Grading Government
Urban Institute, Mary Kopczynski Winkler

Part I: Grading the District  |  Part II: Grading Cities

First Hour: Grading the District

KOJO NNAMDI: Hi, I'm Kojo Nnamdi. Coming up on Public Interest, are you happy with public transportation in Howard County, feel safe living in Arlington? Is your trash being picked up in a timely manner in Bowie? Everyone has personal stories about these things, but what evidence other than anecdotal do we have about how our local governments are performing overall? How about the more objective performance measurement? Well, in the District of Columbia, the mayor now keeps a scorecard. In Prince William County, there's the Annual Service Effort and Accomplishments Report. And in Montgomery County there's legislation and audit plans to measure performance. What this may all mean to you, after the news.

(News break.)

KOJO NNAMDI: From WAMU at American University in Washington, this is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi. Your neighborhood park in the District of Columbia, is it well-maintained? Do you have access to quality family services if you live, say, in Reston? Yes, you probably have personal anecdotes about situations like that, but how do you really know if your government on the whole is efficient or even effective? How do public administrators keep track of the services they provide, and how do jurisdictions effectively translate that information into use for taxpaying citizens?

City mayors and county executives have historically grappled with these very same questions, and now there are programs designed to hold local governments accountable for their expenditures while, at the same time, focusing on positive outcomes. They're often referred to as performance measurements. But here in the Washington area you're more likely to hear the term scorecards. That's because D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams began an initiative last year to rate certain specific aspects of district services so that the government as a whole could, well, make the grade in the eyes of its residents.

In all, over in Prince William County, the county has just completed its fifth annual service efforts and accomplishments reports. It's an enormous document that entails a variety of performance measurements. And Montgomery County currently has legislation for performance measures, even an audit planned down the road to integrate that program into the day-to-day function of the county government.

So now you're asking, "What do these scorecard systems really mean to me? Aren't they just like PR maneuvers for local government?" Well, let's try to find out during the course of this hour, because joining us in the studio is Mary Kopchinski, a research associate with the public management program of the Urban Institute. Mary, good to have you here.

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: Same here, thank you, Kojo.

KOJO NNAMDI: She is joined by Brenda Donald, who is vice president for municipal reforms with DC Agenda. Hi, Brenda.

BRENDA DONALD: Hi. Thank you.

KOJO NNAMDI: Mary, public managers generally tend to think in terms of the process. Could you give us some examples of goals that are not process based, but results based, and explain the difference, and why that difference is important.
MARY KOPCZYNKI: Sure. Typically, public managers have felt the need to track process indicators partly because they feel that those are the ones that they have the most control over. So, for example, a city manager has much more control over being able to put police on the streets rather than to track public safety as an overall objective, although that may be the result.

We maintain, however, that citizens are ideally concerned with the public safety aspects in their community—how safe do they feel, are crime rates rising—yet the public managers may feel that they cannot control that, given other extenuating circumstances.

KOJO NNAMDI: However, there is some public relations value in emphasizing the processes. I hear, for instance, in the District of Columbia, people complaining about not seeing enough foot patrol persons on the street where they say 20 years ago we used to see a lot more, and they don’t seem to make much of a relationship between that and whether the crime rate is falling or not. The perception is, if there are not a lot of cops on the beat, crime is likely going up.

MARY KOPCZYNKI: That is a deep part of the perception, and what needs to happen—or what we recommend—is that there be a continuum in performance measurement, beginning with linking inputs, the resources or the money, to process or outputs, the products that an agency might provide, and then continuing to link that with intermediate and end outcomes.

KOJO NNAMDI: Brenda Donald, talk a little bit about the fact that performance measurement programs usually—and, I guess, should—incorporate some component of citizen input, and how does DC Agenda work with citizens to determine what our preferences are?

BRENDA DONALD: Great. And the question that you just asked, or the point you just made about the evidence of foot patrols, and the linkage in citizens’ minds to public safety is very key, and an indicator, which is the scorecard that DC Agenda did almost two years ago now—we did a D.C. scorecard that was a citizen-driven performance measurement mechanism, and our tack was really to ask citizens what matters to [them] most, how will [they] know, and what do [they] want to hold government accountable for. And so, when Mary talked about outcomes, that's very true: We always want to look at, well, what is a result of the government performance, and what will their actions do in terms of improving public safety, for example, but also what can a citizen see, feel, or touch, that lets them know that government is responding to their needs, and that they have increased feelings and perceptions of being safe or having high-quality services.

KOJO NNAMDI: Tell us a little bit about the survey that DC Agenda did two years ago: How many citizens did you talk to, and how were they surveyed, how did they receive the surveys?

BRENDA DONALD: Actually, it was not a survey. The D.C. Scorecard was compiled based on survey data that actually the D.C. Control Board did, in 1997; [they] did a comprehensive citizen survey that primarily evaluated how satisfied citizens were with various government services. We took that data, compiled it with some focus-group information and one-on-one interviews with citizens in each of the eight wards to ask them, "What are the things that are most important to you?" And, again, "What do you want to hold government accountable for?" We came up with six different categories. Now, these categories were aligned then with the city administration at the time, under Chief Management Officer Camille Barnett, and [she] identified six categories that she wanted to focus on in terms of goals for city agencies for government performance. And the categories are not surprising: It's health, public safety, public crime, et cetera. We took the data from the citizens’ survey, from the interviews and the focus groups, and then came up with a set of indicators that could be measured with data actually from government performance.

KOJO NNAMDI: Brenda Donald is vice president for municipal programs with DC Agenda. She joins us in the studio to talk about performance measurement by local governments, with Mary Kopchinski, who is a research associate with the public management program of the Urban Institute.

You can join us at 1-800-433-8850. You can e-mail us at pi@WAMU.org. That number—I guess I should give it out more slowly—1-800-433-8850 is the telephone number.

Mary, talk a little bit about Prince William County’s service efforts and accomplishment report. It’s not, I guess, necessarily considered to be a scorecard program, is it?

MARY KOPCZYNKI: Not exactly, but it does fall into this broader rubric of performance measurement. In fact, Prince William has three related efforts that I’d like to just describe briefly. Back in 1989, we started with a strategic planning process, where the board of county supervisors invited or nominated 15 citizens to participate in the county’s commission on the future. The citizens were eventually asked to identify what they wanted Prince William to look like in the year 2010.

A second component is a citizens’ action survey, which has been ongoing since 1993, and the respondents are asked to rate over 57 specific services as well as to provide a general overview of how they perceive quality of life in Prince William County.

KOJO NNAMDI: Now, those 57 specific services were determined by the county, or with any citizen input?

MARY KOPCZYNKI: Prince William has a long history of citizen input, and I believe it’s fair to say that there was some citizen input, as with the strategic planning process.

Then, finally, as you mentioned, the service efforts and accomplishments report has been produced annually since 1994, and it reports on major governmental service areas. It started in 1994, reporting on three areas—police was one of them. And it since expanded in 1999 to 13 service areas.
KOJO NNAMDI: Wait a minute, both lengthy and readable is something that former President Ronald Reagan wouldn't have agreed with at all. If it's more than one page, by readable do you mean that it comes accompanied with a summary, or does it mean that I have to be such an engaged resident that I'm going to go through 150 pages of the book?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: You would. That is a throwback. You would have to be more engaged. But one can go to the Internet and pick on a particular service area, if they're interested in parks and recreation, and in three or four pages you could learn more about that particular area of interest.

KOJO NNAMDI: Because I was going to ask, if the report is that thick, is it counterproductive in some ways, because some people are turned off when they see reports that are too long and have a great deal of fine print. But you're saying it is arranged in such a way that any resident of the county can select that which he or she wants to look at or is interested in and find it.

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: Yes.

KOJO NNAMDI: Okay. Talk about the initiative in Montgomery County.

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: In Montgomery County, there were a couple of useful documents. They do have a shorter four- to six-page annual report that the county executive puts out. It's not an indicators report or a scorecard per se, but it does talk about important outcomes that measure quality of life issues of interest to residents. They also have, going into their second year now, something called the Montgomery County Measures Up Report, and this, like the Prince Williams Service Effort and Accomplishment Report, is a rather lengthy document and would have to be read similarly, targeting specific aspects of interest.

KOJO NNAMDI: What's going on in Montgomery County is likely to be influenced by the experiences in Prince William County and the District?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: I think many of the communities in the local area, including Fairfax County, are really learning from each other and drawing on these efforts. The one point I did want to add, if I can, about the Prince William report, is that the whole point of service efforts' accomplishment area is to link resources to results, and that is a very critical point, and we hope that the District will be moving in that direction as well.

KOJO NNAMDI: How do governments work their budgets around performance measures?

