



LEGISLATING FOR RESULTS:

Reviewing Results and Costs of Services and Policies Throughout the Year

A Municipal Action Guide

Number 6 of 10

Elected officials regularly need to encourage actions by their departmental agencies to improve their services to the public. Actions that elected officials can take to help press for such improvements are the subject of this Brief.

Elected officials make many decisions throughout the year. The time between budget seasons provides

an opportunity for elected officials to examine programs and policies more in-depth and in a less hectic atmosphere than during budget season. Performance reviews provide the city leaders with the opportunity to obtain a better understanding of programs and issues and to identify the need for corrective actions.

Summary of Actions

- Don't wait until budget time to review key programs. Schedule annual program performance reviews between budget sessions for programs/issues expected to be of special interest.
- Check progress on key outcome indicators periodically against the targets included in budget submissions. Use this information to identify programs for which additional program reviews are appropriate.
- Determine if any city action is needed based on information received from the reviews and encourage departments to identify program improvements.
- Identify programs whose outcomes are affected by other programs or other departments and review these programs together where feasible.
- Ask for the out-year outcome and cost implications of programs for which the major results are expected to occur in the future.
- Use a set of key questions (such as those in Attachment 6-1) to help assess how well programs are doing in achieving their goals and objectives.

ACTIONS

Selecting programs or issues to review during the year. If targets established during the budget process are to be taken seriously, it is important that they be reviewed during the operating year. Elected officials will not only obtain information about which strategies are showing results but will also send the message to program staff that they are serious about the achievement of program objectives.

ACTION: Ask departments to provide regular reports on key outcome indicators. The reports should compare the latest results against the targets the departments included in their budget submissions. Ask departments to provide

explanations of any significant differences as part of their reports. Use that information to help you decide which government programs services need reviews.

ACTION: Examine important outcome data breakouts, such as the outcomes achieved for various citizen demographic groups or for particular service facilities. Use this information to help identify important issues and problems for your review. (*See Examples Charlotte, NC*)

ACTION: Schedule annual reviews for those services or policies expected to be of special concern. Elected officials should establish its own schedule of such reviews. (*See Examples: Montgomery County, MD*)

ACTION: Hold program review sessions with departments when important program or policy issues arise between budget preparation periods. Focus on the relevant outcome data as well as program costs.

ACTION: Ask staff to review the relevant department outcome data and costs of the program area being reviewed and highlight findings for elected officials. This could include questions and recommendations for the program review session.

To a considerable extent, the ability of local officials to undertake these reviews depends on the availability of staff support to assist in these reviews. Jurisdictions that have their own “technical” staff can use them in assisting with these reviews. Other jurisdictions will need to rely on departmental staff but also can consider using citizen advisory committees for this help.

ACTION: For the program review, ask program staff to identify the major factors that affect the results the program is trying to achieve, how they believe those factors affect desired results, and what is being done to address those factors.

ACTION: Ask citizen advisory committees to conduct some of these reviews and report their findings back to the council.

ACTION: Consider holding program reviews as public or neighborhood meetings, especially those programs of particular interest to citizens.

ACTION: Ask program staff to address any questions or issues that are raised at the review and provide responses to the council within a specified time period.

ACTION: Encourage innovation. Ask if alternative ways to provide the service have been considered.

ACTION: At the program review sessions, ask questions such as those included in **Attachment 6-1**.

ACTION: Use the information from these reviews to encourage departments to design improved programs and policies. (See *Examples: Kirkland, WA and Charlotte, NC (2)*)

ACTION: Throughout the year, important incidents may arise that require quick attention. Assess whether the incident is an isolated occurrence or whether it represents an underlying problem that needs to be addressed? This is where the information from the performance measurement

process can provide important assistance. (See *Examples: Boston, MA*)

Reviewing results by multiple agency or governments. In many cases results will be affected by services provided by more than one agency and even by other governments. Elected officials need to become aware of the different agencies or governments that provide services effecting the results being assessed.

ACTION: As part of program reviews, identify which departments are involved with the issue. (See *Examples: Prince William County, VA*)

ACTION: Ask staff to provide a matrix identifying each major government objective and each department that has a significant role in meeting the objective. This list could also include outside organizations that also have a major role in reaching the objective.

ACTION: If elected officials finds that more than one department or outside organization makes important contribution to the same outcomes, establish joint review sessions and a working group that includes representatives from each concerned agency/organization. Ask the working group to: (a) select key outcome indicators; (b) select targets for each indicator; and (c) identify the roles of and time schedule for service delivery and data collection and reporting.

Using reported results to consider future-year implications. The temptation is to focus solely on getting through the current year, but this can encourage poor planning and budget choices. Elected officials need to learn what consequences current decisions will have on results in future years.

ACTION: For issues involving substantial investments, ask the staff to provide out-year estimates of future outcomes and costs.

ACTION: Every few years undertake strategic planning for your jurisdiction, for more details, see the discussion of strategic planning **Action Brief 3**. Work with staff throughout the strategic planning effort and involve citizens in the effort. As part of the strategic planning, require that key outcome indicators be identified and working with staff, develop estimates and targets for each outcome indicator. In subsequent years, use annual performance reports to check progress towards achieving the objectives in the strategic plan.

