as false positives.

Peer review. Whether internally, through review by budget, performance, or audit staff, or externally through a consortium, a budget committee, or even the media, review of your data by others will catch things that you may have overlooked. Seek out those reviews. If you're unsure of another's data, work with them to clarify their reporting or align your definitions. And when they question your data, accept those corrections with gratitude for their help in better understanding your performance.

Failing an outlier or logic check is not an indication that there's a problem with the data. Rather, take it as a reassurance that you've designed rigorous data collection procedures and that you're catching the subset that are true errors, which could otherwise be embarrassing oversights.

If the data will be analyzed and used by staff outside the operating department, such as by budget, finance, management services, or audit, the staff in those units should partner with the line staff throughout the collection, rather than just critiquing the data after the fact. Remember, if there's limited performance measurement expertise in your organization now, it may be that the budget manager or auditor are the only resident experts. Rely on that expertise, or perhaps rotate those staff into the line departments occasionally. Turn to them as in-house trainers. If you can build a culture where the departmental employees feel comfortable going to the budget and audit staff with questions and working together to establish measurements, your organization is more likely to succeed than if their relationship remains antagonistic. Two jurisdictions that have looked to departments to review their own data and provide verification are [Dallas](#) and [Austin](#), Texas.

Durham, North Carolina, conducted a performance measure audit to see where further steps might be necessary to improve accuracy.



Measure	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Measure 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 2	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 3	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 4	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 5	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 6	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 7	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 8	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 9	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 10	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 11	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 12	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 13	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 14	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 15	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 16	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 17	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 18	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 19	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 20	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
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Measure 24	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 25	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
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Measure 93	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 94	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 95	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 96	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 97	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 98	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 99	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Measure 100	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Undoubtedly, even despite your best efforts, some data quality issues will arise—as you’re collecting the data, as you’re undergoing a year-end audit, or perhaps as you’re seeing inconsistent numbers the following year. To move forward in a way that builds on a reliable base, you may need to revisit some data points to make corrections. Or, feel free to identify those areas as “data not available” for that time period. It’s better to identify what you don’t know than to express confidence in a figure that turns out to be inaccurate. When those inaccuracies arise, a manager’s willingness to take responsibility for them will go a long way toward setting the expectations that other staff can and should bring such data issues forward whenever they’re discovered.

HOW DO WE COMPARE TO PRIOR TIME PERIODS?

Comparing to prior time periods might seem straightforward, because we do it all the time. Still, most of what we compare starts with very clear definitions, such as dollars spent. It’s easy to verify that data via an audit, so the numbers tend to speak for themselves.

Unfortunately, that’s not always the case. For example, how would you compare your custodial costs before and after the construction of new office space? If a line item existed for “city hall custodial,” that might be all you would need. In all likelihood, however, that’s not the case. So step one might be determining whether a program or facility budget is needed first. Such a budget might bring together all the related expenses, from staffing to supplies and even related capital improvement projects. You might also need to track whether expenditures in one area are going up as others might be going down.

- **Have you switched the methods of providing services** (e.g., artificial light to more windows/natural light; from paper to electric hand dryers)? If electric is all on a master meter, that cost might have changed significantly but end up getting overlooked.
- **Are other departments impacted?** A more efficient HVAC system may show up in the program budget, but if there’s more spending on the network connections to enable wireless monitoring and control, is that being paid from an IT budget?

- **Was the project completed mid-year?** If so, does it represent a new activity or a substitution for an old expense? If you're comparing year-to-year, are you prorating that initial year?
- **Are you carefully specifying the measures to be tracked?** Defining these via a data dictionary at project inception can help ensure that you're comparing consistently before, during, and after completion.

TARGETS: WHEN SHOULD WE SET THEM?

It can be tempting to assume that if you're measuring something, you should also have a target in mind. This may work for some measures where there's little variation based on circumstances (e.g., accounts payable processed within a given time period), but even national standards may need to be considered in light of local conditions. For instance, while emergency response might best be completed in a given number of minutes, local topography, low population density, or limited resources might make that impractical for some jurisdictions. Likewise, adopting a target maintenance cost per acre would not make sense for a new park until you've had the time to observe the level of effort required, based on the final landscaping, usage, and other factors.

In the first year of gathering data, you're most likely working out process and methodology issues, or deciding to re-structure the measures to better fit your strategic goals. In the second year, you may be able to collect reliable baseline data. Once you have that baseline data in hand, you may find that your initial assumptions of appropriate targets were either too modest or too unrealistic.

Take this opportunity to discuss the metrics and the targets in terms of both the short-term achievable goals and the longer-term aspiration for where you'd like to be. Keep in mind that just because you set a target of 30 days for a permit to be processed this year doesn't mean that should be etched in stone. You should be reviewing that target next year—leaving it unchanged, starting over, or working with your direct service and IT staff to rethink the process to get that down to 10 days, 2 days, or 2 minutes.

Should every measure have a target? A measure without a target doesn't create any accountability, but in some cases, a target may be difficult to establish.

For some measures, the optimum value might be at the extreme end of the spectrum, such as zero property crimes or workplace injuries. Is that realistic? Probably not. So the question is, do you establish a stretch goal of zero knowing that you'll probably never reach it, or do you set a target at some other level based on experience? If it's the latter, you'd want to make sure in doing so that you phrase the target as "less than/greater than" that amount, such as 5% fewer incidents than in the prior fiscal year.

Other measures may appear to be beyond your complete control and therefore not something on which your staff wish to be evaluated. These may be descriptors, which are simply reflections of the environment in which you're working, such as climate, demographics, and economic factors. Targets here might take the form of predictions instead, such as the expected frequency of a 100-year flood or the impact a predicted unemployment rate might have on the demand for social services.

Where the measure is interjurisdictional in nature, the tendency might be to write that off as being someone else's problem. Commuting times, as tracked through the American Community Survey, might fit this category, as residents may travel through multiple jurisdictions on their way to work. But it may still be worth setting targets on these measures to help drive innovative approaches to service provision or inter-agency efficiency efforts, such as integrated traffic signal management. In doing so, you should reinforce

that the goal of performance management is not to punish staff for targets not met, but to build a culture that fosters continuous improvement and better-informed decision making.

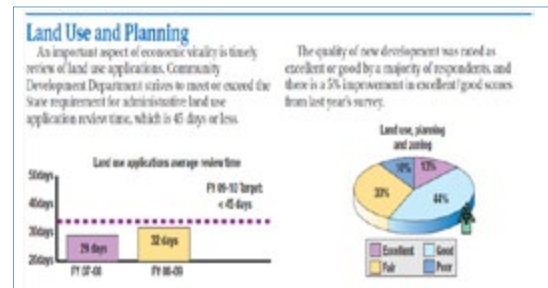
What do we do with targets after they're established? In some jurisdictions, the target value is sandwiched into a table full of data along with prior year, budgeted, and projected figures, with no narrative explanation or graphic cues as to how the target is relevant. This is more of a box-checking step than an effort at true performance management.

At the very least, you should have internal discussions about why those targets were chosen, why they were met or not met, and what the next steps will be. Where jurisdictions are new to performance management, they may be hesitant to have those conversations out in the open, and that's understandable. That's also why targets might best be set after you've been collecting data for at least a year so you can work out some of the "noise" and inconsistent data collection issues that will arise as part of your preliminary data gathering.

As a next step, however, those target discussions should take place in a public meeting, and then also be shared in public communications, such as newsletters, websites, social media, and/or budget documents. This is not to embarrass departments that may have missed their stated targets, but rather to reinforce for the public that your organization is both data-driven and focused on strategic goals. Assuming your goals call for reduced crime, increased efficiency, or higher customer satisfaction, for example, you should be prepared to share the data on each of those, and if you've fallen short, you should also be able to articulate the internal and external factors that contributed to the shortfall (everything from budget cuts to severe weather events) and the steps you're taking to improve.

Departmental snapshots can compare performance to targets via green/yellow/red color-coded scales, line-bar graphs, or other formats. You don't need to graph every one of your metrics, but providing a representative sample, like the one from Corvallis, Oregon, can show how you're performing on various aspects of a balanced scorecard.

If targets are not achieved, you can also provide a narrative explanation for what that means or what actions are recommended next.



Presentation of targets, actuals, and change in performance, Corvallis, Oregon.

Results and Trend Information (2011/Q4)

The retail vacancy rate for the 4th quarter of 2011 was 3.48%. This represents an increase in .13% (2,372 SF) from the 3rd quarter vacancy rate of 3.35%. This minor increase does not warrant attention as it is well within the normative definition of transitional space; that is space that is between occupancies or being prepared for occupancy.

Action Plan (2011/Q4)

Staff is addressing the retail vacancy rate in several ways. First, an Economic Development Plan was created to begin crafting policies to ensure a stabilization of the retail vacancy rates. Second, the City's Strategic Planning process includes a specific Action Plan that includes specific implementable actions to evaluate the market and identify policies and tools to address stabilization reduction in all City vacancy rates including the retail vacancy rate. However, the City's vacancy rate for retail is less than half seen throughout the St. Louis Region and does not warrant specific attention.

Benchmark Information (2011/Q4)

The benchmark for the retail vacancy rate reflects the current vacancy rate for the St. Louis Statistical Metropolitan Area. This target is established at 7.85% which is the vacancy rate for the 4th quarter of 2011.

The Collinsville, Illinois, operational performance report for community development explains what actions the city is taking to address the retail vacancy rate.

What are stretch goals? Stretch goals are targets that are not necessarily achievable by continuing with “business as usual.” They may not be something you can accomplish in a single year, or even in several years. Some of these may find their way into a long-term strategic plan, capital equipment replacement plan, departmental restructuring plan, or community visioning exercise.

Some stretch goals remain elusive, and some serve to inspire great achievement. President John F. Kennedy inspired the nation with this stretch goal: “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win...”

Is it appropriate to set stretch goals? It would be a victory of sorts to come out on top of every comparison. “Number one” has a nice ring to it. Still, being the best team in a weak conference doesn’t say much about you. If your goal is learning something about your operations and improving them, then maybe you need some overachievers in your benchmarking group.

Even when setting internal goals, allowing room for improvement helps make the measures more meaningful. If your goal were to respond to all fires within 20 minutes, you might be able to achieve 100% performance. Year after year, you would be able to display a wonderfully consistent graph of that achievement, but it would be a rather boring comparison. On the other hand, if you set a goal to respond within 8 minutes, there may be a few calls on which you didn’t meet the goal, but studying these would help you to identify the roadblocks to better performance (e.g., call processing, dispatch, turnout, drive time).

The stretch goals you set may be based on industry standards, comparisons to other jurisdictions, or historical performance trends within the department. While you don’t want to set yourself up for failure, you should also not set your goals too low.

Should our performance always be 100%? If your performance is always 100%, then your performance measures could be too basic or maybe you’re not innovating enough.

Basic measures have their place. You certainly want to aim for no accidental deaths. But on a routine basis, month after month, year after year, you may have a consistent “zero” to report. While that’s certainly a fact to instill pride and reinforce a focus on safety, it may not be the measure that’s best included in a brief performance summary.

Just as people may be skeptical when they hear, “We’re from the government, and we’re here to help you,” the public would also question any performance report that showed that everything was performing at 100%.

- Were the data being cherry-picked?
- Are the measures appropriate?
- What’s left out of the report?

Perfect performance might also be...boring. Yes, it’s definitely important that the parts per million of certain contaminants in drinking water remain below thresholds 100% of the time, but if you present the public with a page full of 100%s (or worse, a table full of 0.001 PPMs), they won’t have a true sense of what’s being accomplished or may just look past your data entirely. In such cases, you might be better off sharing the real-world impact of that performance, such as:

- Number of days of boil-water orders
- Number of days of swimming pool closures
- Percentage of residents affected by service outages.

And for the chemistry buffs who want to see the detail, that's a great item to include on the next level of your dashboard drill-down.

BENCHMARKING: HOW DO WE COMPARE TO OTHERS?