BRENDA DONALD: I was going to say, of course, your listeners can't see, but the D.C. Scorecard was reduced to one page. The one-page format was designed so that the citizens could take a quick look.

KOJO NNAMDI: It is one page, but it is a long page.

BRENDA DONALD: It's a long page, but it's very colorful. Of course, there is the data that backs it up, [which] is quite thick, and we have the same thing as a document that accompanies [the one-page sheet] for those people who are interested in really poring through the hard numbers—we have that. But we did think it was important to put something on one page that people could look at, at a glance, and easily reference.

KOJO NNAMDI: What's going on in Montgomery County is likely to be influenced by the experiences in Prince William County and the District?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: I think many of the communities in the local area, including Fairfax County, are really learning from each other and drawing on these efforts. The one point I did want to add, if I can, about the Prince William report, is that the whole point of service efforts' accomplishment area is to link resources to results, and that is a very critical point, and we hope that the District will be moving in that direction as well.

KOJO NNAMDI: How do governments work their budgets around performance measures?

BRENDA DONALD: Well, the way it should work—and I think a lot of the more stellar efforts around the country, Phoenix, Portland, Prince William County, those who have been doing it for a while, really look at this kind of as a loop, where you have citizens identifying what's important to them, what kind of initiatives, including budget initiatives, they're willing to support which in some cases may be increased revenues, the bad words "tax increases." But if citizens are involved in saying, "These are the things that are most important to us, these are things that we will support," then a responsive government wants to look at allocation of its resources, including funding and personnel and identification of priorities that it thinks are the most important to its citizens, and do the things, as Mary has indicated, will result in the kind of public outcomes in terms of service deliver and improvements to quality of life.

KOJO NNAMDI: Mary, are citizens generally interested in the budget and the budget process?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: I think you need to break the budget process down, make it more simple and usable to the general citizen. I think what matters more, as we've been saying all along, are the results, and sometimes citizens don't care how those results are come by. However, one thing a government can do, and can be more proactive in doing, is really educating citizens about the process. And one of the neat things I found recently—Brenda mentioned Phoenix earlier, but Phoenix has a document called Phoenix Is Your City, and it's a curriculum designed for sixth through eighth graders to instruct them about city services, what the role of the mayor is, how people can volunteer in their communities. And I think this is a really neat way to engage people. And this particular curriculum can be adapted to older people as well.

BRENDA DONALD: It is important to demystify the budget process and to make it so citizens can understand that when they list priorities that they want to know that they're able to pay for them.

KOJO NNAMDI: We're talking about performance measurements of the local jurisdictions in the Washington area. You can join us at 1-800-433-8850. You can e-mail us at pi@WAMU.org. We're going to take a short
KOJO NNAMDI: Okay, now back to the business at hand, performance measurements of local jurisdictions. A conversation you can join at 1-800-433-8850 or e-mail us at pi@WAMU.org. We're talking with Brenda Donald, vice president for municipal programs for the DC Agenda, and Mary Kopchinski, who is research associate with the public management program of the Urban Institute.

Talk a little bit more, Brenda, about the scorecard that Mayor Anthony Williams announced, in which Mayor Anthony Williams announced that his administration had met some two-thirds of its goals it laid out in a well-publicized campaign. Do you feel that the mayor's scorecard is a push in the right direction?

BRENDA DONALD: I definitely believe it's a push in the right direction. And the mayor campaigned on government accountability in his mayoral campaign and talked about doing a scorecard. In fact, at the time DC Agenda was already in the process of developing a scorecard in conjunction with the previous administration. And we met with then-Mayor Elect Williams and apprized him of our scorecard process and the partnership we had with George Washington University and the alliance for redesigning government, National Academy of Public Administration and citizen groups, and asked him if he was interested in our continuing our project and if that would be useful for him.

And, in fact, he said that it would. He liked what we were doing, he saw that it was well under way, and [he said] that when he took office he would assign someone from his administration to work with us, which was absolutely essential, because you have to have access to the data. And I wanted to point out that a lot of the city governments do their scorecards in partnership with independent organizations or citizen groups, and certainly [that] was a model for the first scorecard, the D.C. Scorecard.

So we did work with the mayor's office during that first year to produce our scorecard. The second year the mayor decided that he wanted to do more of an internal report card, and that is the version that has been recently released. And his plan was to tie it to comments and input from the citizen summits that he held during the first year and to also tie it to performance requirements of his agency heads. But the difference between the two scorecards is that ours certainly was an independent, or an outside-of-the-government, kind of look and accountability measure, whereas his scorecard is more of an internal document that identifies priorities and commitments that he expects his agency heads to meet, kind of in evaluating their performance. And so you have a mixed bag of goals and indicators: some that are, as Mary pointed out, more process oriented, and others that are more outcome oriented.

KOJO NNAMDI: Joining us now by telephone is Doctor Abdul Salaam Omar, the mayor's chief of staff in the District of Columbia. Dr. Omar, welcome.

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: Thank you, Kojo. How are you?

KOJO NNAMDI: Fine. You just heard Brenda Donald of DC Agenda giving us a rundown of some of the history of the scorecard. Could you give us a little bit of your understanding of how the mayor's scorecard evolved?

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: I think the mayor's scorecard, like Brenda said, is based on accountability and transparency, that the people of the District of Columbia, the residents, should judge for themselves as to how well we're doing and how much progress we're making. Just to go back about a year ago, the mayor had organized a citizens' summit, where over 4,000 showed up, [and he] asked them what their priorities should be and took those priorities and attached [them] to the budget. So it will not just be a priority about talking about what the city needs, but really should attach dollar numbers to those priorities. And as a result of that, a scorecard came about. A scorecard is a way that, not a particular group or any specific organization, but the citizens of the District of Columbia can see for themselves.

In addition to that scorecard, you have a performance contract with each head of a department. In other words, that the head of a department is responsible for producing those results, and also that will be attached to their contract with the mayor.

KOJO NNAMDI: Now, a couple of questions. If, in fact, an department agency head does not meet the goals and objectives of a scorecard, does that necessarily mean that that individual is not doing his job properly? Can that individual make a case that you, the chief of staff, and the mayor did not provide the support services that that individual needed in order to accomplish that task?

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: That's in fact the case. We look at why a particular director did not meet a specific target in the scorecard—is it because of lack of resources, it is because of things that happened outside the control of that particular agency—and one is evaluated, that either the evaluation will be satisfactory and the agency gets more time and more resources, or that it will be declared that the director did not meet those specific targets and has to meet [them] within another specified time.

If, in fact, the director, like two-thirds of the scorecard indicators have been met, then that will depend on what type of bonuses they get, and what type of salaries they get.

KOJO NNAMDI: What do District residents gain, Dr. Omar, from the scorecard that we didn't have before the existence of the scorecard?

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: Before I answer that I just wanted to get back to what Brenda said in terms of the independent group looking at this scorecard. What we are doing is that we put it on the Web site, we sent it
to every resident of the District of Columbia, and we also put it in the newspapers. And the independent verification and validation are the District residents, and the District residents can see that there is progress, that we are showing progress, that the streets are cleaner, we're opening more after-school programs, we're paving more streets, we're answering the telephones better. We have a long way to go, but our indicators show that the District residents see that this mayor is serious about accountability and about fixing this government and providing services that the residents deserve.

KOJO NNAMDI: If there are District residents who are dissatisfied with the scope of the scorecard, or those who feel that there should be more specific services included in the scorecard, how do they get the opportunity to make that input, and how can they expect that input to be reflected in the next scorecard?

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: At the end of this year, which will be a cycle of two years, we will have another citizens summit where all the citizens will come together and evaluate what we have done in a more thorough way, and also put on the table what they perceive to be—what would they perceive to be services where they should be, or what kind of services that we should deliver or if they were not happy with it they can change it. If they want to ask to stay on course, we'll stay on course, and if there are new challenges that are out there, which I'm sure there are, then we will take on those new challenges. But the fundamental issue here is that the citizens have been heard, those priorities that the citizens have voted for, it has been translated into the budget document, and that document has been translated into a scorecard, and that scorecard is attached to performance contracts, eventually, for all District employees. And the independent verification and validation we invite every resident, every organization, every group, every newspaper to see what we're doing, and measure it, and correct us when we're wrong.

KOJO NNAMDI: Dr. Omar, at this point are there any modifications that you are predicting in the next draft of the scorecard as a result of citizen input or as a result of conversations with managers and employees?

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: One of the things that will be completed by the time the next scorecard is that hopefully all the managers under the management supervisory services—which is new in public service, this type of approach—and all the directors and all these senior people in the government—in fact, all the employees—should have a performance contract. That will be in place by the time we get there. Secondly, we are finding out the more we work in this government, how broken it is and how deteriorated the infrastructure is, that the infrastructure, the streets, the bridges, the processes, the system, and we are trying—we're making progress, but we need to make more progress. We need to be thinking, connecting resources to results, and the results are what count.

