



LEGISLATING FOR RESULTS: *Introduction and Definitions*

A Municipal Action Guide

Introduction

What are these Action Guides and How Will they Help?

Local elected officials are charged with the responsibility for making policy decisions and providing oversight on the actions their of government. They are concerned about the welfare of their community and residents and know they have the responsibility for helping maintain and improve that welfare.

But frequently they are not provided the information they need to fulfill their role in improving the results and service delivery of local governments. Even when that information is available, elected officials often do not have the time or do not always know how to make effective use of it.

These Action Guides were developed, in consultation with local elected officials, to assist elected officials – members of local legislative bodies, such as city, county and town councils, boards, commissioners or supervisors – in getting and using the information they need to best tackle this major responsibility

The overall purpose of these Action Guides is to provide elected officials with suggestions as to specific actions they might take to obtain and then use, information on what residents are getting for their money. Information on results achieved can be used to help:

- Track progress in achieving program and policy results;
- Identify questions that need to be addressed about past and proposed results;
- Improve budgeting decisions and the allocation of scarce public resources;
- Make better policy decisions;
- Encourage the staff to make service improvements;
- Provide incentives to contractors and grantees to improve service results;
- Provide better two-way communications with residents and the media; and
- In strategic planing.

Most actions apply both to those local governments that already have an on-going performance measurement process and those that do not. Most apply whether the government has a line item, object class, or program budget. However, having a program budget that allocates costs to programs will better enable elected officials to link costs to results.

What will you Find in these Action Guides?

The primary theme of Action Guides is to better enable local elected officials to base program and policy decisions on the costs and results of government services on residents and the community. Action Guides do not focus on elected official's role in examining the costs of government services, nor on the physical outputs produced by departments. The focus of Action Guides is primarily on the outcomes and results achieved. This will permit linking those results to expenditures and outputs.

Local governments already commonly track expenditures and outputs. Tracking results is a relatively new activity, except for a few exceptions, such as numbers of crimes reported and traffic fatalities. Even when tracking is done, most local elected officials have limited experience and training in analyzing and using outcome information. Action Guides focus on suggesting specific actions that local elected officials can take to improve the quantity and quality of results information they receive and then use that information to help produce better outcomes for their residents.

Elected officials should not forget that obtaining useful information and making proper use of it requires a partnership with the staff as they provide most of the information. Staff also implement the decisions of elected officials in order to achieve desired results.

GLOSSARY – Definitions for Key Words Used in Action Guides

- **“City”** Refers to a city, town, municipal or village
- **“Council”** The organizing body of a city, town, municipal or village
- **“Departments” and “Agencies”** These words are used interchangeably.
- **“Results” and “Outcomes.”** These words are used interchangeably. Both words refer to the effects of particular government services or programs, on residents and the community. These words do not cover other performance information, such as: (a) amount of funds spent; (b) amount of the physical output produced by government departments, such as the number of miles of road repaired or the number of clients served; or (c) the efficiency of service delivery, usually expressed as the cost per unit of output, e.g., “cost per mile of road repaired” or “cost per client served.”
- **“Outcomes” and “Outputs.”** Distinguishing between outcomes and outputs is one of the major challenges in performance measurement. Outputs are the products or services directly produced by an organization, such as number of lane-miles of roads rehabilitated. Outcomes are the consequences of the government’s actions, such as the resulting ride-ability or safety of the roads.
- **“Residents,” “Customers,” and “Clients.”** These words all refer to persons that are affected, either directly or indirectly, by one or more local government services or programs.
- **“Service” and “Program.”** These words are used interchangeably. Both refer to particular activities, or groups of activities, undertaken by a local government.
- **“Goals,” “Objectives,” and “Mission.”** These all refer to brief statements about the overall purpose(s), the desired results, of an organization or program. The specific outcomes to which a service or program contributes should flow from the mission or objective or goal statements. Note: Sometimes the word “goal” is used instead of the word “target,” as noted below.
- **“Indicator” and “Measure.”** These words are equivalent. They refer to specific measurements that are made to track particular outcomes undertaken by a

local government. Some local governments use “indicator;” others “measures.” We have generally used the word “indicator” in these Briefs.