One very effective way to test your data's validity is to compare it with other jurisdictions. Traditionally, local governments have done that through an informal survey, perhaps of their neighbors or others of a similar size or offering a similar mix of services. A staff member (often an intern) is assigned the task of calling or emailing surrounding jurisdictions to collect comparison data that will end up as part of the budget or other performance report. Someone in the responding jurisdictions fields those requests and provides whatever data they have handy—budgeted, projected, year-end, pre/post-audit, or something else. While there may be an email trail, there may be very little focus on sources, definitions, or methods. And as those informal surveys get conducted year after year, you may even find that just as ten economists can give you ten or eleven opinions, ten neighboring jurisdictions may have different and conflicting performance data they've collected about you.

Even looking at seemingly comparable activities, such as DUI citations, may yield very different results. To start with, some jurisdictions cite driving under the influence, some operating a vehicle while intoxicated (OWI), or some other acronym. In some areas, this may be based on a different blood-alcohol concentration, or even include distracted driving, driving while tired, or texting behind the wheel. As with the sampling issues discussed earlier, these data can also be significantly affected by the number, timing, and location of checkpoints a jurisdiction may operate.

A jurisdiction with only a small number of DUI citations may in fact be overlooking a larger problem. To see the full picture, it may be necessary to consider other related measures, such as the number of traffic accidents (or accidents with fatalities) involving alcohol.

Given that, some first steps in comparing data with other jurisdictions include:

1. Define your terms
2. Weigh the impacts of policy or statutory differences
3. Include other related measures.

If you've already gone to the effort of creating a data dictionary, it may be worth convening a meeting of your comparison jurisdictions to discuss and even fine tune those measures to capture comparable data from all participants.

Beyond your local area, there may be an interest in establishing some nationwide benchmarks. The response to this is often the pronouncement:

"We're not like anybody else!"

Yes, on a certain level, that may be true. Some cities, counties, townships, and boroughs have unique arrangements with universities, military bases, and other government installations. Some provide almost all their services via contract, whereas others serve both their own residents and those of surrounding

governments. Geographically, local governments range from small beachfront communities and mountaintop towns to suburbs and major metropolitan cores. Nonetheless, all have uniting features:

- All jurisdictions strive to provide the best value for their constituents.
- The cost of service is shared among some group of permanent residents and/or other customers (e.g., tourists, students, commuters).
- Internal services remain fairly consistent (e.g., fleet maintenance, procurement, information technology, human resources).
- Neighborhood services may vary in scope (e.g., in counties with low population density), but most objective standards remain comparable.

If you're looking to compare with other jurisdictions, you can do so in two ways: best practices or hard data. The best practices approach is the easier of the two. If you know that certain jurisdictions are high performers on a certain service, then research their policies and procedures and learn from their example.

The benefit to this approach is that you need not know the details of the jurisdiction's expenditures, staffing, or internal organization, just that they've achieved some interesting results. If you're curious to find best practices, a great place to start is by conducting a topic search on the [ICMA website](#).

If, on the other hand, you want a more in-depth sense of whether you're performing up to the quantitative benchmarks achieved elsewhere, you need to be sure you're comparing consistently.

IDENTIFYING PEER JURISDICTIONS

Other than the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, most of us don't have another community that is easily recognizable as a peer or twin city. In identifying possible peer communities for benchmarking purposes, there are several criteria to consider:

Location. Decide if you are interested solely in communities within your same region, or if you want to look nationally, or even internationally, as well. Communities in your own state may be easier to compare to because the same laws typically apply, and they tend to provide similar services. Please note, national comparisons have an added level of complexity due to differences in climate, geography, service demand levels, political environment, and funding differences.

Demographics. Using U.S. Census resources, it's relatively easy to download basic information on community size and socioeconomics, and then to sort from there. Choose an upper and lower population threshold to help focus your search. You may also want to focus on communities that are similarly situated to yours (central city, suburban, or rural, or college or tourist towns). You can look at comparative demographics such as income, age, unemployment, and the number of jobs.

Scope. As you drill down, research each community in detail. Set up a matrix for ease of comparison. The form of government may be important. Determine how many employees they have, as well as their fiscal year end date. Look at the major departments and whether that's comparable to your organization. Typically, communities vary in how courts, libraries, schools, and utility services are provided. Decide if it's critical for peers to provide the same services, or whether it might be more helpful to look at other models.

Once you've narrowed it down to a handful of communities (you probably don't need more than five to twelve for good comparisons), reach out to the staff in those communities that would be involved in the benchmarking effort and see if they are interested in participating.

Brent Stockwell, Assistant City Manager, Scottsdale, Arizona

How do we set a benchmark? There are two types of benchmarks you might wish to set—a local one and a stretch goal. The local benchmark might be based on the jurisdictions in your area, in your state, or perhaps among nearby businesses. This gives context to which readers can relate:

- How do you stack up to others in the county?
- If there's a cooperative program available (e.g., a joint risk pool or state purchasing agreement), are you doing as well as the others participating?

If people are familiar with an industry standard or private-sector competitor (e.g., for consulting, custodial, consulting, printing, or oil changes), **have you considered that unit cost, even if for good reasons you're not planning to contract with them?**

The second type of benchmark—a stretch goal—is sometimes scarier. There can be a fear that if you set your sights too high, then (a) you won't be able to reach it, and (b) you'll be blamed for falling short.

But when you're making investments, **do you look only at the benchmark funds that are earning what you're earning now?** If individuals set their sights that low, they'd never earn more than a money market fund might yield. Instead, everyone looks at the high performers, the Morningstar reports, and the long-term results. Shouldn't you do the same in performance management?

Review the available benchmark data and identify jurisdictions that are performing particularly well. This can help set an upper bound for a range within which you'd like to perform. It can also lead you to the discovery of efficiencies or other best practices they may have already implemented that you can adapt for your own organization.

The easiest approach to setting a benchmark might be to say that whatever level of performance that comparison jurisdiction has achieved is the one you should achieve too. Unfortunately, that may be an unrealistic goal. For example, if you're comparing sales tax revenues per capita from a bedroom community with those from a jurisdiction with major regional shopping centers, you may find that you can never match their level of performance. In such cases, it may be better to note trends in the data and set a target that's a percentage of that performance (e.g., if historical trends indicate that your collections are 20% of theirs, you might want to set a goal of achieving 25-30% of their revenues).

That approach might be one that you follow locally. Comparison to the jurisdiction next door, for instance, is always going to be on the minds of your elected officials.

Beyond that, you might want to select a group of comparison jurisdictions, either in your state or elsewhere, and compare to the median performance of that group. The sample set may be similar in population and demographics, or may be chosen based on other criteria. For example, you may look at which jurisdictions provide services in a similar manner (e.g., contracted fleet maintenance, centralized purchasing), which have similar policies or labor markets (e.g., highly unionized workforce, state-specific workers compensation presumptions about whether certain cancers among firefighters are work-related), or even similar physical or fiscal conditions (e.g., average snowfall, energy-efficient facilities, general fund revenues, enterprise fund/utility operations). Or, if you're aspiring to higher performance, you may want to set a target based on the experience of the leaders in the field.

Benchmarks may include comparisons to standard comparison jurisdictions, high performers, industry standards, state or national averages, historical performance, or some combination.

REPORTING BENCHMARK INFORMATION

Long Beach, California, reported this benchmark information for 2008/12: "Since 2003, lost work hours have declined 63 percent. During 2003, the City lost the equivalent of 90 FTEs due to injury. As in Long Beach, the national rate of lost work hours is decreasing. According to 2007 data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the rate of lost work hours due to injury or illness has fallen 4 percent from 2006. Additionally, during the time period June 2004 – June 2007, the City of Long Beach has the lowest average cost per Workers' Compensation claim among our survey cities, averaging \$6,821 per claim."

Who are our comparison jurisdictions' customers? When you're choosing your comparison jurisdictions, you should perform a bit of research about who their customers are:

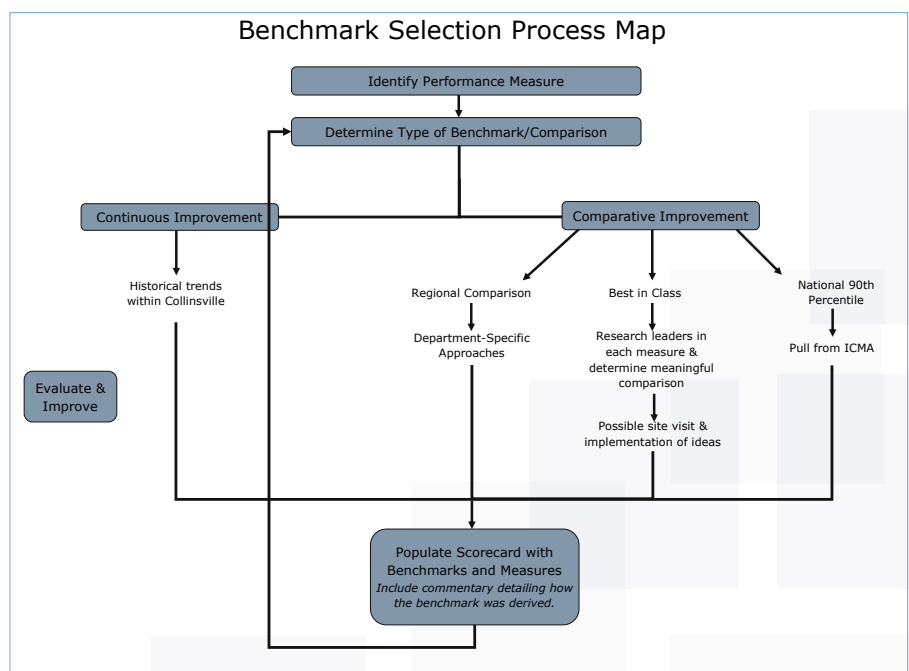
- Do they offer the same range of services you do?
- Are their demographics or zoning different, and if so, how does that impact their service delivery or core audience (e.g., youth vs. senior programming, rental housing vs. single-family homes, big box commercial vs. mom and pop businesses)?
- What is their policy environment (e.g., form of government, tax/revenue constraints)?
- Are they providing services directly or through contractors or franchisees?
- Do you know their populations? Is there any significant daily influx of nonresidents, such as those working in major business parks? Is there a seasonal fluctuation with students or vacationers?
- Are there formal agreements to serve wider swaths of the regional populace?

This last point is not to be confused with mutual aid. Every jurisdiction provides some degree of cross-jurisdictional assistance when necessary. While the number of such responses may be significant, it is not part of the planned service area of the jurisdiction. But where a fire agency, for instance, enters into a formal contract to serve an unincorporated area adjacent to its territory, those neighborhoods should be included in any related calculations of expenditures per capita or square miles served per station.

You can compare to these jurisdictions regardless of your differences. In fact, including national top performers or local area jurisdictions regardless of size, services, or organization is a good way to ensure you're not setting your expectations too low. But having the background on your benchmarks can help you put their performance into context.

What about the private sector?

The town of Gilbert, Arizona, does not formally benchmark against private-sector providers, but with each budget proposal, they request departments to consider alternative solutions for providing that service, including potential provision by private-sector contractors.



Collinsville, Illinois, process map.

Whether or not you're considering contracting for services, you might want to consider private-sector comparisons. If a local company provides custodial service, for example, you may want to compare your expenditure per square foot maintained to theirs. You would explain differences in service levels as part of the narrative accompanying your data (e.g., jurisdiction staff remain on-call after hours and also provide specialized maintenance of plumbing, mechanical, etc.).

When you have sufficient data to judge your performance over the long term, you may also find such comparisons useful in considering managed competition or decisions on whether to provide certain services in-house, via contract, or via inter-jurisdictional cooperation or consolidation. However, keep in mind the data validity issues raised previously.

Other entities in your area may measure their performance in similar ways, such as school districts, universities, hospitals, and larger corporations. While not all will align perfectly for comparisons to local government, services like fleet maintenance, information technology, and human resources may be very similar. Among universities and military bases, you may also find opportunities to compare around housing, traffic, security, and utilities issues. For example, Jacksonville, North Carolina, worked with Camp Lejeune to integrate their traffic signal management, and in the process, significantly improved performance.

MEASURE	WESTERN BOULEVARD		LEJEUNE BOULEVARD	
	Afternoon rush hour	Weekend rush hour	Morning rush hour	Afternoon rush hour
Travel time	26%	27%	20%	4%
Delays	52%	51%	69%	15%
Stops	61%	52%	84%	38%
Fuel consumption	13%	10%	Not available	Not available

Improvements in Jacksonville, North Carolina, and Camp Lejeune Traffic Performance, as discussed in [Smart Solutions: Technology Serving Communities](#).