KOJO NNAMDI: Dr. Omar, you know that Brenda Donald is in our studio; she is joined by Mary Kopchinski, who is a research associate with the public management program of the Urban Institute. Before I let you go, I have to see if either of them has any questions, suggestions, criticisms, or denunciations of you.

Mary?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: Dr. Omar, I was wondering if you could talk at all about whether the city has any plans to more actively engage citizens, perhaps through conducting neighborhood surveys or perhaps even participating in trained observer processes of physical conditions in the community?

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: Yes, in fact, we do. In fact, we have plans for 39 neighborhood planning meetings from now until June, and this was a result of the citizens' summit, where we have divided into the city 39 quadrants, and going to those 39 neighborhoods and saying, "What would you like to see in your neighborhood, what type of development would you like to see in your neighborhood, what type of things that need to be changed?" And given the resources we have to have a contract with those neighborhoods, the contract between the government, the mayor, and the neighborhood, and to produce those results in the coming two years. The mayor will be attending probably two-thirds of those neighborhood planning committees, and they will be kicking off March 7th.

KOJO NNAMDI: Brenda?

BRENDA DONALD: Thank you. Dr. Omar, hello. We certainly would encourage your office to think about providing some more context to the results that you report, so that citizens will have a handle on whether planting 6,000 new trees—which sounds great, it's a big number, but that's relative to what. How does that compare to the kind of density in other cities, is that a good standard, is that relative to what occurred before.

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: That's a good question, Brenda. And primarily one of the problems in the District government is that data has never been collected, so we don't have a benchmark to go from. And that's very evident in two areas, particularly the tree-planting area, and also the telephone call center, (202) 727-1000. If you don't have anywhere to measure from it, it's difficult to say from what. But we intend to go out to other communities, we intend to see the density of the population, the beautification, what Keeping America Beautiful says about it. But the intent right now is just that it's obvious to everybody out there that we need more trees in the District, we need to replace some of them, we need to put in new ones, and the number is dictated by the amount of funds that are available. But that's a good suggestion, and we need to come up with some benchmark on that.

KOJO NNAMDI: Abdul Salaam Omar is the chief of staff with the mayor of Washington, D.C. Dr. Omar, thank you very much for joining us.

ABDUL SALAAM OMAR: Thank you, Kojo.
KOJO NNAMDI: We are talking about performance measurement of jurisdictions in the Washington area, and how they measure themselves, and exactly what that means to their citizens—whether it means that, in fact, citizens now have more influence over the local government than they did in the past.

You can join us, 1-800-433-8850, or e-mail us at pi@wamu.org. This is Public Interest, I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

Mary Kopchinski, we talked about Prince William County, we talked about Montgomery County; what are other jurisdictions in the Washington area doing? What's going on with Prince George's County, what's going on in Arlington, Fairfax; is anybody else introducing performance measurement standards that citizens can participate in and use as a barometer for how their local government is performing?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: I mentioned earlier that Fairfax County has been involved for some time. And their efforts right now seem to be more internally focused. They'd put out a Performance Measurement Matters quarterly report, which is available on the Web, but I believe that's distributed to most of the city employees. They have a rather extensive effort, training effort to involve employees and to achieve buy-in, which is a very important concept in the idea of performance management. There's often a lot of fear surrounding the use of data or the potential misinterpretation. And Fairfax is really trying to address this, and make agency staff more comfortable with the use of performance data.

KOJO NNAMDI: And speaking of Fairfax, let's go to the phones and talk with Gary in Fairfax, Virginia.

Gary, you're on the air, go ahead please.

CALLER: Hi, Kojo, thanks for taking my call today. I always thought the computer guys would be my first call in to your show; I've been a long-time listener. But I find this particular subject compelling. I've been involved with a number of scorecard efforts, regionally and nationally. And though I no longer have an affiliation with any of those particular projects, and I won't mention any names, I think what's missing from the discussion is that when properly done, a scorecard is more than just a "what did we do," and it's also more than "what we want to do." It frankly becomes a feedback loop for information from within an organization, as well as from without, that drives an organization to certain behaviors.

And oftentimes people get caught up in what we in the industry call lagging indicators, those numbers that we know: How much did I spend, how many people did I have working for me, et cetera, et cetera. We fail to look at the leading indicators, and those indicators so often, those indicators of how well are we doing in maintaining morale, and working towards that, which I think are in many instances directly relatable to the citizens' input. You seldom hear that discussed within the confines of developing scorecards. We want to say, often, "Did we spend that dollar in the right place, yes or no," so we can spend it in the right way for public relations means, but we seldom look at the ability for communications within these scorecarding efforts to have a genuine and beneficial result.

KOJO NNAMDI: Okay. Allow me to have Brenda Donald and Mary Kopchinski respond. These are some of the intangibles of scorecards that Gary is talking about here.

Brenda?

BRENDA DONALD: I agree with the caller's comments, that a scorecard should be part of a feedback loop. In fact, the scorecard that we did, we even showed it within a diagram that started with management training, strategic planning process; a budgeting process, agency accountability, citizen survey—and then an employee survey was also planned—and then the citizen's scorecard. And each would feed into the other to help shape the mission, the focus, the culture, and decisionmaking of the governmental agencies. So I think that's a valid point. And I'm glad you brought it up.

KOJO NNAMDI: Mary?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: I agree. And I think the point is exceptionally well taken. Performance reporting by itself really doesn't guarantee and improve performance, and we all need to recognize that. And if scorecards are not used to improve decisionmaking, improve public accountability, or improve service delivery and performance, they're really not worth the time and effort.

KOJO NNAMDI: And we're going to take a short break, but when we talk back we'll talk about the likely effect that Mayor Williams's scorecard had on citizens in the District of Columbia, or whether it was seen as just a public relations measure that citizens didn't particularly have to pay any attention to, and that the news media should have paid a great deal of attention to.

You can join this conversation on performance measurement and city scorecards by calling 1-800-433-8850, or e-mailing us at pi@wamu.org. Our guests: Brenda Donald, vice president for municipal programs with DC Agenda, and Mary Kopchinski, research associate with the public management program of the Urban Institute. We'll be right back.

(Commercial break.)

KOJO NNAMDI: Cities and counties and how they measure themselves, and how their residents view those performance measurements, a discussion we're having with Brenda Donald of the DC Agenda, she is its vice president for municipal programs; and Mary Kopchinski of the Urban Institute, she is a research associate for its public management program.

You can join us 1-800-433-8850. You can e-mail us at pi@wamu.org.

Any of our local jurisdictions use comparative performance measurement to rate their services, comparing...
MARY KOPCZYNSKI: Yes, there is a local consortium, the ICCMA, the International City County Management Association, [that] has been involved in comparative performance measurement for the past—well, since 1994. Prince William County was one of the initial jurisdictions participating in that effort, and Fairfax County most recently joined that effort.

As I mentioned earlier, in the service efforts and accomplishments report of Prince William County, they are also attempting to make comparisons to other counties within the state of Virginia.

KOJO NNAMDI: Does the District compare itself to any city of similar dimensions?

BRENDA DONALD: The District was involved in the ICCMA performance measures project at one point. I’m not sure that they are now. We attempted to do some comparison with the D.C. Scorecard the DC Agenda issued in 1999, and looked at comparable cities and cities that had comparable data in the categories, and so there was some of that. I know that city government, D.C. government, does, in fact, look at other cities for relative comparisons in terms of their own government performance and decisionmaking. It’s not in this particular version of the scorecard, though.

KOJO NNAMDI: Allow me to go back to the telephones to Frank in St. Leonard, Maryland. Frank, you’re on the air, go ahead, please.

CALLER: Yes, I’d like to make a comment about the measures, the outputs which are external versus internal. And the public is interested in the external measures. Essentially the question is, “Why are we here? Why is the government here?” And the government is here to provide the services. So far as measures, we need to measure what these services are and how we achieve them, how many holes [we] fill on the roads, how soon we deliver a service, how well do we deliver the services. So, again, what I’m trying to say is that in a strategic plan, just outside is what is important, and out of that whatever you do inside is a secondary thing. But the strategic plan should reflect the outside deliverables.

KOJO NNAMDI: In other words, Frank, we citizens don’t care about the process, just deliver us results?

CALLER: Pretty much so. And a proper strategic plan should reflect that, yes.

KOJO NNAMDI: Okay. Any comment, Brenda? Mary?

BRENDA DONALD: Well, there is a value, I think, in identifying internal measures if, in fact, you can link them to outcomes. So, I think the previous caller talked about employee morale, or retention of government employees in an organization where you have a high turnover rate, and you’re not able to fill key positions, that may be an indicator worth mentioning if, in fact, then you can easily for the public demonstrate that by having a well-trained workforce that is up to speed, therefore the results will translate to the citizens.