- **“Targets” and “Goals.”** The future numerical values of individual outcome indicators sought by the agency or program. These values should indicate what results the funds budgeted are expected to produce.
- **“Outcomes” versus “Outcome Indicators.”** Outcomes are the results that a service hopes will result from that service. Outcome indicators are the specific measurements used to measure progress in achieving the outcome. For example, “reducing crime” is an outcome sought by police departments. The outcome indicator usually used to track progress towards this outcome is to track the outcome indicator “crime rates for particular categories of crime.”
- **“Performance Measurement” and “Performance Management.”** Performance measurement refers to a variety of procedures used by governments to track the performance of individual government services and programs. The term encompasses the measurement of outputs, efficiency, and outcomes. These Action Guide focus on the measurement of outcomes, the category of indicators that have in the past been given the least attention by local elected officials. Performance management means the use of performance measurement information in managing the government’s programs.

Sources

The actions included in these guides have been developed with the help of the NLC’s Legislating-For-Results Project Advisory Committee. This Committee provided oversight and review of the documents as well as participated in training events held throughout the country.

The examples of actions taken by local elected officials used in the Action Guides have been obtained from over 25 local governments that have had some history in tracking results information. Local government staff assisted in identifying the examples and a number of elected officials were interviewed to obtain examples.

Legislating for Results Advisory Committee

Co-Chair:

Jackie Nytes, Councilmember, Indianapolis, IN

Co-Chair:

Brian Murphy, Councilmember, Cambridge, MA

Ron Aycock, Executive Director (retired), North Carolina
Association of County Commissioners,
Raleigh, NC

Aaron Azari, Councilmember, Arvada, CO

Del D. Borgsdorf, City Manager, San Jose, CA

Robert Broom, Councilmember, Aurora, CO

Diana Cordray, City Clerk and Treasurer, Carmel, IN

Lee Feldman, City Manager, Palm Bay, FL

Stan Finkelstein, Executive Director, Association of
Washington Cities, Olympia, WA

Myron Frazier, Council President, Southfield, MI

Ron Gonzales, Mayor, San Jose, CA

Jim Haggerton, Councilmember, Tukwila, WA

Martin Jones, Councilmember, Conyers, GA

Michael Lawson, International City-County Management
Association, Washington, DC

Jim Leidgen, Clerk-Treasurer, Jeffersontown, KY

Craig Maher, Councilmember, Wauwatosa, WI

Cynthia Mangini, Councilmember, Enfield, CT

Felicia Moore, Councilmember, Atlanta, GA

Patrick O'Reilly, Councilmember, Scarborough, ME

Ellen Posivach, City Manager, Tarpon Springs, FL

Marilyn Praisner, Commissioner, Montgomery County,
MD

Jean Quan, Councilmember, Oakland, CA

Harry Smith, Mayor, Greenwood, MS

Pamela Syfert, City Manager, Charlotte, NC

Dee Vanderhoef, Councilmember, Iowa City, IA

About Legislating for the Results

The National League of Cities and the Urban Institute, with support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, undertook a two-year effort (November 2005–October 2007) to develop and disseminate educational materials and tools to help local elected officials obtain and use information about the results of government services in helping their citizens.

Most of the attention of good governance has in the past been placed on the executive/administrative part of government. The vital importance of legislative bodies in governing has often been neglected. This is true at the local, as well as state and federal level of government.

Under the guidance of a national local advisory committee, the Urban Institute-NLC team identified and used examples of existing practices of local legislatures around the country to develop a series of Municipal Action Guides and other materials on ways to:

- Obtain more informative, useful, and user-friendly performance information from their government's service agencies;
- Use the performance information to help the local legislatures make resource allocation (including budget) and policy choice decisions; and
- Assist in communicating with their citizens – both in providing more relevant information to citizens and in obtaining helpful information from them.

Building on this work, the National League of Cities will continue to disseminate materials and conduct training and other education seminars on Legislating for Results in future years.

Project Team

Harry Hatry, The Urban Institute, Washington, DC

Katharine Mark, The Urban Institute, Washington, DC

James "Jay" Fountain, Consultant to the Urban Institute,
Washington, DC

Chris Hoene, National League of Cities, Washington, D.C.

Katherine Bates, Consultant to National League of Cities,
Washington, D.C.