And even if the private-sector partners in your local area don't align at all with the things you're measuring, you may still find common ground on process issues, such as the use of ISO 9001, Lean Six Sigma, Baldrige criteria, or other leading management strategies.

How do we ensure nobody is gaming the measures? No matter how carefully a measure is defined, there's always the possibility that someone—in your jurisdiction or elsewhere—will either misinterpret that definition or willfully act in such a way as to make their number look better—in other words, [gaming](#) the measure. If you measure only the quantity of work performed, there's a built-in incentive to churn through as many cases as possible, without regard for quality or other outcomes.

Avoiding this problem depends on two actions:

- Adopting a suite of related measures, so that you're assessing the productivity, efficiency, quality, timeliness, satisfaction, and other characteristics of the services being provided. This makes it more difficult to present a single-faceted impression of success.
- Building in a regular review process to assess year-to-year trends, spot-check individual data points or cases, or discuss data collection methods with the various departments or agencies that may be involved.

HOW HAVE OTHERS REPORTED THEIR FINDINGS?

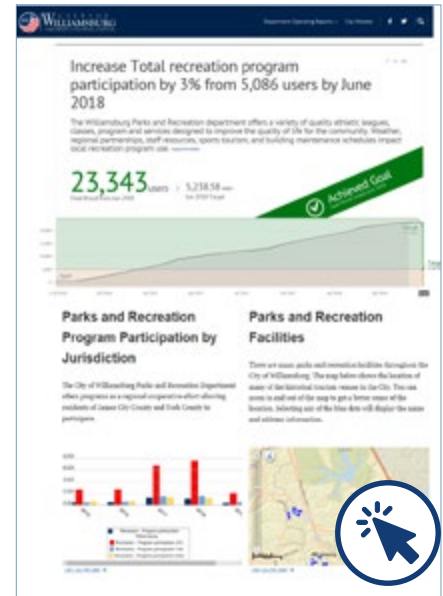
Even in the internet age, some jurisdictions say their only method of reporting performance data to their residents is by means of discussing it in an advertised public hearing. While that may be the minimum that's to be expected, you can consider a range of other methods that don't need to break your budget.

Every jurisdiction reports at least limited performance data, even if it's just through the financial figures published in the annual budget or comprehensive annual financial reports. Just posting these documents on the local website, however, does not constitute a user-friendly means of communicating with the average resident.

Once you've determined which measures are meaningful and which are not, you will need to consider the format of your data reporting.

Assuming you want some data to accompany each department's budget, keep in mind that today's reader is probably not interested in skimming the full document. Posting a summary of the data as a PDF or providing hyperlinks can help make the data much easier to find.

[Shoreline, Washington](#), reporting has included summary performance data with strategic goals, historical data, and color coding to indicate current trends, and Williamsburg, Virginia, includes strategic goals, graphs, and comparisons to targets.



Williamsburg, Virginia, shows strategic goals, graphs, and comparisons to targets.

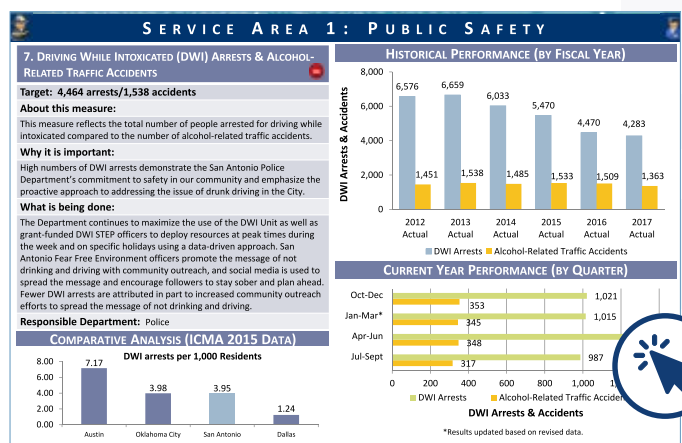
Since the selection of measures is a rather arcane topic for most of the public, in addition to your own data and your benchmark comparisons, you might also want to **report why the measure is important and what you're doing to improve your performance in the future.**

WHAT ARE PERFORMANCE DASHBOARDS OR SCORECARDS?

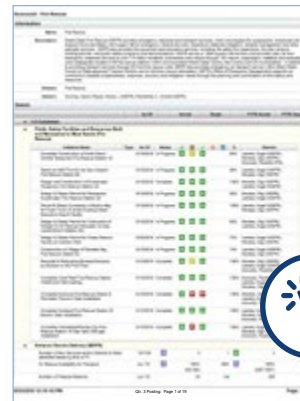
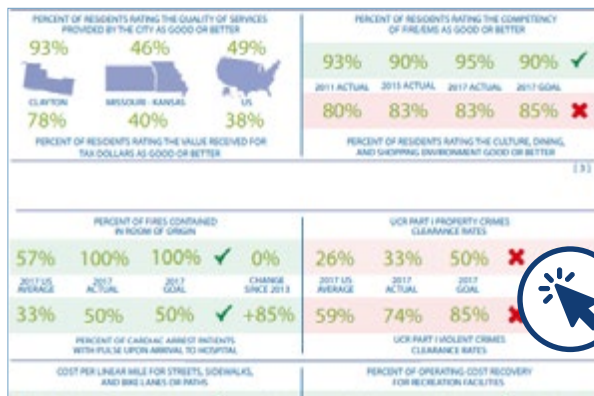
Just as vehicle consoles display fuel remaining, speed, engine RPMs, and various early-warning lights, dashboards are attempts to show a broad range of related measures in one concise listing. Ideally, they also provide a snapshot of both current performance and ongoing trends.

Dashboards can be an effective means of communicating performance with either elected officials or the general public and typically show a color-coded view of which measures are meeting goals and which may not be.

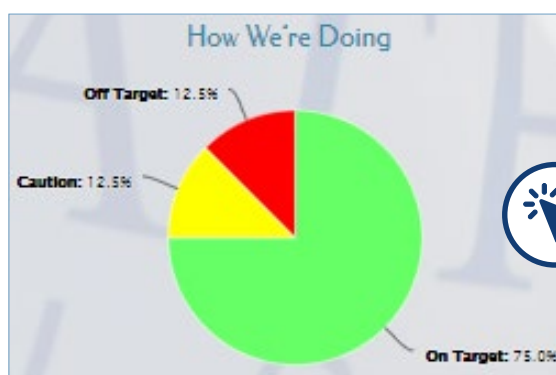
While the terms *dashboards* and *balanced scorecards* are sometimes used interchangeably, balanced scorecards imply that there is more than one bottom-line consideration. In fact, "triple bottom lines" explicitly include social and sustainability criteria in addition to financial criteria. A balanced scorecard in local government may also include consideration of service quality, ethics and fairness, and customer satisfaction.



City of San Antonio, Texas, quarterly performance report, showing what is being done to improve performance.



Click to view the dashboard for Clayton, Missouri, and the scorecard for Miami-Dade County, Florida, Fire and Rescue (including customer, financial, and internal components).



Reporting in [Olathe, Kansas](#), includes a summary scorecard that tallies the percentage of goals being met, while [Edmonton, Alberta](#), reports the number of goals met along with narrative on trends and goals missed.

As you craft a dashboard or scorecard for your organization, you may choose a comprehensive approach, with multiple metrics in each division and department—either as part of one lengthy document or as layers of information available for drill-down—or a more summary format such as the 24/7 approach followed by [Tacoma](#) and [San Antonio](#), which focuses on a short list of key strategic goals.

HOW ELSE CAN WE DO DATA VISUALIZATIONS?

Spreadsheets and bar graphs aside, you have a range of options for sharing data in a way that can communicate effectively with your audience.

Infographics. An infographic is a means of communicating with limited text, typically in a single page, advertisement, or web view. It may involve excerpts from budget or performance reports, but often it's closer to a dashboard in its focus on icons, color-coding, flowcharts, or other visual elements.

The best infographics actually communicate data as part of the visual, rather than simply adding a related icon beside a large boldface number. These might show the scale of the activity (e.g., by repeating the image or showing a partial icon to represent the percentage of a goal that has been completed), or giving further context for what the raw numbers mean.



Maps. Geographic information systems (GIS) open up possibilities for multi-layered analysis and reporting, either as static documents or as interactive means for staff or the public to access the underlying data. Such maps can range from heavily quantitative information, like police statistics or permit activity, to frameworks for making narrative more relatable to a geographically dispersed audience.



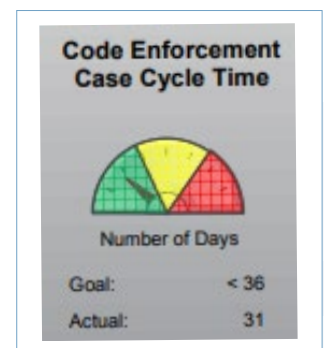
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, publishes a map that residents can click to access underlying data.



The Life, Well Run website provides a map with links to detailed success stories.

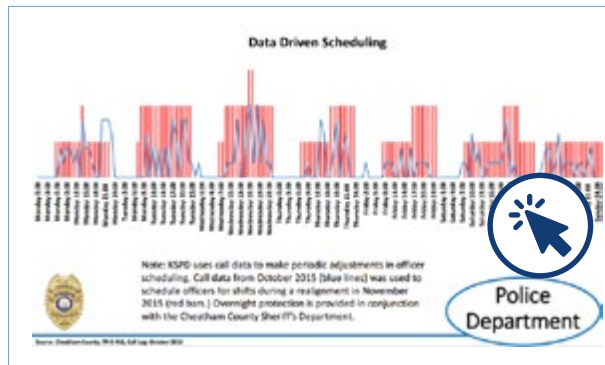
Gauges. Where targets have been established for a measure, and you know either a minimum and maximum range (e.g., 0-100%), or you know that certain levels of performance would either be cause for an "early warning" or definite indicators of a problem, it may be worthwhile to program gauges to display how your performance compares to each of those milestones. More so than spotlight style indicators, these can communicate visually how close the jurisdiction is to the target or to the optimum or sub-optimum ranges.

Multi-variable comparisons. Graphing a single variable on its own bar chart might show you how performance has changed over time or how your jurisdiction compares to another, but bringing the data together visually via regression or simply a data overlay can show you correlations between variables and help drive home the potential impacts of decisions.

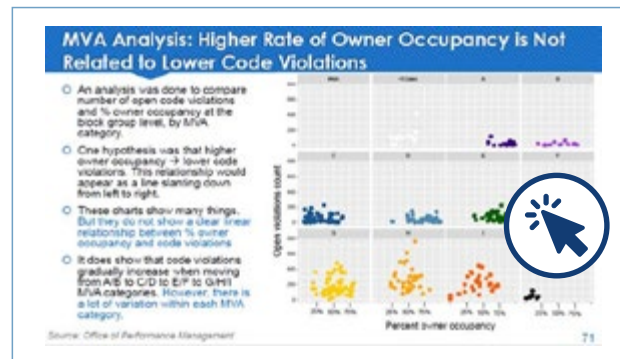


Source: City Manager's Performance Measurement Dashboard, FY 2017-18, City of Phoenix, Arizona

Such comparisons can also chart changes in results relative to progress on a long-term project, such as processing times for social service cases before, during, and after the completion of a new data management system.



Kingston Springs, Tennessee, charted police call data side-by-side with shift staffing to see how well their availability aligned with demand.



Kansas City, Missouri, reviewed code enforcement data and found that there was not a correlation between higher owner occupancy and lower violation rates.

Other considerations. As the saying goes, the greatest obstacle to communication is the illusion that it has taken place. You may think you have communicated quite effectively, but what you've shared may still be far too technical, poorly explained, or hard to locate for your target audiences. Just as you're measuring other aspects of your operations, you should also create some metrics for your public engagement and communication efforts. These should not simply be limited to the number of website hits or social media followers, but also incorporate feedback on the content of your messaging.