So the point is that you’ve got to link the process measures with the internal measures to the outcomes so citizens can understand, and it’s important to have those linkages, I think.

KOJO NNAMDI: Something just popped into my head: It may be of absolutely no relevance, but I remember picking up the morning paper and seeing the chairperson of the D.C. school board making the statement that half of the teachers in the school system in the city are not well trained, that they’re not trained enough to carry out the job they’re supposed to do. Is that the kind of thing that ultimately can be involved in a performance measurement if, for instance, a school board does one?

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: Absolutely. We would argue that professional development is perhaps one important intermediate outcome. It may be defined as process by some, but the ultimate question is, what does that professional development lead to, and does it contribute to improved student performance at the end of the day.

KOJO NNAMDI: Again, it has to do with process more than outcome, and as our caller Frank was indicating, we citizens, residents, might not be as interested in the process as we are in the outcome.

Thank you for your call, Frank.

On to Glenn in Frederick. Glenn, you’re on the air. Go ahead, please.

CALLER: Good afternoon, Kojo.

KOJO NNAMDI: Hi, Glenn.

CALLER: I work for Maryland state government, and I had some comments because in state government we have various performance type programs. Specifically, I’m thinking of, it’s more like a quota system, this pay for performance, periodic evaluations of all employees every six months, and while it’s quite specific in terms of what it’s trying to account for and what’s being accomplished, there is a cost in terms of it eats up a tremendous amount of time in terms of keeping track of all the numbers. Managers have to spend a lot of time writing evaluations on employees, and it does eat up some of those dollars in terms of what the money is being spent on. And I think there’s a danger in getting too carried away with these evaluations. Obviously, it’s necessary to periodically do evaluations, but I work in public health fields, and I think that when you’re doing public health, if you’re doing performance evaluations, it’s going to have to have some kind of quota system to measure it. And when you’re not producing widgets, it’s also hard to have quotas in public health. I mean, you’ve all seen what’s happened in managed care when you start applying numbers to things, and the same with policing. I mean, when you’re attaching quotas, numbers of arrests or tickets, nobody likes to do
that sort of thing. So I’m just throwing out a word of caution that there are some needs, but let’s apply some costs and benefits and look at how it will affect benefits to the public.

KOJO NNAMDI: That touches a particular nerve when you talk about the District of Columbia and the controversy over D.C. General Hospital that is occurring at this point, because the ongoing debate is over whether or not, under a plan proposed by the mayor that would limit the inpatient services at the hospital, whether or not the overall health picture of people who don’t have health insurance in the District of Columbia will improve. And I guess that, Brenda, is very hard to break down to raw numbers.

BRENDA DONALD: Well, that is true. But I think in a good performance evaluation system, you have the employees involved in designing the measures that matter to them and that they feel they should be held accountable for as well. This is not just a “got you,” or shouldn’t be just kind of a paper exercise to say, you know, how much did you do in any given period. But it really should be, what is the benefit of your work, and how does that contribute to include outcomes.

And also in terms of employees, I think good performance evaluation systems and scorecard systems indicate where supports are needed, where additional training is needed, and so that it should not be a punitive kind of thing, but an accountability system that everyone can sign on to.

KOJO NNAMDI: Glenn, thank you for your call.

We’ve got an e-mail from Bill in Bethesda, who says, “As a management and planning consultant to municipalities and states, I strongly concur with the development of performance measures that define results for the community, especially those that tie the results to the budget allocation of resources. However, I find that the most common problem is the collection and analysis of agency operational performance measures. Without these, the managers are unable to adequately determine the actions they can take to improve their operational productivity. Could your guests comment on the status of local government collection of internal agency performance measures?”

Mary.

MARY KOPCZYNSKI: Again, I’ll refer to the ICCMA consortium effort, the comparative consortium effort, because that started with a heavy emphasis on internal measures, and I think to some degree still maintains a reasonably heavy emphasis. There has been a push to include more outcomes, to include survey measures. Citizen satisfaction survey measures. But, there is a heavy emphasis on the internal measures, and I think they’re important. As Brenda said earlier, they’re valuable in that they can help explain, when they’re linked appropriately outcomes, why some of the outcomes are the way they are.

KOJO NNAMDI: Martha in Prince William County. Martha, you’re on the air, go ahead please.

CALLER: Thank you. I work with many of the Washington-area local governments, and I want to commend them for what they’re doing to make performance and accountability more transparent to citizens. But, being an observer of these things, I want to put out a plea to your listeners just to remind people that citizens have an important role in getting accountable, responsive government. And even though we’ve made a lot of progress here in the Washington area, there’s still a lot more that can be done. So I would just ask each one of your listeners to go home and take a look at your local government budget, to take a look at the kind of information you’re getting, are you satisfied with it, are they measuring the kinds of things that you think are important, and to again make sure that you’re getting what you’re paying for, and what you expect for the future of your community. So please get involved.

KOJO NNAMDI: Martha, thank you very much for your call.

CALLER: Thank you.

KOJO NNAMDI: This is Public Interest. I’m Kojo Nnamdi.

Martha raises a very important point, however, and that is the extent to which people who tend to complain if we find out all of a sudden that they’re planning to put a roadway through our backyard do not take a general overall interest in the planning process as it takes place. And I guess it’s unreasonable to expect that every single resident or citizen of a community will do precisely that. But, as Martha makes the argument, if there are enough then you will begin to see your own priorities reflected in what happens.

Let’s talk a little bit about what does end up in a scorecard, Brenda. For instance, in the District of Columbia, replacing the Taft Bridge Lions, that was played up big in Mayor Williams’s scorecard. Is that an appropriate goal for a scorecard?

BRENDA DONALD: Well, I know that we received some snickers, but I would argue that, in fact, it could be a good indicator of government accountability. The Taft lions had been removed and hidden away in storage for many years. There were promises that they would be restored and replaced within a certain amount of time. And as a very simple and visible indicator that, yes, in fact, the government is paying attention and is responding and keeping its commitment, that in fact is a likely indicator. Now, what does it translate to in terms of improved quality of life? That’s a question for citizens.

KOJO NNAMDI: Well, for those citizens who like seeing the lions there, that’s good. But the mere size and weight of the lions alone make them a highly visible symbol.

BRENDA DONALD: Correct.

KOJO NNAMDI: And it seems that if an administration can deal with those things that are highly visible, then
KOJO NNAMDI: Brenda, [do] you feel that a citizen-driven scorecard would be a good companion to an official city or jurisdictional scorecard? What is the likelihood that DC Agenda will continue to undertake scorecards on the basis of citizen input?

BRENDA DONALD: Well, we are having conversations with the Urban Institute, the Fund for the City of New York, looking at their model and considering doing more of a community report card that would be at the neighborhood level, perhaps at a ward level, and that might involve some of the techniques Mary just described, where you have citizens not only identifying what's important to them to measure, but involved in the data collection itself, because we think citizen engagement is an important component of any government.

KOJO NNAMDI: Well, Dr. Omar said, not on this program but before, about the neighborhood action forums, that ultimately the city intends to involve 4,000 citizens in these forums. So it would be interesting to compare what comes out of the city's official scorecard in which "4,000 citizens" will ultimately be involved, and what hopefully will ultimately come out of a citizen's scorecard that DC Agenda and other organizations will put together.

Yes, it's something that we'll have to look at in the future, because right now we're out of time. Our thanks to Mary Kopchinski, research associate with the public management program of the Urban Institute, and Brenda Donald, vice president for municipal programs with DC Agenda, and of course you, for your participation.

This has been Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

Second Hour: Grading Cities

KOJO NNAMDI: Hi, I'm Kojo Nnamdi. Coming up on Public Interest: In most transactions we expect to get back the rough equivalent of what we pay. For example, you don't want to shovel out $20,000 for a 1984 Dodge Dart, or $10 for a gallon of milk in the supermarket. This same concept, value for your money, is changing the relationships between governments and their citizens. Citizens are realizing their tax dollars are spent for services, government is now seeking to become more accountable for how that money is spent. It could significantly impact how citizens influence government and how government responds to citizens.

Government performance measurement around the nation, with help from the Urban Institute, after the news.

(News break.)

KOJO NNAMDI: From WAMU at American University in Washington, this is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

You know, local governments are not just providing services that can be loosely equated with the private sector, like trash removal or car inspections, they're also working to improve our quality of life in ways we don't usually notice—that is, unless things go awry, like maintaining public parks or providing police protection. There's always been a kind of bottom line for local government; it comes in the form of the annual budget. But since the early 1930s, city administrators across the country have started to grade themselves on the actual outcomes of their expenditures. It's kind of like the taxpaying citizens are the stockholders in the company, and the major or county executive is the broker. And what is the prospectus? Well, for some cities, it's a performance measurement program, or what some might refer to as a scorecard.

