

A Case for the Development of the Southeastern Practitioners Network on Local Government Performance Measurement

Statement of Principles

Members of the Southeastern Practitioners' Network on Local Government Performance Measurement ("the Southeastern Network") believe that measuring and reporting on the performance of local government is essential to increasing accountability, improving performance and engaging members of the public in the affairs of the cities and towns where they live.

We believe that local government performance measurement cannot be and should not be solely the province of local government officials. There is an intrinsic value to involving the public and independent public interest organizations in this process. Working together, practitioners from within and outside of local government can develop best practices that produce performance measurement systems based on reliable, credible data that aid government officials and citizens alike.

Who We Are

Members of the Southeastern Network include both local government officials and organizations that use data to measure and evaluate the performance of local government entities in their cities and towns.

A Historical Perspective on Local Government Performance Measurement

Since the Progressive Era, local governments have been the focus of efforts to measure performance as a means of both improving management and increasing accountability. At the turn of the last century, civic leaders in cities across the nation organized independent bureaus of municipal research to reform inefficient – and often corrupt – local governments. More recently, efforts to "reinvent" local government have emphasized the need for accurate and timely data to assist public managers in meeting service delivery needs ranging from fighting crime to filling potholes.

At both its beginnings and now, local government performance measurement has been conducted both internally and externally. Local governments have sought to track and monitor their own performance. External organizations have also attempted to collect information about performance – often using independent sources of information to check the claims of the local government.

Despite the lengthy history of local government performance measurement, it is neither uniform in its application nor are there commonly accepted standards when it comes to its practice. In many cities, there are no formal means of assessing local government performance. In some cities, local governments do have some form of self-assessment and in other cities external organizations may engage in formal or ad hoc reporting on performance. Even where a performance measurement system and reporting is in place, there is wide variation in the method for measuring and/or reporting on performance and there are no agreed upon indicators for measurement across jurisdictions.

There has also been relatively little interaction between those government officials who measure performance internally and those external organizations that do the same.

The result has been that local government performance measurement initiatives have gone through a series of fits and starts. Few local governments and fewer still external organizations have sustained their efforts over a long period of time.

To a large extent, the sustainability and success of internal performance measurement initiatives have depended on politics. “[M]odern governmental performance measurement (initiatives) ... are likely to remain significant practices exactly as long as they remain relevant to the political agenda.”¹

While measurement merely for the sake of data collection has never won political support, those efforts that have produced greater accountability or real reform have been politically popular. A recent example has been the success of New York’s COMPSTAT program, designed to regularly measure and monitor crime trends: the program has been hailed by many as a critical component of the city’s crime reduction efforts over the last decade.

But in most cases, the sustainability of internal performance measurement initiatives has depended greatly on the support of political leadership. As leadership changes, support for the initiatives has frequently waned.

¹ Daniel Williams, “Measuring Government in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Public Administration Review*, November 2003.

What's Different Now?

A series of developments over the last decade has given new impetus to local government performance measurement initiatives. These developments increase the opportunity for sustaining efforts at local government performance measurement and potentially institutionalizing its role in local governance.

The most important developments have been improvements in and greater access to technology.

Past efforts at performance measurement at the local level have been hampered by the lack of easy access to reliable data. The increased use of personal computers, laptops and handheld devices in local government and the development of specialized software to manage and report data have made internal performance measurement much easier. Fundamentally, the COMPSTAT process of analyzing crime trends is not very different than what police departments have done for more than a century: crime data once collected manually and displayed with pins on a map can now be collected through patrol car based laptops and mapped using sophisticated GIS programs. The difference is in the ability to do it in a more timely manner at less cost in time and resources.

The development of 311 systems – unified call centers to handle non-emergency complaints in the same manner that 911 centers receive emergency complaints – has created another important, relatively easy to access source of data on local government performance.

The Internet is also creating new expectations for local government when it comes to both transparency and accountability. An entire generation now believes that most information should be one to two clicks away on the Internet. Information that may have been hidden in reports, buried on shelves in a library is now suddenly accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from one's own home. As more and more information from federal and state governments is available, cities will be expected to meet the same standard. Where local government agencies don't directly provide the information, the combination of freedom of information laws and the ease of creating a "Google-able" website will allow individuals or non-governmental organizations to easily fill the vacuum.

In addition to these technologically driven changes, there are increasing incentives for local government to engage in performance measurement.

There is a growing literature suggesting a "back to basics" approach to local economic development. While many cities have relied on special economic

development programs or tax breaks to attract or retain businesses and jobs, business leaders have frequently indicated that what they are really look for is the basics – a well-run local government. Similarly, public opinion research suggests that the public believes that “effective government” is the most important factor as well.

If performance measurement and management becomes a critical component of economic development policy – as it has, in some cities, in the area of crime control – competition for growth will drive more cities toward performance measurement.

The Governmental Accounting Standards Board's recent decision to move performance reporting to its technical agenda is likely to ultimately lead to more local governments engaging in systematic performance measurement as well.