Among the questions you may want to consider are:

- Was your audience able to find your performance data?
- How well did the data or visuals communicate the jurisdiction's performance?
- How satisfied were readers with their ability to navigate through different data views or interactive menus?
- What was missing that those readers would like to see?

Kansas City, Missouri, has provided employees with a wealth of resources on data visualization through its [Data Academy](#), and also shared those lessons with ICMA conference attendees through a session entitled "[Your Charts Suck!](#)"

WHAT IS A POPULAR ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT (PAFR)?

A Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) is typically produced by a jurisdiction's finance or audit staff to provide a professional overview of assets, liabilities, expenditures, revenues, and other relevant financial data. While it provides data for each of the jurisdiction's funds, it tends to be of more interest to accountants than to a general audience.

A Popular Annual Financial Reports (PAFR), as the name implies, is geared toward the community at large. While PAFRs may still



Suwanee, Georgia, used a comic-book format to convey performance information.

include the same key financial data, they may summarize it in infographic form, provide greater context around why a particular item is important, or include performance data so that local residents can see not just the bottom line but what the jurisdiction is doing to improve on its results.

PAFRs vary in length and style, from a two- to four-page PDF/mailed to a more creative piece to engage the reader, such as Suwanee, Georgia's [report in a graphic novel format](#).

WHAT ROLE CAN SOCIAL MEDIA PLAY IN PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT?

Social media followers may be more interested in breaking news than in spreadsheets, but that doesn't mean there isn't a place for performance measurement there too. If one of your departments has achieved a key goal, completed a capital improvement project under budget, reduced response times, or won accreditation, that's certainly ripe content for a tweet or a post.

You can also send alerts on ongoing performance tracking. During a particularly severe winter storm in 2011, the city manager in [Elgin, Illinois](#), posted to Facebook followers throughout the night with road closures, plow locations and streets cleared, 911 wait times, and the status of major traffic pileups. While that may be more detail than some may care to read, the timeliness of the data and the demonstrated commitment of staff led one local to reply: "I live and have taught in Elgin for the past 20 years and have never been more impressed and proud of my city! Your posts gave us a window into your world and the inner-workings of our fine city. You sir, get a gold star!!! Tell the 'troops' that my students will learn of their heroic efforts."

More routinely, social media can serve as the conduit for sharing current performance data. If a local resident has contacted you via social media, customer relationship management software, or a 311 request, be sure to follow up with them afterward with both the task status and relevant data. Was your response time faster than the target? How does their request fit into the larger picture, such as total tasks completed that month, related service/facility improvements, or expenditures per capita? Remember, every complaint is a gift, not only letting you know where your performance may be lacking but also enabling you to change the conversation from anecdotes to data.

WHAT ABOUT MORE DYNAMIC, SEARCHABLE DATA?

Even with dashboards and scorecards, communication tends to be driven by the jurisdiction. A number of jurisdictions now share data in ways that permit residents to conduct their own searches.

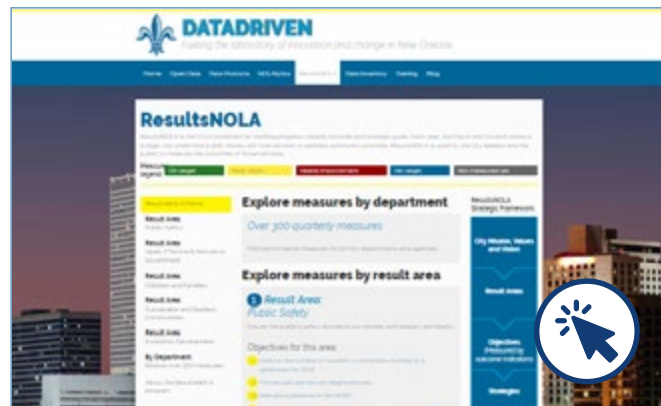
As noted above, several local governments post their performance and financial data in public online databases. This can foster better understanding of how tax dollars are spent and enable drill-down searches into how a particular budget's funds are spent. Those curious about the mix of vendors for vehicle maintenance, for instance, can answer their own questions via the web, rather than sending their inquiries through the manager or the clerk. This approach is supported by a range of vendors to allow for either public-friendly portals for selecting measures, creating charts, and drilling down into detail or for more the more tech-savvy to conduct research using raw data from downloadable database files.

Among the jurisdictions that enable the public to conduct dynamic explorations of performance data and related dashboard views are Fayetteville, North Carolina, and New Orleans, Louisiana.

More generally, as you're considering an interactive data presentation, you might want to include both the summary and the detail, as well as links to help readers interpret what they're seeing.



The website in Fayetteville, North Carolina, allows users to drill down for more data.



The New Orleans website allows users to drill down to access more data.

ENSURING THAT OPEN DATA HELPS RESIDENTS UNDERSTAND PERFORMANCE

For Montgomery County, Maryland, transparency is an important value, and [dataMontgomery](#), the county's open data program, is a key component of realizing that vision.

The county does not publish data simply for the sake of compliance with open data legislation. We are intentional about ensuring that residents can access, understand, analyze, and use published datasets. This effort is led by the Department of Technology Services (DTS), with input and collaboration from CountyStat, the performance management and data analytics team for county government.

To that end, Montgomery County has taken steps to ensure public input, engagement, and education so that residents use our open data to better understand government services, operations, and performance.

During the formation of the program, the county sponsored multiple town halls throughout the jurisdiction to solicit input on the types of data that residents want to see; the results were then shared across departments and analyzed. Once the initial dataset inventory was completed, DTS partnered with the county's public libraries on a taxonomy project. Librarians used their taxonomy expertise to create common categories and metadata for each of the several hundred county datasets. They placed iPads with special software in library branches and asked library patrons to drag datasets into the category they thought the data belonged in. Libraries then took the results of these exercises and fine-tuned the taxonomy structure. The results are the categories that show on the dataMontgomery page today.

The county's approach to selecting which datasets to prioritize for publication reflects the anticipated level of public value. All identified datasets are rated and scored to be queued up for publication, with half of the points available reflecting an assessment of how important the dataset will be for county residents and businesses, such as the degree to which the data can be used to inform policy around quality of life issues, whether the data contributes to civic engagement, and other criteria.

When publishing data that we expect have significant public value, the county seeks input not just from the relevant staff but also the public. For example, before publishing crime data, DTS put together a session with police district officers, residents, developers, and community advocates (including neighborhood association heads). The public provided common questions they have about crime, and their feedback was analyzed and used to develop a dataset that provides answers to those questions. Similarly, when an

analysis showed that county budget and spending data was not being viewed by the public very much, the public was engaged to discover ways to explain complex financial data without the need for a data science or financial background. The result is a guided financial transparency site that incorporates input from key users (residents, advocates, etc.).

Finally, DTS undertook development of an Online Resident Guide to ensure the open data is accessible to everyone—not just developers and data scientists. Once a resident gets comfortable with the software, he or she can perform basic tasks and analysis, but getting over that initial hump could drive away key audiences. DTS partnered with the University of Maryland iSchool to create an online guide to help residents face that challenge. Two focus groups of residents were held to collect ideas about how they wanted to use data to live, work, and thrive in Montgomery County. These findings (such as steps to search datasets, analyze data, or create a neighborhood crime map) were incorporated into an interactive online guide. As an added feature, the dataMontgomery site has feedback mechanisms that allow users to suggest a dataset or ask questions about dataset content.

David Gottesman, CountyStat Manager, Office of the County Executive, and Victoria Lewis, Data Service Manager, Department of Technology Services, Montgomery County, Maryland

ARE ELECTED OFFICIALS AND RESIDENTS POTENTIAL PARTNERS IN THIS EFFORT?

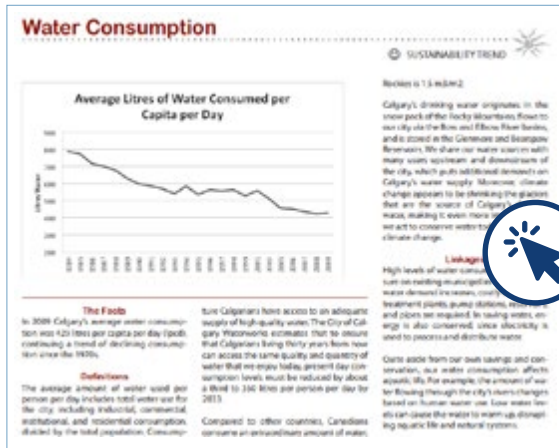
The public and elected officials play crucial roles in both the identification of key measures and the related data collection.

If your community has adopted a strategic plan, that plan may point the way toward your “front line” of performance measures. While you may track dozens of additional metrics at a department level, those that relate directly to the strategic plan will be the ones that will be discussed most. And if that strategic planning process was informed by a community engagement effort, then the public could be told, “This is what you told us was important, and this is how we’re tracking our progress.”

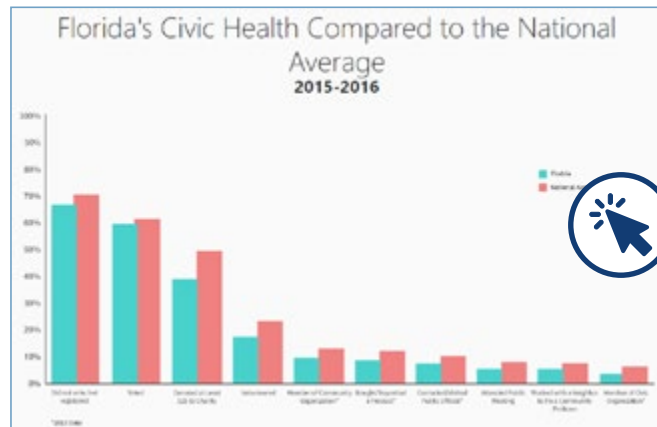
That’s not to say that all dealings with the public will go smoothly. They may say they favor a new swimming pool during the strategic plan discussions, and then turn against it as soon as you put a financing plan to a vote. Likewise, you can present voluminous traffic study data and not carry the day on the consideration of a new stop sign. But with a strategic framework on which to hang your measures, the logic of your performance tracking will be more readily apparent.

Local residents may even help develop the performance measures themselves. In so doing, they also voice their buy-in to the jurisdiction’s priorities.

As jurisdictions look beyond their own internal management metrics at interagency and public/private cooperation—whether around traffic, the opioid epidemic, or other priorities—they may find that the other partners at the table bring a wealth of suggested metrics with them as well. For example, Sustainable Calgary’s “state of the city” reports and Florida Civic Health both bring a nonprofit perspective to local government performance data. (See following page.)



The community-led Sustainable Calgary program has been tracking resource use, wellness, natural environment and health metrics since 1998.



Florida Civic Health tracks community engagement metrics - from voting to volunteerism to working together to address community issues.

HOW CAN WE LEVERAGE SENSORS OR SMART COMMUNITY APPLICATIONS?

Wherever possible, the best option for collecting data is to get someone else to do it, or in the case of the Internet of Things (IoT), to get something else to do it. This can include building-specific SCADA systems to track and adjust HVAC usage, [Shotspotter](#) technology integrated with GIS to help track crime trends, traffic flow sensors to indicate the need for street network capital improvements and temporary detours, rain sensors to control irrigation systems, and automatic vehicle locators to help dispatch public works or emergency personnel. Internet of Things connections can also allow for direct notification of system failures so that response time for repairs can be reduced (and automatically tracked).

For a more in-depth review of the benefits, costs, and other considerations relating to smart community applications, see the e-book [Smart Solutions: Technology Serving Communities](#), developed by ICMA and IBTS.

With the proliferation of smart phones and mobile technology, your community members can also help collect your jurisdiction's data. What was once the province of meter readers or proprietary hand-held devices can now be pushed down to the level of an individual QR (Quick Response) code or photo. Customer relationship management (CRM) software and [311 systems](#) allow jurisdictions to maintain a database of residents' complaints and service requests. With innovations in those systems, residents may now submit their requests directly via cell phone and check the project status online. [San Francisco](#) has opened its city databases to mobile app developers to track everything from city buses to sidewalk and graffiti problems. Boston has supported the development of the [Street Bump](#) app that senses potholes as you drive over them and sends the GPS coordinates to the street maintenance staff. Other vendors of apps have proliferated as well.



Street Bump app in Boston.

WHAT IS “BIG DATA”?