So, listen up, because this is a show just for you. It's a chance to hear how you, citizen, can give meaningful input regarding how government runs, and not just at the voting booth every two or four years. It's also how you, as a taxpaying partner, can more easily keep track of your investment. In this hour, we team up with the Urban Institute for a nationwide examination of performance measurement programs.

Joining us in our Washington Studio, Elaine Morley is senior research associate with the Public Management Program of the Urban Institute.

Elaine, thank you for joining us.

ELAINE MORLEY: Thank you for inviting me.

KOJO NNAMDI: Joining us from the studios of WAMC in Albany, New York, is Jonathan Walters, senior correspondent for Governing magazine. He's also the author of Measuring Up: Governing's Guide to Performance Measurements for Geniuses—that would be me—and Other Public Managers.

Jonathan, thank you for joining us.

JONATHAN WALTERS: Thank you very much, Kojo. That would be me, too.

KOJO NNAMDI: And it may include Scott Bryant who joins us from the studios of KUFC in Los Angeles. Scott is a consultant to city governments on strategic planning and performance measurement. He's the former consultant to city governments on strategic planning and performance measurement.
Scott Bryant, welcome.

SCOTT BRYANT: Thank you, Kojo. It's a pleasure to be here. And I think I am here.

KOJO NNAMDI: Yes, I hope you are there. Good, good.

You too can join us, all of you citizens listening out there, at 1-800-433-8850; all of you other geniuses can e-mail us at pi@WAMU.org.

Scott Bryant, allow me to start with you. Citizens, it seems, too often think of government employees as unmotivated, which leads to the perception all too frequently that their taxpayer dollars are being misused, sometimes outright wasted. Talk about specifically your work with the Colorado State Patrol, and how changing the focus of its responsibilities brought about a change in attitude.

SCOTT BRYANT: Certainly. You know, I think oftentimes what governments tend to do is, they focus on an activity or a process, or sometimes on projects, and they don't look at the outcomes, or what are the results that they're trying to achieve.

And the example from the Colorado State Patrol really comes from the early '80s, where the state patrol was using the traditional strategies of issuing citations, and the way I like to put it is, when state patrol officers got up in the morning and looked at themselves in the mirror, thought about what they were going to do that day, they were going to go out and give out citations. Really a very negative kind of function.

KOJO NNAMDI: Yes, especially from the point of view of me, the driver.

SCOTT BRYANT: Certainly. And when you're dealing with that all day, and you see that as your role, it's not a very positive one. But the purpose or the real reason that you do that is really to protect life, prevent loss of life, and prevent loss of property. And so, by redefining the role of the state patrol officers, now your goal is not to go out and issue so many citations, your goal is to protect life and reduce the loss of life and property. And what that did was, it opened up a whole new realm for [the patrol]. Instead of having just one strategy of issuing citations, they now had a number of strategies. They could work with the highway department to identify and solve highway areas that were poorly designed or poorly maintained that caused accidents. They could do driver education, they could target enforcement in specific areas where they had problems. So, it became a very different approach.

One of the biggest problems that we had with these patrol officers is, they were so motivated that they were working way too much overtime, unpaid overtime, and we were violating the Fair Labor Standards Act.

So, you know, I think public employees—oftentimes they're in the job because they want to make a difference, they're motivated to improve the quality of life. But often they get so stuck into the process orientation that they can't see the results of that.

KOJO NNAMDI: Scott, did the patrol officers themselves in the Colorado State Patrol start to participate more in the process of looking at road design and driver education and signage on the streets themselves—is it because their own perception of what they did for a living changed?

SCOTT BRYANT: Absolutely. They took responsibility: If someone lost their life in their patrol area, they took responsibility for that, and they put a lot of effort into finding out why, and into trying to make sure that that didn't occur again. So, yes, they very much participated in reaching the outcome as opposed to just participating in the process.

KOJO NNAMDI: Jonathan Walters of Governing magazine, you've covered state and local public policy for the past 20 years or so. However, you seem to feel that over the past 10 years, public management has gotten much better, it's become much more professional. What leads you to say that; what changes have you observed?

JONATHAN WALTERS: It's interesting. I've been covering this for a long time, and Scott's comments about the essential attitude of public employees, and the shift in the attitude of the public employees is something that I've witnessed, and it's been developing more intensely in the last 10 years and, I think, with the advent of performance measures.

I think a couple of things are happening. I think politicians—because you can never take politics out of any of this—politicians have begun to realize that good management is good politics; this is especially true at the local level. I mean, if you're a mayor or a city council person, what you want the folks on the street to know and see are results. And so you have a group of politicians who came along and started to understand that when they did programs and policies and budgeting, it couldn't be straight ideological, it couldn't be hunches, it couldn't be whim, it couldn't be pet projects; they needed to really start focusing on delivering. And, at the same time, you had this push on the management side of the public sector in things like total quality management, and management by objective, and the two sort of merged in, I think, a very logical way, which is to begin to push government—and this is happening at all levels, it's not just happening in local government, it's happening at the state and federal level as well—but to push governments to start looking at, what are we actually accomplishing day in and day out.

KOJO NNAMDI: Is that to be distinguished from the political method of politicians getting reelected, and that is the old—if you think about Chicago, the ward heelers, and if you think in other places, people who kind of went around and made sure that certain influential people in certain neighborhoods were taken care of
because those people could round up votes at a particular time? Do you feel that the approach today is more professional, less political?

JONATHAN WALTERS: Yes. But that was also performance measurement, it was just a different kind of performance measurement. You know, you did have ward heelers who were expected to deliver very specific things, and if they didn't they were in trouble. Yes, it has been a whole shift in governance and how localities are governed. And it's pushed folks, I think, to be more professional, more efficient, and less political in how and why they do things.

KOJO NNAMDI: Elaine Morley, what government service tend to be of most concern to citizens from the point of view of the Urban Institute's research?

ELAINE MORLEY: Well, I don't think we've really researched what services are of greatest importance. I think, just speaking more off the cuff, certainly people always seem to care a whole lot about crime, there's a lot of interest in education—those are certainly two of the really big ones. And I think within any given locality, when there's a big problem with a particular service, like snow removal—it's a snowy day here in Washington—that people are probably going to start wondering about when the streets are going to be cleared off. And if there's real trouble in removing this snow, or picking up trash, then that becomes a hot button in a particular community, and people may focus on that.

So it's a combination; I think police and education are always big ones, and whatever seems not to be working too well in a particular community is probably a big focus there.

KOJO NNAMDI: Performance measurements, cities, counties and local jurisdictions, and what that has to do with you, the citizen—whether that means your influence is expanding on local government, or whether it means that they're putting on a show just for you. You can join this conversation at 1-800-433-8850, or you can e-mail us at pi@wamu.org.

Jonathan, could you explain what the Government Accounting Standards Board is, and a proposal that GASB is floating that could make the issue of performance measurement a nationwide phenomenon.

JONATHAN WALTERS: I was afraid you were going to ask me that. You're going to now have a national audience fall asleep simultaneously. The Governmental Accounting Standards Board is a group that essentially sets all the accounting standards for state and local government. In other words, at the end of the year, state and local governments, just like a business, are audited. And in order to get what is considered a clean financial audit they have to report certain things. GASB is flirting with the idea of adding some things to what is asked of state and local governments to report. The really dry boring term for what they're going to be looking at is service efforts and accomplishments, which is an accountant's way to say, what is it that a government is trying to do, and what is it that a government is actually accomplishing.

They're in the process of getting comments from state and local accountants, auditors, financial types on the proposed SCA reporting rules, and folks seem to think that in the next, I don't know, two, three, four years, that this may actually become part of the standard accounting requirements for state and local government.

KOJO NNAMDI: Let's get to the telephones and start with Ken in Bourbon, Indiana. Ken, you are on the air, go ahead please.

CALLER: Yes, I happen to be a three-term city councilman from a small town in northern Indiana, and a lot of the things that happen—a lot of people just don't understand. A lot of the population of our country lives in small towns. The government of small towns is not a full-time system in most cases, as far as councilmen. They go punch a time clock somewhere, and they come home in the evening. And essentially what they do is, they do the best they can to be good citizens in their local community. And there are areas of government that just really beat these local officials to death.

One of them is a prime example in the state of Indiana, when the Clean Water Act went into the state, Indiana kind of fell into line, and then they adopted these standards. The standards were passed down to the little towns. This was an unfunded mandate. By law they had to comply, there was a time frame set, yet no money was allocated. So the taxpayers of this little small community had to essentially spend tremendous amounts, disproportionate amounts of their budget just to try to meet these unfunded mandates. There's also another area that is just—

KOJO NNAMDI: Ken, if you're getting to a question you're going to have to do so quickly, because we're getting to a break.