Reviewing Results and Costs of Services and Policies Throughout the Year

ACTION: For outcomes that require multiple years before significant results are expected, ask for indicators that provide early evidence of progress towards the long-term

desired results. Discuss these indicators with program staff and understand how they show progress toward the desired objective.

EXAMPLES

Charlotte, North Carolina (10)

Crime Offenses are reported monthly to the Charlotte, NC City Council and the community. Crime counts in targeted geographic areas are used by the council to question allocation of officers to police districts and the effectiveness of special task forces such as street crimes units.¹

The Charlotte, NC City Council also asks for information on housing conditions, code violations, and houses brought up to code to help it assess staffing levels for housing/nuisance/code enforcement programs.²

Charlotte, North Carolina (2)

The Charlotte, NC City Council became concerned that the euthanasia rate at the animal shelter was too high. Staff provided euthanasia data broken out by reason. This showed most euthanasias were due to shelter space limitations or the length of time animals remained unadopted because so many animals were brought to the shelter. The council approved a number of steps to reduce euthanasia and after implementing these steps, the number of animals euthanized for time or space reasons decreased from 5,833 in Fiscal Year 2003 to 3,487 in FY 2004 and 1,039 in FY 2006.³

Montgomery County, Maryland

Montgomery County Council, MD annually approves a resolution that specifies the annual work program for the County's Office of Legislative Oversight. The Council includes in the resolution a brief description of each project's intended purpose and scope.

Kirkland, Washington

When the Kirkland, WA City Council examined data on its recycling program, it found a substantial decline in the single-family recycling rate (the amount of

recyclables collected divided by the total amount of waste), down to 47%. It also found an increase in the average pounds of solid waste generated per household per week (up to 35 pounds). The council set targets for these at 52% and 33 pounds, respectively. It then approved an experimental charge rate for collections: the smaller the can the lower the charge ("pay-per-can"). The council also eliminated the need to sort primary recyclables and asked the administration to report changes to both indicators. Subsequently, the Public Works Department reported substantial improvements in both outcome indicators – reaching 62% in the recycling rate and down to 26 pounds per household per week of waste.⁴

Boston, Massachusetts

In July 2006, a Boston, MA City Council member in July 2006 raised concerns over the death of a citizen who fell off the citizen's fire escape near the top of his building. The council member also noted that a similar death had occurred the previous year. He raised questions as to whether these were isolated incidents or whether an important underlying problem existed such as infrequent building inspections, code problems, or something else. He requested an expedited hearing be scheduled to address the issue. At that later time, additional information was requested as to the numbers of accidents, injuries, and fatalities, and the percent of inspections completed within appropriate time standards.

Prince William County, Virginia

Prince William County, VA Board members began receiving an increasing number of informal complaints from citizens about the physical conditions in their neighborhoods. The Board found that the indicator "number of official complaints" had indeed increased

1 E-mail communication from Pamela Syfert, City Manager, Charlotte, North Carolina (June 2, 2006).

2 E-mail communication from Pamela Syfert, City Manager, Charlotte, North Carolina (June 2, 2006).

3 E-mail communication from Pamela Syfert, City Manager, Charlotte, North Carolina (June 2, 2006) and telephone interview with Kim Eagle, Evaluation Manager, City of Charlotte (September 21, 2006).

4 Phone interview with David Ramsay, City Manager, August 3, 2006 and memo from the Public Works Director to the City Manager, July 24, 2006.

considerably. The Board increased the number of property code inspectors in response to those complaints. The Board also began reviewing tabulations by neighborhood and by type of complaint.

The Board also sponsored a series of neighborhood assessments. These included reviews of property code violations, registered complaints, and reviews of indicators of other neighborhood concerns, such as crime counts, traffic accidents, parking violations, fire and EMS calls – involving multiple county departments. In addition, households in the neighborhood were surveyed to obtain citizen ratings of a variety of neighborhood characteristics. The purpose was to identify which neighborhoods most needed resource assistance and what kind. The data also helped the Board convince the state legislature to change the state code to allow inspectors to write violation tickets on the spot, rather than having to go through a considerably more lengthy formal legal process.⁵

⁵ Telephone interview with the Chairman of the Prince William County Board of Supervisors, June 12, 2006 and review of three “Community Assessment” reports, one from 2005 and two from 2006.

Attachment 6-1

Basic Questions To Ask During Program Reviews (See also “Bookmark”)

1. Who is your program intended to serve? Who else is affected by your program?
2. What are the key results that should be expected from your agency/program?
3. What key outcome indicators do you use to track progress in attaining these results?
4. What results do these outcome indicators show for the past several years? For the most recent year, including this one?
5. How do your key results compare to those for other comparable local governments?
6. To what extent have you met previous years' targets? If not, why not?
7. Do you expect to reach your targeted values for the indicators for this year? If not, why not?
8. What major factors influence the results you are trying to achieve? What are you doing to try to address those factors?
9. What actions are you taking that will improve the quality of your services for our citizens?
10. What efficiency (cost-saving) improvements have you implemented and what effects will they have on the quality and effectiveness of your services?
11. What other programs, departments, or organizations provide services that contribute to (influence) the results you are trying to achieve? What is being done to coordinate with these services and avoid duplication?
12. What are the major challenges facing your program/service?
13. What actions do you recommend that the council take to help improve the service for citizens?