For private companies, “[big data](#)” may include everything from purchasing history and browsing patterns (online or even in-store) to more personal data such as what they may glean from social media or from sources they purchase from third parties. For local governments, big data would tend to involve not only standard operational and financial data, but also sensors, apps, GIS, public transactions and service requests, and state or federal databases (e.g., census, transportation, flooding). And where traditional performance management tends to be focused on quarterly or annual outputs, by pulling together incident database queries, IoT sensor data, and all other available data, information such as crime statistics can be broken down to a much more granular level, by the day, time, precise location, and other potentially relevant characteristics of the incident.

The point of amassing such big data is to use available technologies for business intelligence, analytics, or predictive modeling to make more accurate assumptions of likely outcomes or to consider multiple “what if” scenarios when making consequential policy, program, or capital improvement decisions. When fully integrated with smart community technologies, that data can also drive automated control of complex systems, such as traffic signal timing, to facilitate optimal traffic flow under varying conditions.

DO WE HAVE TOO MUCH DATA?

The problem with all these approaches is that they can be too effective! Once you start collecting data via Twitter, CRM (customer relationship management), and 311 systems, CAD (computer-aided dispatch), GIS, and other software, you run the risk that you’ll have more data than you have time to analyze. For the business community, that’s where the concept of “big data” comes in, through which corporate marketing divisions are analyzing everything from your internet searches and shopping patterns to the where and how your smartphone wi-fi signal meanders through a department store. For those with the bankroll and the IT server capacity to analyze that data, there are not many dots left that cannot be connected.

Fortunately or unfortunately, most local governments are not in danger of needing an offsite data center, and few have the resources to finance it. Still, if you’re going to collect the data, you should also plan how you’re going to put it to practical use. Otherwise, you run the risk that you’ll raise public expectations for more effective management, while all the reports you churn out will simply be expensive paperweights.

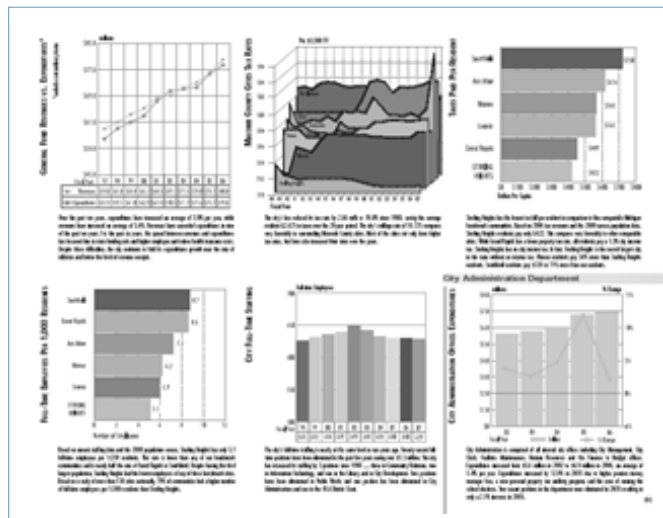
If you’re starting small, focus on your short list of key, strategic measures. While most new software applications come with reporting options, you may overlook them initially because you’re focusing on implementation and staff training. Focusing on getting that first data into the system is demanding, but you should also spend some time considering what built-in summaries, SQL reports, or custom programming might provide you with at least the rudiments of “actionable” or strategic data for monthly or quarterly discussions. If you’re successful in that much, you can always revisit those reports later to cull additional understanding from the wealth of statistics.

That same challenge of having too much data also comes into play when deciding how to share data with the public.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO GO LOW-TECH?

As exciting as those technological possibilities can be, many smaller jurisdictions cannot even think about such ideas, at least at the start of their performance measurement efforts. Still, data need not be technology-based to be part of an effective communication campaign. When Sterling Heights, Michigan, produced a city calendar to share information about parks and recreation programs and community events, they also

included an appendix of key performance data. Cartersville, Georgia, produced a similar calendar, with a monthly feature on a different city department and its performance.



Sterling Heights, Michigan, produced a city calendar that incorporated a performance data appendix.



Cartersville, Georgia, produced a calendar with a monthly feature reporting on performance.

Sarasota County, Florida, posted its traffic incident data not online, but on the street corner, where all those driving past could see it every day, while Baltimore, Maryland, did the same with fire data.

And to spark the most literal “elevator conversations,” Wichita, Kansas, placed floor-to-ceiling graphics on the outer doors and back walls of its elevators to share strategic plan goals and related data.



Billboard showing traffic incident data in Sarasota County, Florida.



Incident data is maintained on the side of a fire station in Baltimore, Maryland.



Floor-to-ceiling elevator graphics from Wichita, Kansas, serve as conversation starters, sharing fire response time, containment and call volume data.

Next Steps:

HOW AND WHEN SHOULD WE REPORT PERFORMANCE DATA TO THE PUBLIC?

Collecting performance data can be a scary proposition, because whatever you collect may become grist for public records requests, disgruntled bloggers, public hearing gadflies, or even the fast-disappearing local print media, all seeking a big scoop about government inefficiency.

If this is the first year you have collected performance data, you may still be working through the bugs in your data collection process. That being the case, it may be premature to report your data to the public. Regardless, you might want to keep in mind that local residents and even the media can be very understanding about the difficulty of generating accurate and comparable data. They tend to be less forgiving of those who appear to be hiding unfavorable numbers. Even if your performance in some areas is not as strong as you had hoped, it may be better to share the results and use that as a baseline to chart both your process improvement and your performance improvement as you move forward.

When you first start measuring performance, the collection procedures and the measures themselves might not be fully defined. As you go through those first few iterations and attempts, you might want to keep the profile low as a work-in-progress. But once the effort reaches maturity, such as inclusion in discussions with elected officials or in printed budget documents, it's also time to consider getting the data in front of any who may voice their discontent.

- **Share your goals.** The purpose of performance measurement is not to demonstrate how perfect you are already, but to point to those areas where you can improve.
- **Share your timeline.** While it may be tempting for some to jump on the first year of complete data as evidence of problems, clarify that this baseline is helping to establish where performance has been so far, identify process issues that will help collect data more effectively in the future, and determine what to monitor more closely as year 2 and year 3 data start becoming available. This is not a matter of taking a department's temperature and knowing that anything over 98.6°F is incontrovertible evidence of a fever. Rather, it is a matter of determining whether the spike in activity during any given time period (e.g., overtime spending, sick leave, etc.) was reflective of normal variation or part of a larger, long-term trend.
- **Limit what your report.** If some is good, more must be better, right? Well, if you find yourself in the situation discussed above of having too much data, one thing you might want to avoid is reporting all of it to the public. Don't try to inundate the public with numbers. If your goal is increasing their under-

standing, focus on those strategic measures that you want them to remember. While you may have plenty more data available, you also know that the space available in documents and websites and the attention span of your audience are limited.

- **Include graphics.** A chart or a map may be worth a thousand words. That does not mean you should skip the narrative, but be sure to supplement graphics where appropriate. Algonquin, Illinois, reports its community survey results, but also posts graphs of results over time on public video displays in community meeting spaces.
- **Discuss what you're measuring and why.** A focus on strategic measures begs the question of how those strategies were selected. This may help to steer the conversation back to the broader community vision, elected officials' goal setting, and the choices those goals engender. Are you slow at responding to barking dog complaints? Maybe that's because a greater emphasis was placed on loud parties and DUI enforcement. The same may be true for passive recreation vs. organized sports leagues. If some disagree with the choice, that may be an area for a discussion about goals. If the goals change, the measures can follow.
- **Consider your staff a captive audience and arm them with the facts.** Your staff are never stuck on a desert island. They're often spotted standing in line at the supermarket, riding in an elevator, or passing out flyers at a community event. When residents see the jurisdiction logo on the staff shirt, they start peppering the staff member with questions, or worse, the "common knowledge" that the jurisdiction is mismanaged, misspending, and missing the point. Rather than save performance data for budget times, push that information down within the organization so that everyone knows two or three measures relevant to their operations and can respond politely with a few actual figures you're tracking (and working to continue improving).



Algonquin, Illinois, video data display in Village Hall.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

Do not assume there's just one audience. Depending on what you're measuring, your audiences could be:

- Jurisdiction residents
- Local businesses
- Potential site selectors
- Commuters
- Customers (e.g., for utilities, parks and recreation, libraries)
- Specific demographic groups (e.g., by age, language spoken)

Beyond that, you're also communicating with traditional and social media, current and prospective elected officials, and the historical record. It's a daunting prospect, but just as you analyze how much detail you share, you should also spend some time determining how you share it with each group.

Is a single huge report on the website the best option for sharing your data, or would some audiences be better engaged via community meetings, Twitter forums, newsletters, or billboards?

All might be appropriate, but you should consider that each medium or campaign might best accommodate a very abbreviated list of metrics at any given time. Once you have people's attention, you can always give them options for finding more information—via drill-down links, social media likes, or targeted community outreach campaigns (e.g., meetings with homeowners' associations, seniors, youth, chambers of commerce, etc.).



Performance data can inform, encourage discussion, facilitate decision-making, or drive action. Does your audience and purpose match the method of communication?

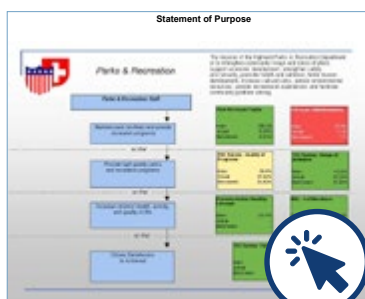
HOW DO WE LINK PERFORMANCE MEASURES TO STRATEGIC GOALS?

The concept of linking performance measurement to strategic goals sounds good, but making it a reality can be difficult. That is in part because some strategic plans are too vague. What does it mean, for example, to make your organization “the finest community (or department) in the country”?

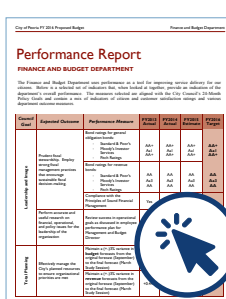
Where the goals are overarching, the measurements may need to be as well. If you can't operationalize the goal, perhaps the best way of gauging your performance is to ask the public what they think. As New York Mayor Ed Koch used to say, “How am I doing?” Even if the jurisdiction does not have the funds for a more detailed resident survey, starting with a broad rating of all local services can give a sense of whether the goals are being accomplished and your administration's message is getting across. For those able to undertake a more comprehensive approach, the [National Citizen Survey](#) or a similar instrument might fit the bill, both for the local data it would yield and for the benchmarks from other jurisdictions around the country.

As strategic plans focus on more specifics, the measurement becomes a bit easier—for example, fostering public safety, efficient transportation, and livable community spaces. The goals may still be broad, but they lend themselves to much more service-specific measurements. A few jurisdictions that have incorporated significant linkages between their strategic plans and performance measures are:

One concern with this approach might be that some strategic goals do not have a well-defined corresponding measure. This should not be a concern. Courses of action might include identifying the goal as not yet having a corresponding measure or sending the management team, elected officials, or other strategic plan stakeholders back to the drawing board to set a more actionable goal. Either way, that gap is identified as a work-in-progress. To paraphrase former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, acknowledging those “known unknowns” is the first step in filling in the blanks later.



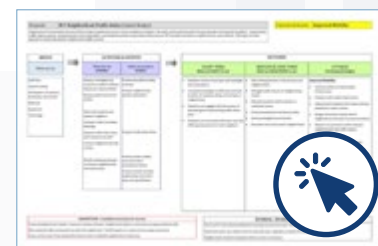
Highland, Illinois



Peoria, Arizona



Rock Hill, South Carolina



Bellevue, Washington

WHAT KIND OF FOLLOW-UP SHOULD WE DO?

If the performance data is collected simply to sit on a shelf (or on a quiet corner of the website) until it's refreshed the following year, then it's not accomplishing anything for your organization. Most of the jurisdictions that have built a performance culture have committed to monthly or quarterly discussions around performance.

Getting started, you may wish to conduct these meetings one-on-one with each department, but ideally, they should involve not just the department head, but also the service supervisors or analysts. These staff have the greatest connection to the data collection, and absent the top-level attention from a manager or deputy, might feel that their efforts toward data-driven management are undervalued.