CALLER: Well, I asked that part. What should small towns do? The other thing is two-mile limits, small towns are also asked to go out and police a two-mile limit outside their city limits. What can they do to keep from spending thousands and thousands of dollars of—when I say policing, I mean, as far as development and everything else, when those two-mile limits will actually never even affect these little communities?

KOJO NNAMDI: Ken, if you'll hold for a second, after this short break we'll try to get an answer for you that does not include the words Andy Griffith or Barney Fife.

You too could join us at 1-800-433-8850. We'll take a short break, we'll be right back.

(News break.)

KOJO NNAMDI: Welcome back to our conversation on performance measurement of cities, counties, and what it means to you, with Scott Bryant, consultant to city governments on strategic planning and...

I don't know, Scott Bryant, do you care to respond to our caller Ken, who talked about what's a small town supposed to do?

SCOTT BRYANT: I think the whole topic of unfunded mandates probably could be another total show. But it does create difficulties for both small towns and large cities, where they're trying to focus on what the community needs, and yet they have this whole level of mandates, both from the federal, state, and county levels often, to finding what they need to do, and what their priorities are. So it certainly works oftentimes against the whole approach of being responsive to your local communities. So I'm not sure I have an answer for Ken, but I have a lot of sympathy.

KOJO NNAMDI: Jonathan?

JONATHAN WALTERS: Well, I can hold out some hope for Ken. One of the potential benefits of focusing on results more than focusing on process and rules and regulations, and the rules that Ken are referring to are stringent requirements for small municipal water plants, that actually don't—you know, are putting out perfectly drinkable water, but the EPA has set this whole overlay of rules and regs on them that they have to meet. If, in fact, the USEPA would, itself—and they're trying to—would itself shift to a more bottom-line, "okay, what product is a locality or state actually ultimately delivering to their citizens and taxpayers" [mindset], then you could avoid a lot of these in some cases very expensive, very redundant, and even nonsensical rules and regulations requiring them to do certain things that may really have or not have ultimate benefit at the tap.

KOJO NNAMDI: Vera Katz.

VERA KATZ: Hello.

KOJO NNAMDI: Could you tell us how long Portland has been in the business of performance measurement?

VERA KATZ: Well, we have a couple of things that we do. One, our report is 10 years old, and we've been doing performance—the other form of performance measurement is about 8 years old. So we've been at it for quite a while.

KOJO NNAMDI: What is the relationship between your performance measurement, and the managers of the agencies in your government?

VERA KATZ: Well, they clearly understand that the performance measurements, and us using benchmarks in comparing ourselves with other cities, is a way for us to identify what perception citizens have about the services that we provide. It helps us also shape our policies, and it helps us shape the kind of resources we may provide to their bureaus, so that they can improve the jobs that they're doing. It is a tool for them, as well as a tool for all of us to hold ourselves accountable.

KOJO NNAMDI: Can those measurements come back to haunt you when it's time for reelection?

VERA KATZ: Good question. And I think that's one of the fears of city managers—we don't have a city manager—but a fear of a lot of the city managers that they would be concerned about what would happen if the trends are going in the wrong direction. And I want to mention that it's the trends that really are important. So if you see the trends going in the wrong direction, then you have to explain it to the community, and then you have to figure out with partners in the community what to do. Benchmarking and performance measurements lead to collaboration, because if you truly want to reshape the kinds of services you're providing and how you're providing them, you're going to need to pull in your county partners, your state partners, your neighborhood partners in the community at large.

KOJO NNAMDI: You should know that we are joined in this conversation by Elaine Morley, Scott Bryant, and Jonathan Walters; any of you can jump in at any point if you have questions or comments of your own. In the meantime, I'll just continue.

ELAINE MORLEY: Actually, I would jump in. I think Vera said some really, really important things...

KOJO NNAMDI: You weren't meant to take that seriously.

ELAINE MORLEY: I'm sorry, Kojo.

KOJO NNAMDI: Go ahead.

ELAINE MORLEY: Some really important points that I had hoped to raise somewhere, so I'm glad she did. The thing about performance measurements is they have to be used. Just measuring things isn't good enough. They are meant—performance measurement systems are meant to help managers manage, to give them feedback to help them make decisions about where they're doing well and where they're not doing well, and when they see, as Vera said, that trends are going down, to try to find out what's happening, why are they not doing well in that particular area. And it's really important and useful to breakdown the performance measurement information by neighborhood, or by district, or by whatever unit makes sense, you know: "I'm doing really well in these three neighborhoods, but my performance is not so good in these two. What can I
learn from these areas where we are doing well and maybe apply those particular procedures or practices in the areas where we're not doing so well."

VERA KATZ: Can I just piggyback on that?

KOJO NNAMDI: Of course, please. Sure.

VERA KATZ: Exactly. Our sample for our services efforts and accomplishment report is large enough so that we break it down by eight neighborhood areas, which are neighborhood associations. And we're able to take a look by neighborhoods, if things are going the wrong way, or if all of a sudden we have a spike going the wrong way, or the right way. We also reward success for our bureau managers if they've finally figured out or we've finally figured out this is what we need to do. And just last year we noticed in one particular neighborhood that has not really been happy with the city; we made a decision to contact them by phone and get back to them, those that replied to the mail survey. And get a little bit more—drill down to get a little bit more specific information on why are they unhappy. And that was very helpful.

KOJO NNAMDI: Madam Mayor, do you see this changing in any fundamental or significant way, the way government works in terms of altering the relationship between government and citizens?

VERA KATZ: Absolutely. We can't and shouldn't do this in a vacuum. These benchmarks belong to the community. They have to tell elected officials and managers what, in fact is important to them, and what they would want us to measure. We have the responsibility to do the work and come back and report to them. We also have the responsibility to bring in the larger community, to check in with them and say, is this the right benchmark, are these the right performance measurements that we're using, should we change them, and if we're not doing very well, does anybody have any recommendations for us.

KOJO NNAMDI: But, as the elected official who is running the city, you obviously come to your job with a certain vision of what you'd like to do. How do you arrange priorities, budget priorities in particular, dividing between your own priorities and those that are indicated by the citizens as a matter of preference on their part?

VERA KATZ: It's an excellent question. And I think if this falls apart—in a lot of communities it falls apart at the budget. The budget should be tied to improving your performance. I have a responsibility to make sure that the basic services are adequately funded. Our crime rate is at a 30-year low. Should I reduce the budget, the police budget? No, we may want to begin thinking of how we do business differently, but I'm not going to reduce the budget. On the other hand, our citizens are concerned about traffic congestion and traffic speeding and management; should I put more money into the transportation bureau? Yes, and in fact, have done so, using not gas tax money—which should be funding this—but our general discretionary funds, because we want to improve the trends.

KOJO NNAMDI: Mayor Katz, to digress maybe for one second, you talked about you wouldn't be reducing the police budget. Regardless of how a performance measurement [issue] comes up, from a politician's standpoint isn't even talking about ever reducing a police budget a kind of political suicide?

VERA KATZ: We've done it. Most communities have had to do it. If your resources are coming short you have to take a look at making some reductions, either across the board or very selectively. But you're going to have to treat your fire bureau and your police bureau pretty fairly on that. I've done that, and by reducing the budget we've had to think about how we're going to do business differently.

KOJO NNAMDI: Mayor Katz—

SCOTT BRYANT: Kojo?

KOJO NNAMDI: I'm sorry, go ahead.

SCOTT BRYANT: Could I just emphasize a couple of things that the mayor started to talk—

KOJO NNAMDI: Scott?

SCOTT BRYANT: Yes.

KOJO NNAMDI: This is Scott Bryant. Go ahead.

SCOTT BRYANT: One issue is that by focusing on results and measuring those results, you foster collaboration. I think that is also very important. You know when most agencies tend to focus on their activities, what they're doing, not on the results of those activities. When you focus on the results you recognize all these other organizations that have that same result as an end that they're trying to achieve, and you collaborate with them. The other thing is, in looking at the budgets, we're still budgeting in most jurisdictions by function, not by outcome, not by what we're trying to achieve. I think as we evolve in performance measurements, we'll see the budget process evolving more to an outcome orientation, where instead of saying we're going to budget for this many police officers, we might say we're going to budget to reduce violent crime this much, or we're going to focus on safety in the community.

KOJO NNAMDI: Jonathan?

JONATHAN WALTERS: Yes, you know, Scott and Vera both make good points, and if you're doing a performance measurement system that is solid and holds up under scrutiny, it can actually give you some political cover when it comes time to make some tough decisions about budgets and where you're going to allocate funds. And as Scott said, if you're really focusing on the ultimate impact of the spending, versus just
looking at it as, we're going to cut the police department or the fire department, you can go to citizens with a much stronger case, and you can actually go to specific interests and departments with a much stronger case for why you're doing what you're doing.

**KOJO NNAMDI:** Mayor Katz, can it be difficult to get the news media interested in performance measurement initiatives?

**VERA KATZ:** Yes, that has really been a sore spot. It is not a sexy issue, it doesn't bleed. And we explain it to them—

**KOJO NNAMDI:** And it's much too often good news.

**VERA KATZ:** Right. And they don't like good news. And we happen to have most of our news, the hard numbers, the perception of citizens about how safe they feel, those are good news. They yawn. And if they do do a story, because we really try to make a special effort to the editorial board and to the reporter to sit down with them, walk them through, they pick out all the negative information, or at least focus in on that. I have a television program. I do the results on a television program. And we have it report back to the council. But, the media—unless it's controversial, unless there's a community out there that is really very concerned about what the findings are, they are really not terribly interested in it. And that's been a problem.

**KOJO NNAMDI:** How about direct communication with your citizens by way of mail, by way of e-mail, and by way of other sources, telephones, and the kind of responses you get from citizens directly on performance measurements?

**VERA KATZ:** I have to be very honest with you, I haven't received a letter or an e-mail specifically on the results of any of our measurements. We do report to [citizens], we make the reports available to them. And what we do is when we go into the neighborhoods on any other issue, we like to check in with them and share with them the information we uncovered during the last year's survey. So that they know what kind of news we have for their neighborhood, and we're very honest with that as well. But I have not received much correspondence from them. If they're happy about the services that they get they usually don't write to us.

**JONATHAN WALTERS:** Citizens are a lot like reporters in that way, aren't they, Vera—unless the news is bad they don't make noise, or they're not interested.

**VERA KATZ:** Right.

**KOJO NNAMDI:** This is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

Allow me to get to the telephone, starting with Mitch in Indianapolis, Indiana. Mitch, you are on the air, go ahead please.

Hi, Mitch, are you there? I don't think that Mitch is there. We'll put Mitch on hold and try to see if we can get Michael in Phoenix, Arizona.

Michael?

**CALLER:** Yes.

**KOJO NNAMDI:** You're on the air, Michael, go ahead please.

**CALLER:** Thank you. I had a question talking about city planning and administration. Are all these management and administrative positions, are they purely elected officials, or is there some kind of educational requirement or history that the council or whoever hires these people look at?

**VERA KATZ:** Are you specifically asking about the bureau managers?

**CALLER:** Correct.

**VERA KATZ:** No. We hire them, they're not elected. Our planning commissions are also selected by the council or by myself. The requirements basically are their resume and the screening that we do when we have the applicants before us.

**KOJO NNAMDI:** Why is it, Michael, [do] you have a resume you want to send someplace?

**JONATHAN WALTERS:** If you made it out of grade school, Michael, we'll take you.

**KOJO NNAMDI:** Michael, thank you very much for your call.

**CALLER:** Thank you.

**KOJO NNAMDI:** On to Richard in Cleveland, Ohio. Richard, go ahead please.

**CALLER:** Hi, I just wanted to say that—well, it's a short comment, and an even shorter question. I was in a meeting where a councilman stood up and said, as so many politicians have said, government can't do everything mainly for the people. And I got up afterwards and disagreed, vehemently explaining that this is a representative democracy, self-government, where citizens send people to do, for ourselves, collectively what we can't do for ourselves individually. So I'm part of the government. I can't build schools, and roads, and hire police and fire departments by myself, so we hire other people to do that with our tax money together.

The question is that schools seem to resist performance evaluation for lots of reasons: parental influence; too many teachers that contribute to create a defective student, and it's difficult to determine which teacher was the problem; lack of standards for teaching, lack of standards for knowledge—
KOJO NNAMDI: Your question, Richard, [is] how do we craft performance measurements for school systems?

CALLER: You read my mind, yes.

KOJO NNAMDI: Allow me to go to Mayor Katz.

VERA KATZ: Well, I authored the Education Reform Act when I was in the legislature, and part of the requirements was, in fact, a report card and measuring exactly what percent of the students have met standards in math or in reading. In our performance measurements, we also measure the performance of students in our school districts. So we hold them accountable, the press holds them accountable, and the school board holds them accountable. Now, I know that's not the case in every community.

KOJO NNAMDI: Richard, you're saying it's different in Cleveland?

CALLER: Well, actually I substitute teach in the city of Lorraine, and I've taught in other school districts and have found that even though there appear to be standards out there, they're not really met in the classroom, that they're cramming for these exams. In Ohio they're still disagreeing over proficiency tests and, in fact, [those tests] were created before there were standards—now they're trying to create the standards. I mean, it's not working.

KOJO NNAMDI: Let me see if I can get another response before the break. Anyone care to respond to that?

JONATHAN WALTERS: Jonathan Walters here. Scott, do you want—I was just going to say, education is one area where it's tough to do measurement well. Plus, this country, and I think you've seen this by the Bush education proposal, we're going a little test crazy. I think there are ways, intelligent ways, to measure a kid's scholastic aptitude and what he's doing. The problem is there's a whole lot that influences that outcome, and it's tough to lay it at the feet of teachers, school superintendents or principals, or parents.

KOJO NNAMDI: And I'm afraid we are running out of time in this segment so far. Vera Katz is the mayor of Portland, Oregon; she joined us in this segment.

Mayor Katz, thank you for joining us.

VERA KATZ: Thank you.

KOJO NNAMDI: We will continue our conversation with Elaine Morley, Jonathan Walters, and Scott Bryant after this short break. You can join us, 1-800-433-8850. We'll be right back.

(Commercial and news break.)

KOJO NNAMDI: In our continuing series with the Urban Institute on America's cities, today we focus on performance measurement in cities and counties around the nation, with Elaine Morley, senior research associate with the Public Management Program of the Urban Institute. She joins us in our Washington studio; Jonathan Walters, senior correspondent for Governing magazine, and author of Measuring Up: Governing's Guide to Performance Measurement for Geniuses and Public Managers, joining us from Albany, New York; and joining us from the studios of KUFC in Los Angeles, California, Scott Bryant, consultant to city governments on strategic planning and performance measurement. He is the former director of strategic management for Long Beach, California.

Scott, these performance measurement systems and scorecards constitute an attempt by government to report to citizens on what is presumably an easy-to-understand manner, kind of a compromise maybe between that 400-page budget book and, well, nothing. But what are the challenges that jurisdiction face when honing down this material and selecting what to include?

SCOTT BRYANT: I think there are several big challenges. One is changing the mentality of the local government because, again, I think the focus tends to be on all of the different activities, and not the outcomes. And citizens just are not interested in those activities. It's like reporting how many tires you put on the car. You know, what citizens really are interested in is what difference did that make in [their] communities or in [their] lives, what value did you create through your efforts. And it's difficult to narrow in on that value. I think that's one challenge.

I think another challenge is trying to separate all the different things that might impact those outcomes. As we discussed earlier, there are a lot of things that affect student achievement. Pretty much with any other outcome that a local government might report on, whether it's violent crime, or gang activity, or the quality of the streets, there are a lot of different factors that affect that. And so trying to focus in on those that the government can have some control over is another challenge.

KOJO NNAMDI: Elaine?

ELAINE MORLEY: Yes, you can also do some things to make presentation of data more interesting. We mentioned comparative performance data report, and Vera Katz compares in Portland—compares with, I think, six other cities. You can use bar charts to show your city's performance compared to their performance, make it easier to grasp. One thing that's really effective, again—earlier we spoke about the need to show data for different neighborhoods—is if you show data on maps, and have shading and show which communities are rating highest in street cleanliness, or which have the worst crime rates, or what have you, that kind of presentation is useful.

KOJO NNAMDI: Jonathan?
JONATHAN WALTERS: Comparison seems to really get folks' attention, and I think that's one of the most powerful ways to communicate this stuff: "How is my neighborhood doing compared to that neighborhood, or how does my city stack up next to the other city." It's also, though, what makes folks—public sector officials—in a lot of places the most reluctant to get into this. When they find out that their performance is actually going to be directly compared with St. Louis' performance, is going to be compared to Minneapolis' performance, that's when they start to get a little nervous.

KOJO NNAMDI: They start saying, you don't really understand how things are. They're a lot different, or why we're so different.

JONATHAN WALTERS: Yes, we have a much tougher job than you have there.

KOJO NNAMDI: Tom in Dayton, Ohio. You're on the air, Tom. Go ahead please.