The goal is not simply to have staff provide an update in print or in person saying, "This is how many potholes (or permits or arrests) there were in the previous month," but rather, "Given the workloads, efficiencies, quality measures, and other data we've collected, here are the implications for the organization and here's how we see that impacting our achievement of this year's performance targets."

This can then be the basis for:

- Reviewing the results or return on investment from prior decisions (see the section *It sounds good, but what's all this going to cost?*)
- Formulating action plans for improving performance
- Establishing task forces for deep-dives, performance audits, or process reviews.

3. Analyze the Problem


# of days	502
# of Steps	62
Fleet Buyers	1



# of days	346
# of Steps	49
Fleet Buyers	2

4. Determine and Validate Root Cause

- Root Cause – Communication
 - Expectations are not communicated clearly
 - Everyone's understanding of overall process
 - Define roles of parties involved in order to complete steps timely
- Other Causes
 - People
 - Staffing Levels
 - Unstable process



Fort Worth, Texas, has a Lean Team conducting in-depth analysis on areas where performance has fallen short or where opportunities exist for process improvement.

WHAT IS A "STAT" PROGRAM?

Stat programs got their start with the New York City Police Department's [CompStat](#) and Baltimore's [CitiStat](#)—comprehensive approaches to tracking all the data that's fit to be collected, whether that concerned crime statistics or the accomplishment of pothole repairs within a promised 2-day window. More importantly, they included four key elements:

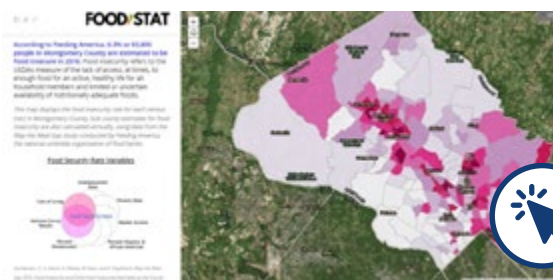
- Accurate and timely data reporting
- Effective planning and strategizing
- Rapid action
- Relentless follow-up¹

All of these concepts are consistent with the idea of monthly or quarterly reviews of performance data, but what differentiates the stat approach is that the follow-up meetings are typically held in public session, and they often involve in-depth questioning of the staff who present their data. This questioning can at times be confrontational. The purpose is not to embarrass or punish anyone for the numbers they're sharing, but rather to ensure that the organization learns from that performance and actually uses the data to drive service improvements.

Such approaches have since been replicated across the country and serve as structure to operationalize performance management principles.

¹ The PerformanceStat Potential: A Leadership Strategy for Producing Results, Robert D. Behn, Brookings Institution Press, 2014.

A primer on the Baltimore CitiStat and MidAtlantic StatNet programs was shared at the 2018 ICMA Annual Conference.



HOW DO WE USE THE DATA IN DECISION MAKING?

Even with a moderate level of data collection and in-house analytical capacity, it is possible to apply data to routine decision making.

However, performance measurement should not be expected to yield direct cause-and-effect evidence of the impact of a budget cut or a policy change. And it cannot demonstrate with certainty which action should be taken on a proposed reorganization or contracting decision. But while certainty may be elusive, performance data are a key piece of evidence that should be sought and considered in any such circumstance. In its absence, the loudest voices at the council/board meetings are met with no countervailing facts.

One jurisdiction using performance measurement in its decision making is Bellevue, Washington (see below). When faced with decisions on (1) fire station staffing, (2) the in-house provision or contracting of golf course operations, and (3) the reactions to economic recession, they turned to the data. With their resident survey data, they tracked both satisfaction levels and the importance of various services, which helped them identify areas with “high importance, low satisfaction” for service improvements, and “low importance” services for potential cuts.

DECISION-MAKING WITH PERFORMANCE DATA: BELLEVUE, WASHINGTON

Using comparative performance measurement data, city of Bellevue staff explained that the addition of eight FTE firefighters would allow the city to staff an additional dedicated two-person aid unit on a 24/7 basis—greatly decreasing the risk of a fire station being without a crew as before.

Also using comparative data, the city’s parks and recreation department awarded a new, more competitive golf course operations contract. With the new contract, the city sought to address concerns about the financial fitness of the city’s golf operations, which had been losing money under the previous contract.

As a step in preparing the request for proposals (RFP) for the new contract, the city first examined data from ICMA and the National Golf Foundation (NGF) to determine how the city’s golf course maintenance and staffing expenditures compared with those of peer jurisdictions. The city found that its costs were in line with other golf course operators, and, with further research, determined that marketing and other aspects of course operations needed to be improved in order to improve the bottom line.

After the contract was awarded, the city’s research proved a handy resource when another vendor charged that the city’s golf course maintenance costs were out of line with industry norms and were caus-

ing the financial shortcomings. With its ICMA and NGF data, the city was able to defend itself against the charges before the city council and avoid repeating the RFP process. The data also helped officials focus on marketing of the city's golf course and fiscal incentives that might improve the operation's bottom line.

Excerpted from FY2006 Comparative Performance Data Report, ICMA Center for Performance Measurement, © 2007 ICMA.

Woodbury, Minnesota, has used performance data in tracking pavement condition, fire response time, workplace injuries, and other departmental operations.

In FY2012 Woodbury used performance data in consideration (and approval) of an increase in public safety staffing to address deficiencies in fire response time.

"2011 community survey data reveals overall high resident satisfaction for all city programs and services. The major resident concern expressed in the survey was the condition of city roads. The council responded to low resident satisfaction during last year's budget season and allocated an additional \$563,277 to roadway reconstruction."

"The performance measurement data reveals positive improvement due to the city's roadway improvement projects. The average Pavement Condition Index (PCI) of non-residential streets increased from 67.5 in 2010 to 74.5 in 2011. The average PCI of residential streets increased from 72.5 in 2010 to 76.8 in 2011. While improvement is being reported, the percentage of roads requiring rehabilitation is expected to remain high for years to come because of the large number of roads constructed during the late 1980s and early 1990s that have recently begun to qualify for mill and overlay improvements."

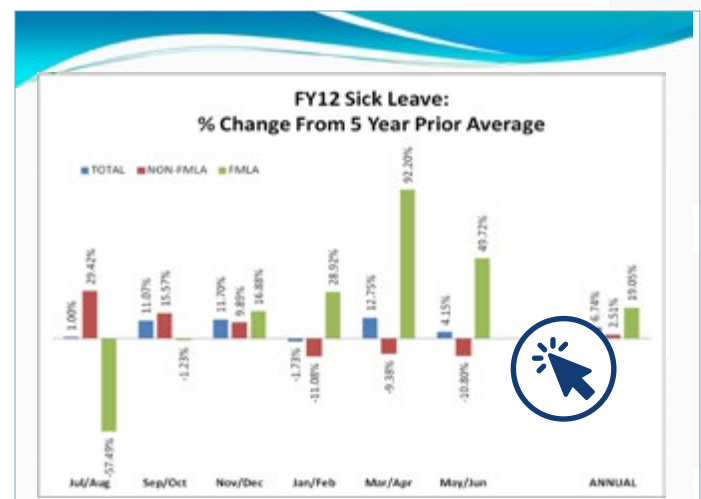
Those examples notwithstanding, performance measurement can also be used as an ongoing research tool, rather than a spending guide. Albany, Oregon, has used its analysis of sick leave data not to make any multi-million-dollar decisions on its budget appropriations, but rather to predict key seasons for higher usage, understand which departments or individuals are using the most sick leave, identify the employee illness vs. family leave components of the issue, and discourage sick leave abuse.

Even where the data have revealed problems in some timesheet accounting practices, this approach has led Albany to improve its employee training, revise the analyses, and keep digging.

Santa Barbara County, CA:

- Surveyor: Wasn't meeting performance targets due to staffing vacancies, so some of work was **outsourced**
- Public Works: Reviewed lane miles paved and \$/lane mile, and **switched method of sealing streets**
- Fire: Studied response time w/ options for additional **aid agreements** or consolidation among area fire agencies
- Gen. Services: Cost studies led to **paperless** paychecks and other benefits admin.

Over the years, Santa Barbara County, California, has applied performance data to decision making throughout the organization.



Albany, Oregon, analyzed sick leave to make budget decisions and to predict seasons of higher usage.

While it is laudable to include performance data any time a key decision is being considered, it is just as important to revisit the data after the fact. Whether in internal discussions between management and department heads or in consideration of subsequent budgets, performance data enables you to revisit those past decisions. Did the new staff really help trim the backlog of work? Did the new piece of equipment increase efficiency? While knowing the answers to those questions may not enable you to go back in time to decide differently, that knowledge may help to determine how subsequent funding or reorganization plans are handled.

WHAT CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD WE KEEP IN MIND WHEN WEIGHING CUTS?

The easier decisions are those that involve using performance data to justify new staff. If workload is high, then new staff may be able to handle the excess or even bring in new revenues.

But in the more common situations where savings are needed, performance data can be useful as well. To start with, how much demand is there for a particular service? If you have not counted the users, doing so may help you to identify how many are local residents, how many are from outside the jurisdiction, what portion of those are your “core customers,” and what portion are using some other program or facility that might be cut or become subject to a user fee.

For many years, Fairfax County, Virginia, has used performance data in evaluations and compensation decisions for all non-public safety employees. While the recession placed a hold on employee merit increases, department managers did use their performance data to suggest lists of potential cutbacks and to weigh their impacts. (See accompanying sidebar.)

FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA, USED PERFORMANCE DATA TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF POTENTIAL CUTS:

“...The elimination of these positions increases the workload for the 34 remaining tradesmen. The overall backlog of facility maintenance work orders addressed by the Garage Worker position is now about 45 days and will most likely increase to 75 days or more. The current backlog for equipment maintenance (grounds equipment) is now approximately 15 days and is expected to increase to approximately 30 days. Delays in the repair and maintenance of equipment will decrease customer satisfaction, delay maintenance activity, and result in the closure of some park site equipment and amenities.”

Are you reporting the performance impacts for budgetary actions? If there’s an expectation that performance or satisfaction will decline after cuts, do you revisit this later to discuss the impacts on customer service?

Once you’ve identified the specific programs, services, or facilities and their audiences, you should also assess the relative portion of existing expenditures that are dedicated to each. If you have a payroll system that allows for project-related accounting of staff time, you may want to institute more detailed tracking than just the total hours per pay period. Even if you do not measure all employee time every year, the targeted tracking of employees with multiple functions (e.g., cross-trained permit/inspection/code enforcement staff) can help to better understand how a proposed cut might actually impact a revenue-generating activity.

HOW CAN EMPLOYEES AND THE PUBLIC BE INVOLVED IN DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS?

Employees and supervisors who see the results of performance measurement may be the most emphatic cheerleaders. Even if your organization has some separately elected department heads who are more interested in their own operations than in jurisdictionwide initiatives, there's room to begin a performance measurement program in those direct-report areas. Once those who do not participate in the initial roll-out realize that decisions are being informed by facts rather than some informal political pecking order, they may step forward to collect more data within their own operations.

Peer examples aside, employees may also be motivated by gainsharing policies, which allow them to reap some of the direct rewards of improved performance. As *Governing* reported in 2012, there has been mixed reaction to the [gainsharing](#) approach, but such initiatives hold the potential for concrete savings and are well worth considering.

Unions and other quasi-recognized bargaining groups can also be active partners in the consideration of performance data. Rather than focusing solely on compensation and working conditions, injecting work unit performance reviews into informal discussions could help to explore new ways of understanding productivity and quality improvement and lead to innovative approaches that may best bubble up from the front-line crews.

Elected officials' budget decision making is often supported by the work of a public budget commission. While this body typically looks at the bottom line of financial data, there's no reason that discussion cannot also include consideration of performance data. The budget commission's resulting memo or recommendations to the board/council can then be more fully informed and reference how the spending relates to performance.

Where the local populace isn't filled with accountants and other budget wonks, a residents academy is an approach that can help develop some expertise. The classes that are offered are usually limited to an orientation to the basic functions of each department, not the minutiae of government finance, but they can also include a primer on strategic planning and performance management. Remember, the folks who sign up for the academy now may be your future elected officials.

Budget games are another way to spark interest, either among the public in general or among, for instance, school groups. Most offer a starting pool of revenues and ask residents to prioritize among the various competing proposals to build a budget. The frustration that results can go a long way toward fostering understanding and sympathy for those who are making the tough choices each year. One example is [Counties Work](#), an online game developed with support from the National Association of Counties and aimed at students in 6th through 12th grades.

Civics 101: A Citizen's Academy



Sarasota County employs more than 2,000 people. Do you know what they do? Sign up for our citizens' academy, *Civics 101*, to find out!

Ask questions — get answers.

Tour facilities. Test your skills. Learn about county programs and resources, and make connections to further your own vision in our community.

Civics 101 is offered in two modules, and modules can be taken in either order.

Classes are held on Thursday evenings from 6-8:20 p.m., at varying locations in the winter and summer.

There is no registration fee.

The 2019 Winter Session (Module I), running January through February, is full.

Please email neighbor@scgov.net if you would like to be contacted with the summer dates and application once they are available.

Additional information is available in the Documents Library below.

Neighborhood Challenge

A sustainable neighborhood is connected and engaged with their immediate neighbors and the community at-large, with the tools and confidence to improve their overall quality of life.

The Neighborhood Challenge is a competition encouraging neighbors to work together to make their neighborhoods sustainable, healthy, and involved. The Challenge recognizes existing improvements and aims to drive further progress in our community.

<https://www.scgov.net/government/planning-and-development-services/planning-and-zoning/neighborhood-services/civics>

1/5

A description of the community academy program offered by Sarasota County, Florida.

HOW DOES PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT RELATE TO ETHICS?

What are the ethics of managing *without* data? Well, just like ethics, public agency data is for everyone, not just ICMA members, staff, or elected officials. All should be making decisions based on the best available information. Considering how much data is currently available, even with limited staff time investment, there's no reason not to be using it. And considering the public thirst for transparency, applicable sunshine laws, and the culture of continuous improvement and idea sharing that's an ingrained part of professional local government management, there's no reason performance management should not be the norm.

The implementation of performance management across the globe is a great illustration of the commitment to ethical management by local government leaders. Performance data is essential to developing strategic plans, measuring progress toward goals, assessing policy alternatives, making sound management decisions, and serving as responsible stewards of public resources.

Communicating data about the organization's performance contributes to transparency. Setting clear and measurable performance targets based on data makes the often-elusive notion of who is accountable for results more concrete. Asking residents for feedback on key quality of life indicators and engaging them in the prioritization of services demonstrates respect for the democratic process. The rigorous assessment of what works and what doesn't leads to evidenced-based decision making, open and reasoned consideration of outcomes, and appropriate action steps when targets are not met.

MEASURING SOCIAL EQUITY

Social equity is an increasingly important goal for city and county public programs. Social equity, however, does not lend itself to simple definition or measurement, but the following four steps will support administrators to measure and assess their policies and programs in terms of social equity.

Operationalize social equity. To operationalize the policy and programmatic goal of social equity, administrators can turn to a framework developed by the Standing Panel on Social Equity of the National Academy of Public Administration. This framework considers four ways that equity can be measured: access, quality, procedural fairness, and outcomes:

- Access measures: Evaluate the extent to which public services and benefits are available to all.
- Quality measures: Assess the level of consistency in public service delivery to different groups and individuals.
- Procedural fairness measures: Examine problems in due process, equal protection, and eligibility criteria for public policies and programs.
- Outcome measures: Assess the degree to which policies and programs have the same impact on groups and individuals.

Incorporate mixed methods. Given the complexity of social equity, quantitative measures should be only a part of the story. Effective assessments of social equity are going to be based on various research methods, in particular qualitative methods. Understanding the limits of quantitative indicators is an important practice as well. For example, in some organizations staff have partnered with key departments, such as the Human Services Department, to produce mixed-methods reports that include statistics and interview data, providing a more holistic view of program impacts.

Connect strategy to action. The adoption of a strategic lens is critical to performance measurement in general, and social equity measurement in particular. Both departmental leadership and staff should be expected to understand the broader organizational strategy, how they fit into that strategy, and how data can be used to connect their actions to the strategy.

Build equity into the organizational culture. Generally speaking, performance measurement will be most effective in organizations that have adopted measurement as part of their organizational culture. Social equity performance measurement is no exception. To create, foster, and sustain a culture that supports the collection of data and measurement requires strong leadership. That said, leadership should not be a simple top-down process. Decentralizing the responsibility of social equity performance measurement is important for creating a sense of ownership by departments.

Benoy Jacob, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Interim Director, MGM Public Policy Institute, School of Public Policy and Leadership, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

WHICH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN WE LOOK TO AS RESOURCES?

ICMA conducts an annual [Certificates in Performance Management](#) program to recognize jurisdictions that have instituted robust and results-oriented performance management systems. Tiered recognition (achievement, distinction, excellence) is conferred for implementation and incorporation of performance data into jurisdiction operations and decision making for varying numbers of years.

Even if your jurisdiction is not ready to apply, you can download the [eligibility criteria](#), view a list of the most recent [certificate recipients](#), and access some of their [related documents and websites](#).

If you're interested in comparisons of customer satisfaction data, one option is the [National Citizen Survey](#) (NCS). The NCS provides a statistically valid mail-based survey of local residents, including key driver analysis and optional comparisons to norms by population and region. The companion [National Employee Survey](#) (NES) enables similar surveying for internal services. Both surveys are aligned with the questions asked in ICMA's [Open Access Benchmarking](#) program, so participants can compare across a broader pool of data.

HOW MIGHT THIS PROCESS MESH WITH OUTSIDE EFFORTS TO MEASURE OUR PERFORMANCE?

The media, special interest groups, and others will continue to measure and rank your organization's performance no matter what you do. With an active performance measurement program of your own, at least you'll be well prepared to rebut any inconsistencies or comment on the merits of their findings.

At the state government level, the auditor's office can often play a part in local government performance measurement, either via mandate or in more of a supporting role, and sometimes with a tie to related grant funding.

ICMA encourages local governments to work actively with their counterparts at other levels of government to ensure that local data used in any such analyses are tracked accurately and with appropriate consideration of local decision-making authority.

HOW DO WE BUILD A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT?

Performance measurement has the potential either to remake your organization or to be a paperwork exercise that gets set aside as soon as the budget has been approved. In order to work toward the former, a few recommendations include:

- Revisit the data.
- Build data into regular budget, strategic plan, and employee evaluation discussions.
- Trumpet your accomplishments.
- Keep tinkering.

For example, workload data and backlogs may be used to justify hiring a new staff person. But how often is that decision reviewed to see whether the new hire has made a difference in processing times, work quality, or other measures? As you put forward a budget proposal, you should be armed with two types of measures: those that justify the proposal and those that will be used over the coming months and years to evaluate its effect.

If there are routine meetings with department managers, is performance measurement one of the topics? Do you discuss progress toward strategic plan goals? Is the participation in performance tracking efforts a component in employee evaluations?

If you've accomplished something in your performance tracking, do people know about it? One of the key frustrations among employees is carrying out a task for which they never see the results. If the performance data, "aha" moments, and resulting decisions don't get communicated back to employees, they may hesitate to participate in the next round of data gathering. But if they see the results, even in a department other than their own, that might facilitate and sustain greater buy-in throughout the organization.

As for the measurement process itself, does that remain static, or is it constantly evolving? Some functions might always be included among your measures (e.g., crime rate). Others might vary depending on changes in the strategic plan. More importantly, if you're properly monitoring or auditing your performance measurement process, you may find that the methodology for some data collection may be faulty, or that roadblocks hamper the collection of key metrics. Paying attention to these details can make the difference between having a spreadsheet full of errors or blanks and having a reliable dataset on which to base decisions.

Finally, the culture of performance improvement is one that instills in all employees the quest for a better understanding of operations. The goal is not getting to the number itself, but knowing what that number represents, what led to its being as high or low as it is, and what steps might be taken to improve that performance the following month, quarter, or year. It's a culture that accepts uncertainty and experimentation, with an eye toward gathering evidence, learning from poor performance, and always working toward what's next.

Conclusion

There is not one single approach to performance management that all jurisdictions should follow. Depending on your organization's history and culture, your local business and educational environment, the services you provide, and the resources at your disposal, you may find it appropriate to build your own program, adapt from a neighbor, partner with a university, or start a consortium. Your reporting might range from paper reports to town hall meetings, static PDFs to interactive CRM and open data portals.

So given that, what are the universal conclusions and recommendations?

- **Do your homework.** Consider what's been done in your organization already. Celebrate those departments that have already begun the performance management journey. Talk to your peers about what they're doing that might work in your jurisdiction as well, perhaps even via interagency working groups to foster improved service.
- **Train your staff.** Provide the guidance and resources they'll need to develop meaningful measures focused on outcomes. Allay their fears that performance management is a disguised attempt to slash their budgets. Assume that the training you provide today will need to be reinforced or reiterated as new staff join the organization. Lead by example by showing that you take performance data seriously, both in line departments and in administration as well.
- **Work with your elected officials.** Help set their expectations for how performance data can inform decision making and what limitations and challenges will remain.
- **Be open to the data.** Look at performance data as a source of both validation and warning. It is not intended to be a source of unlimited, happy press releases. Rather, it should deepen your understanding of how services are being delivered and where you may need to make some changes. Accept that results will not be instant, nor will the trends always be clear-cut.
- **Build a culture of transparency.** Use the fact that you've got numbers to back up your organization's performance to both elevate the level of discourse with local residents and acknowledge those areas where there's still work to be done. Even in an environment where trust is in short supply, performance data offers the opportunity to build trust in an open and even collaborative way.
- **Stay focused on improving.** Continuous improvement is often focused on the services you're providing, but it applies just the same to the performance management process itself. Evaluate ways the current measures could be improved. Look at how you can tie them more closely to your strategic goals. Consider how data collection can be audited, corroborated, automated, or crowdsourced. And keep thinking about the decisions you have ahead of you that would be better informed by data you could be tracking.

For Additional Reading

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["Across-The-Board Budget Cuts May Not Bring Real Savings,"](#) Katherine Barrett & Richard Greene, *Governing*, July 2011.

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[Civic Index](#), National Civic League

CPM Case Study: Providing Responsive Information Technology Services with Limited Staffing in Williamsburg, Virginia, Adam Szumski, ICMA, 2012.

["Does measuring performance lead to better performance?"](#), Mary Bryna Sanger, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 2013.

[Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018](#)

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[Performance Management](#) content on the ICMA blog

[“Performance Management Purpose, Executive Engagement, and Reported Benefits Among Leading Local Governments,”](#) David Ammons, Ellen Liston, Jordan Jones, *State and Local Government Review*, 2013.

[Realizing Return on Investment in Performance Management](#), David Swindell, Brent Stockwell, Amy Pressler, Taylor Winkel, Drew Callow, John David Selby, Yasmeen Hussain, and Jacob Winters, ICMA, 2019.

[Smart Solutions: Technology Serving Communities](#), ICMA, 2017.

[Smarter, Faster, Cheaper: An Operations Efficiency Benchmarking Study of 100 American Cities](#), IBM Global Business Services, 2011.

The PerformanceStat Potential: A Leadership Strategy for Producing Results, Robert D. Behn, Brookings Institution Press, 2014.

Appendix A: ICMA Open Access Benchmarking

ICMA has been collecting local government performance data since 1995 to assist local governments in improving the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of public services through the collection, reporting, analysis, and application of performance information.

While prior data gathering efforts attempted to track performance more comprehensively, with up to 5,000 annual measures, the current ICMA [Open Access Benchmarking](#) program focuses on 80 key performance indicators, with 54 additional metrics specific to county governments. Data are currently collected for the following services, tracking activities identified by the [Performance Management Advisory Committee](#) and various focus groups:

General Services Measured:

- Code enforcement
- Facilities management
- Finance
- Fire and EMS
- General government and demographics
- Highway and road maintenance
- Human resources
- Information technology
- Library services
- Parks and recreation
- Permits, land use, and plan review
- Police services
- Procurement
- Risk management
- Solid waste
- Sustainability

County-Focused Services Measured (may also be applicable to consolidated governments or other jurisdictions):

- Courts
- Food assistance
- Health
- Housing
- Jails
- Job training
- Probation
- Property assessment
- Youth services

There is no charge to participate and no specialized software required. Any jurisdiction may download a copy of the database, use it in their own analytics tools, or contribute performance data of their own.