CALLER: Thank you very much. I really appreciate you having this topic. I'm a consultant and I work with labor groups, public employees, and management groups who are doing, among other things, this kind of activity. The point that I wanted to make is that this is incredibly valuable for the public employees who have been beaten about the head and shoulders for the past 15 or 20 years, I think, really going all the way back to the Reagan administration, when we were taught that government is the problem and not the solution, and the various efforts now to deal with privatization and managed competition in government. Public employees have been demoralized, and this is a way, as somebody said earlier, to foster cooperation and to really get them involved in a solution to the problem and in measuring what it is they do, and actually figuring out how to improve once those measurements are taken. Those are the people who are the experts and who can really add some value.

KOJO NNAMDI: But, Tom, allow me to raise this question with you, and with our panelists: You bring out one of the problems with performance management, performance measurement, and that is perception. If every time we see performance measurement we see how well the city or the county and its employees are doing in our benefit; does that not affect credibility when people say, "Look, this is just the government putting out a schmooze PR job on us, when, in fact, we don't think that things are going that well"?

CALLER: Well, there are a couple of things. Number one, I think you have to be honest. Where governments are not doing well, the politicians and the managers have to be courageous enough to say that they're not doing well.

KOJO NNAMDI: How about if they say, "Our employees are not up to scratch, they're not well qualified, and they're not working very hard"?

CALLER: They can say that, but then it's also incumbent upon them to do something about it and take whatever employee development measures they need to do in order to make sure that their employees are top-notch. The reality, Kojo, is that people—there is nothing that government does today that cannot be done by the private sector. And public employees, at least the ones that I deal with here in Ohio, are painfully aware of that, and they understand that what used to be a cushy job where there was infinite job security, that's no longer the case. So they are motivated. And I think this has been a good development: They are motivated to deliver the kind of quality services and products to their customers in the same way that the private sector is.

KOJO NNAMDI: Jonathan Walters, you said earlier that you see an increasing level of professionalism in management; is that also reflected in overall employee performance, and is it, maybe, in part as a result of performance measurement?

JONATHAN WALTERS: Tom raises a really good point, and it goes back to what Scott mentioned as far as the Colorado State Police and the sort of pride they take in their job and the different attitude they approach their jobs with now that there's a different focus, and now that they're actually being—you know, they're being given an opportunity to perform. And you've seen this in city after city after city, where public employees, you know, slug away day in and day out. They get very little recognition for what they do. Nobody ever really evaluates their ultimate impact. And all of a sudden, you've seen this in cities like Indianapolis, which was sort of the bellwether of this, all of a sudden you have an administration that comes in and says, "Okay, we're going to start really taking a hard look at what you guys are accomplishing at the street level." And it really does have quite a positive impact on the attitude and the performance of public employees. You can see it.

KOJO NNAMDI: Okay, Tom, thank you very much for your call.

Let's move on now, look who's back, Mitch in Indianapolis, Indiana. Mitch, you're on the air. Go ahead please.

CALLER: Thanks, Kojo, thank you very much for the great show you're putting on. I want to make a couple of observations. I did a lot of—my name is Mitch Robe, I did much of the work on activity based costing in Indianapolis that was just reference on performance measures, et cetera. First of all, costing is really important as a basis for performance measures, and the costing of services is pretty tough and takes a great deal of effort. The commitment required to do this kind of work is very substantial by the entire organization, and not really well understood, I think, by the public or the news media. Government accounting traditionally simply doesn't—cost doesn't matter, there's no balance sheet.

That flows into another comment on a guy by the name of Jay Fountain. Your comments on GASB, tremendous, but Jay Fountain as an individual has fought this battle for years with GASB and others.

SCOTT BRYANT: Jay is a staff member of GASB's who has been pushing the service efforts and
accomplishments reporting.

KOJO NNAMDI: Okay.

CALLER: Right, and just does a tremendous job.

And, lastly, I guess I would like to add that I think the Internet has an opportunity to really, once these budgets are broadcast or narrowcast on the Internet, I think the Internet really has an opportunity to change the way people interact with their governments and use this information more effectively, allowing people to get the kind of feedback more effectively that the mayor of Portland did talk about. I wonder if your guests would comment on the role they see the Internet playing in taking this outside of the confines of city hall, and really giving the public an opportunity to see those budgets and interact with them and make judgments.

KOJO NNAMDI: Mitch, thank you very much.

Jonathan, would you like to respond?

JONATHAN WALTERS: Oh, this is on the Internet stuff?

KOJO NNAMDI: Yes.

JONATHAN WALTERS: You're talking to a guy who barely knows how to turn on his computer.

KOJO NNAMDI: In that case, Elaine?

ELAINE MORLEY: Well, I think that's exactly the point. A lot of people surf the Web for fun, and they would probably do this. And there are some people who, again, barely know how to turn their computers on. There are certain income inequalities in terms of who has access to computers. And, yes, we can go to the public library and get on a computer, but is somebody who has a 40-hour-a-week job or more and a family to take care of going to spend their spare time doing it? So there's a great deal of promise, and it can have a big role. But I think it's not a completely equitable role in terms of who is going to be involved through it.

JONATHAN WALTERS: My flipness aside, there is a way that government is connecting with citizens through technology, and that is actually providing services. Now, that may ultimately spill over into this broader area of performance measurement, and I think it could. I think once you see citizens getting comfortable doing things like renewing their licenses or trying to find out how to get a building permit online, it could then expand to this broader area. So, how are we doing?

KOJO NNAMDI: Mitch, thank you for your call. This is Public Interest, I am Kojo Nnamdi.

On to Bill, who is near Holland, Michigan. Bill, you're on the air, go ahead please.

CALLER: Yes. I've been listening to this very interesting conversation, and I was just curious as to whether or not Elaine or any of you have looked at the Baldridge national quality criteria and how well that serves as an umbrella or a framework to pull all these concepts together.

KOJO NNAMDI: Elaine?

ELAINE MORLEY: I haven't really looked at it. I'm aware of the Baldridge Awards, but I am not familiar enough with the criteria to really answer that.

CALLER: For example, I'm working with a large inner-city school district now [that is] using the education version of the criteria, and it's a holistic way in which they not only have to develop better performance measures and deal with the fact that, yes, there are standardized tests, and there are good and bad things about that, but they have to deal with the whole stakeholder issue, and results are very, very heavily weighted categories, but they are within the context of an entire framework of how you plan, how you lead, how customer focused you are, and so on.

KOJO NNAMDI: Okay. Bill, thank you very much for your call.

CALLER: Sure.

KOJO NNAMDI: On to Michael in Washington, D.C. Michael, you're on the air, go ahead please.

CALLER: Thank you, Kojo. My name is Mike Lawson, I'm the director of the ITMA Center for Performance Measurement. And one of the areas in the jurisdictions that participate in our program—one of the very exciting areas—is the use of performance measures in the governance process; that is, not only setting budget, but how even city council members, county supervisors, interact with each other in order to set public priorities. And I would like the panelists to go into a little bit further the issue of governance, setting budgets, broad policies for local jurisdiction.

KOJO NNAMDI: Scott Bryant?

SCOTT BRYANT: Yes, I think that is a very important use of performance measurements. And looking at both where your issues are and where you're making progress, and then determining whether or not the strategies that you have in place—some of your strategies could be policy, and some of them could be budget allocations—whether or not those are achieving the results that you're wanting to obtain. I think that's a very powerful use in both determining and setting policy direction and in allocating resources to use a performance indicator. It's a good guide for both of those processes.

KOJO NNAMDI: Elaine Morley, Jonathan Walters, do performance measurement scorecards have to be
related to goals, or can they just report on conditions?

ELAINE MORLEY: They don’t necessarily have to relate to specific goals. There are services that are being provided with a general goal in mind, whether it’s spoken or unspoken: providing police services because you want to control the crime rate, reduce the crime rate, what have you. So you can measure what governments are—the results of government actions.

JONATHAN WALTERS: And I would say something like clean parks is both a goal and a condition.

ELAINE MORLEY: Absolutely, yes.

JONATHAN WALTERS: I mean, frequently they line right up.

KOJO NNAMDI: Frequently they intersect.

Since Jonathan had mentioned earlier about the computers and somebody asked about the Internet, we should tell you that on Public Interest this coming Tuesday, our Tech Tuesday broadcast, is on e-government: exactly how much governments are getting into the use of the Internet and just what you can accomplish, and what can be expected in the future.

I’m afraid, for this hour, we’re just about out of time. So thanks to Elaine Morley, senior research associated with the Public Management Program of the Urban Institute; Jonathan Walters, senior correspondent for Governing magazine, and author of Measuring Up: Governing’s Guide to Performance Measurement for Geniuses and Other Public Managers; Scott Bryant, consultant to city governments on strategic planning and performance measurement, and the former director of strategic management for Long Beach, California. Our thanks to all of you for joining us....

Our ongoing thanks to the Urban Institute for its participation in this series on American cities. This has been Public Interest. I’m Kojo Nnamdi.

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