Where jurisdictions demonstrate high performance, they are not ranked and lauded in press releases for the simple reason that high performance in one area may be based on a strategic decision to devote more resources there. Rather, contact information is provided for each responding jurisdiction so that peers may contact each other to learn from leading practitioners or discuss ways to improve services further.

Among the benchmark data available as of as of February 2019:

ICMA Open Access Benchmarking: Sample Data

Code Enforcement	12%	Share of cases resolved through forced compliance
Facilities Maintenance	\$1.66	Admin/office custodial expenditure per square foot
General Government	77%	Quality of all local government services rated as excellent or good
Human Resources	4.2%	Turnover rate for public safety employees
Information Technology	56%	Help desk requests resolved within 4 work hours
Library	18.6	Hard copy materials circulated per registered borrower (electronic circulation is tracked separately)
Police	273 seconds	Average time, dispatch to arrival, for top priority calls
Risk Management	13.5	Workers compensation claims per 100 FTEs

In accessing the raw figures, jurisdictions may parse the database by population size, population density, fiscal year, median income, staffing levels, or other fields.

For more information, visit <https://icma.org/benchmark>.

Appendix B: International Perspectives

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES: LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROFESSIONALS AUSTRALIA, NEW SOUTH WALES

By Annalisa Haskell, GAICD, Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Professionals Australia, NSW

Some operating philosophies I have on a personal level are that helpful

- Everything is possible, so when things seem insurmountable or people say, “Oh, no we can’t do that,” “we have never done that,” or “it’s too much work” (for example, new reporting requirements, new data capture, or having to redo things you already have), do not accept that.
- Always assume you can find a way to measure something—even if it means you have to build from scratch. Do something.
- What can be measured can be used to provide insight for the organization—sometimes by itself or put with other pieces of data. So, if you think about your council* operation and all the things you do, it is possible to break down the elements and consider how you might use the data.
- How we started originally was to get a group together of councils’ staff, and sit back and think about—how might we determine if we are performing well? What might that look like and scope the outcome you would like to have.
- THEN look back inside the organization and think about what measurement would tell you that answer.

Here is one example: if you were trying to know if your council was more efficient or getting more efficient in a key function like the finance function (as we know, a healthy finance function is essential in all councils), what would that look like? It might be that you would be keen to improve on the number of business days it took to deliver month end financials, or reduce the days debtors owing or reduce the time it took to do the annual budgeting process or have less FTE (full time equivalent) staff for the work you are doing, or indeed process more transactions for less relative staff resources (which might mean you are automating processes more)—or it might show that you have taken on more work for the organization such as doing more time spent on business insights with less relative staff. From here you need to consider what trend you might like to see and what rate of change you believe might be possible

* As used here, council refers to the local government as a whole, not to its elected body.

Another example might be spending time on defining what does efficient really look like in your organization? How would we know if we are being more efficient? It is not just employee cost per resident, or number of employees per resident that can determine this as this is quite simplistic. It might assist but there will be other things to measure—such as volume, type and nature of work you are able to do with your level of resourcing for the services that you directly manage in your community. You must consider that as councils often take on more work and you need to understand your service mix—what you do yourselves and what you outsource—before you take a view on the “efficiency” element.

In our program we have developed a model that takes account of the nature of the council’s service mix, the amount that the council does themselves, the nature of the local government area they manage and the relative characteristics of that area as you cannot just compare councils across jurisdiction without all this context.

Of course, comparative results are always useful but if one council manages a service in house and another outsources it—unless you allow for that—it is meaningless. [Our Australasian LG Performance Excellence Program](#) allows for this all.

KEY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Accuracy is key: if you put rubbish in you’ll get rubbish out!

It’s not an end in itself: it’s the starting point of a road to improvement.

Benchmarking is important: good practice transcends geographical boundaries.

Don’t try and measure everything: measure what matters.

Debbie Johns, Head of Performance Networks, Association for Public Service Excellence, United Kingdom

IMPLEMENTATION OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

By Dawn Martin, Manager, Corporate Performance, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

The city of Regina's best advice on beginning the performance management journey is to just get started—select something small and begin to embed the practices and build competencies which can then be expanded to other areas. Here's what we did . . .

In municipal performance management, there are generally two approaches that are complementary to one another:

- Measuring a municipality's achievement of its levels of service for residents
- Measure the municipality's advancement of its corporate strategy plan—the changes or improvements it is working to improve the efficiency and/or effectiveness of its service delivery.

Clearly the most important of these is the delivery of services to residents and that is where the city of Regina initially began. But the complexity of this work became too daunting and we soon re-focused our effort to the measurement of the Corporate Strategic Plan.

The more manageable scope of work resulting from the decision allowed us to model and execute another key principle of performance management—monitoring progress. We are now just beginning implementation of our third strategic plan and have had some tremendous success. The key contributor to that success has been the way we execute and monitor the plan:

- Periodic (almost monthly) meetings with the Executive Leadership Team to discuss strategic issues
- Quarterly Strategy Review meetings with the Executive Leadership Team to monitor performance, mitigate risk, and make strategic adjustments
- Quarterly meetings with all municipal management to talk about the strategic plan results, to communicate adjustments made by the Executive and to get input to address issues and/or risks.

Establishing good systems to monitor progress has been our biggest lesson in performance management. The processes we have established help to keep the strategic plan on the agenda and reinforces the Executive's commitment to it for all management.

Our department also provides support for business planning across the city of Regina. Through leadership in these processes, we can ensure that the Corporate Strategic Plan and its measures and targets are inputs to business planning in every area.

The need to address the complexity of managing service levels has been an element of our Corporate Strategic Plan and we are gradually moving to be able to monitor and report on them. We have joined the Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada ([MBN Canada](#)) as a means of supporting this effort. MBN Canada brings built-in service measurement along with the ability to compare service performance to other jurisdictions. We are relatively new to this process and are still developing our internal processes to ensure that the data is used as an input to our business planning. The key question for us is how to use the data within our municipality to get to a, "So what? Now what?" discussion. Once again, the importance of monitoring progress is being driven home.

Editor's note: In an example of international idea sharing, the Ontario/MBNCanada experience served as a model for the Phoenix area Valley Benchmark Cities consortium.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE APPRAISALS

By Guo Yonggang, Chief Director of Information Center of Tongchuan Municipal Human Resources & Social Services Bureau, Shaanxi Province, China

One of the universal challenges with performance management is finding the right balance when linking organizational performance goals to individual employee appraisals. Linking these too closely runs the risk of punishing staff who may be dealing with a difficult-to-serve constituency (e.g., should a teacher be blamed if test scores do not improve, regardless of the challenges posed by the class they've been assigned?). Not linking them enough means there are effectively two sets of goals—one for the organization and one for the individual—which may be working at cross-purposes. The following article discusses how those issues are being considered within local government in China.

Performance management is the linchpin of the “last mile rush” in a team’s strategic goal. For government agencies and organizations in the public sector, performance management is a vital component in attracting popular support from the people. Against the backdrop of policies such as “simplifying authority, relaxing control, and optimizing service,” however, many problems remain in government agencies’ performance management work.

- **Top-down focus.** This can inhibit effective discussion prior to the decision-making and cause a lack of promotion of the work after the decision has been made. During implementation, lower level government employees are not encouraged to express disagreements, leading to mismatched understandings of the goal and expectation of the work carried out, and making employees confused as well as unmotivated in the phase of implementation.
- **Ignoring process.** If the decision-making body cares only about the result, it will send undue pressure down the administrative structure. Impacts can be negative if no institutional check and balance mechanisms exist to mitigate such pressure.
- **Overemphasizing annual reports.** Emphasizing the end-of-year annual achievements but not the daily performance [can be problematic]. Without enough “goal decomposition mechanism,” implementation-level employees often focus only on the end-of-year evaluation, especially when leadership has the veto power in deciding the pass or fail of such assessments. Such issues can easily force employees to excessively spend energy and resources dealing with the assessment but not achieving the actual work goals. At the same time, many of the assessments involve too much subjective opinion and not enough objective, quantifiable items, making the evaluation result irrelevant to the end-goals of the team.
- **Insufficient humanistic components in evaluation.** Performance management focuses on mid- and long-term goals. Appraisal focuses on the promotion and salary raise of employees and pays little to no attention to the realization of an employee’s life goals and personal value. This means such assessments can hardly resonate with internal preferences of the team and team members, making members the passive receivers, rather than the proactive initiators, in conducting these evaluations.

Based on the above issues, government agencies should revise their performance evaluation in the following ways:

- **Collaborate on the performance plan.** Decision-making body, human resource, management body, and employees are the concerned parties in performance management, therefore they should all have a voice in the development of performance management. Performance management in the public sector should also include clients (people who receive the service), thereby making the work development goals more realistic, down-to-earth, and feasible.

- **Clearly assign tasks and goals.** Mid- and long-term goals should be specified by development stages in their work plan. Short-term goals should be clearly explained and dissected, based on the result of which tasks should be assigned to relevant positions and appropriate talents invited to make sure that employees' capacity fits the position's expectations.
- **Center appraisals around people.** The goal of evaluation is to help employees achieve their mid- and long-term goals. More importantly, evaluations are to help employees refine and improve themselves, realizing the goal of co-developing the team and team members. Evaluations should particularly focus on resolving setbacks that employees encounter in daily implementation of their work, difficulties and hardships, as well as attaining overall personal improvement, rather than being a means of "annual punishment."
- **Find the right fit.** After setting a work goal, employees are the core of achieving the goal. The current practice of "exam-decides-all and evaluation-decides-promotion" ignores the vital role played by the responsibilities and requirements of a position in achieving any team goal. When this happens, creativity, responsibility, and cooperation at work become a luxury. Therefore, when designing a position, one should fully understand the duties and expected goals of the position; when selecting the right person for a position, one should particularly pay attention to the person's ability to adjust to the need of the position, ability to be creative at work, and the ability to collaborate with others.

PERSPECTIVE ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

By Octavio E. Chávez, Director, ICMA México-Latinoamérica

In the last couple of decades, many national governments in the Latin America region have been promoting Management by Results (MbR) as the preferred approach for government operation, following the recommendation of the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB).

As part of the MbR, we have performance management (PM) as a relevant component. Therefore, PM is now in the process of gaining greater acceptance in subnational governments in the region, although most of them are still struggling in getting their indicator systems consolidated in the first place, which is a must-have element in performance management.

PM is an effective navigation mechanism – for some specialists even a “philosophy” – that provides relevant evidence to support decision making. It is a very advanced stage in public administration that several local governments in the United States and, perhaps, none in Latin America have fully attained. Because of its complexity, it is common that organizations implement performance management partially or just some elements of it. When that happens, which is most of the time, what is in place is not truly performance management, but rather a system that collects information and even processes it, but from which the results are of limited value or, in some cases, do not completely align to the organization’s goals. It is not rare to claim to have achieved performance management just because the organization has adopted a group of indicators, even when they are not related to specific results or even relevant products.

For true performance management, the organizations must have adequate planning mechanisms that produce the framework on which metrics are related to results, which are expressed as general and specific objectives and their targets.

Such an effort requires qualified staff, who may be hard to retain in Latin America public organizations due to regular turnover associated with political changes in the government bodies. Additionally, the environment in which performance management is properly implemented requires transparency, citizen involvement, and access to information that it is unrestricted and easy to access. Conditions that currently are in the process of building and consolidating in the region give hope that perhaps soon we may see at least a few subnational governments operating under a basic performance management approach.



Appendix C: Software Partners

A wide variety of software providers can help with project management, strategic planning, data analytics, data visualization and dashboarding, public engagement, and satisfaction surveys. Several of these companies are among ICMA's [Strategic Partners](#) and/or participate as ICMA [Annual Conference exhibitors](#).

ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics. ICMA provides member support; publications; data and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 11,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of individuals living in thousands of communities, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.



INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

777 N. CAPITOL ST. NE, STE. 500, WASHINGTON, DC 20002

202.962.3680 | 202.962.3500 (F) | ICMA.ORG