The Development of Regional Practitioners Networks and Assessment of the Need for the Southeastern Network

In the absence of clear national standards and in the face of technological and policy shifts that make sustainable efforts at local government performance measurement both more possible and attractive, those individuals and organizations that already engage in the process can play an important role in helping one and other and helping other cities and organizations new to the effort.

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has funded a series of initiatives to encourage the involvement of the public in local government performance measurement. More recently, it has provided seed funding for the development of regional practitioner networks in the Northwest, Midwest and New England.

In 2006, the Sloan Foundation awarded a grant to the Community Research Council (CRC), a Chattanooga Tennessee based non-profit organization to explore the potential for the development of a regional network in the Southeast.² Over the last six months, CRC staff conducted a dozen interviews with officials from local governments and local non-profit organizations in Birmingham, Durham, Knoxville, Lauderdale, Florida, Louisville, Memphis, Miami-Dade, Mobile, Nashville and Sarasota to assess both the need for, and potential role, of a practitioners network.

² CRC had previously conducted an analysis, with support of the Sloan Foundation, of citizen perspectives on local government performance measurement in Chattanooga. In addition, CRC's President had previously served as City Finance Officer in Chattanooga: in that capacity, he secured funding from the National Center for Civic Innovation for the City's first ever public report on performance.

Based on these interviews, CRC identified an initial set of issues where a practitioners network could play an important and valuable role:

How to Determine the Best Measures of Local Government Performance

One of the most important questions that both local governments and outside organizations face is “what to count?” Network participants may benefit from the collective knowledge of participating entities with respect to developing measures that are easiest/most difficult to standardize and compare. Additionally, it may be helpful for network members to share experiences in dealing with differences in scale in service delivery, population, fiscal capacity, etc. Some cities have also been able to effectively implement a reporting system that integrates technology across different jurisdictions.

Sarasota, Florida

Sarasota Openly Plans For Excellence (SCOPE) views engaging the community in the indicators process (rather than enforcing governmental accountability) as its primary mission. To this end, SCOPE implemented a five-year community-based planning effort that resulted in an indicators framework of major subject areas: civic participation, culture and recreation, the economy, health and medical care, learning, the natural environment, the social environment and transportation. These subject areas were developed through informal meetings with residents in addition to more formalized subject area sessions attended by field experts. The list of funding partners has since expanded to include several local governments in the county and the United Way. During this initiative’s five-year existence, SCOPE has produced five annual Report Cards through this initiative. With continued input from the community, SCOPE is currently in the process of revising the indicators framework based on four major topic areas: natural environment, built environment, economic environment and social environment.

Other cities have made substantial progress in standardizing their performance measures so that results are comparable to other cities in the region and across the nation. Standardization of data across jurisdictions may be another important function of a practitioners’ network. Many jurisdictions collect data with different standards for population definition, collection techniques, data aggregation/disaggregation and report formats. Standardizing methods of data collection and

report formats would allow for cross-jurisdictional evaluation of government performance, allowing for an additional level of comparison of peer cities and an enhanced ability to communicate success and accountability.

Lauderhill, Florida

As part of its first ever Performance Measurement Report, Lauderhill Florida included comparable data for thirteen other cities in Broward County. While other performance reports have utilized benchmark data, Lauderhill's report went one step further: Lauderhill officials used trained observers to measure conditions on streets and parks and the effectiveness of code enforcement in Lauderhill and in the other Broward County jurisdictions.

How to Translate Data Collection into Performance Measurement

Some cities that have now implemented 311 systems have not been able to take the data collected and use it for actual measurement of performance. Other cities have made 311 data the centerpiece of their larger efforts at performance measurement. The practitioners network could be a forum for information sharing on how to take existing data sources – including citizen driven complaint information from 311 and 911 systems – and use the data to measure performance. Similarly, it may be possible to explore the use of data collected by 211 systems – usually focused on resource information referral in the area of social services – as well.

Mobile Municipal Information Systems

The City of Mobile has a relatively advanced performance measurement system that is integrated with the non-emergency call center. Mobile Information Systems has implemented CitySmart, a performance measurement and accountability system based on Baltimore's CitiStat measurement system. This framework was very recently implemented (October 2006) and involves all "public-serving" departments in the start-up phase, although eventually every city department will participate as the initiative is brought to scale.

CitySmart meetings occur once per week, and are attended by the Mayor, the Executive Directors of Finance, Administration, Human Resources and Public Services, the Law Department, the Chief of Staff, the CitySmart Analyst and the directors and relevant managers of the attending departments. Departments attend on a rotating schedule once every two weeks, although some of the major departments have their own internal meetings every week. The Police Department reviews two precincts per week on a rotating basis, while the Fire Department reviews two divisions per week on a rotating basis.

Attending departments are required to submit what will be presented one week prior to the meeting. The CitySmart Analyst will then work with the department to create a graphic representation of the data to be reviewed at the session. The CitySmart sessions normally focus on one of three issues: personnel, service request orders, or any issue that requires evaluation or was requested by the administration over the past two-week period,

How to Ensure the Integrity of Performance Measurement through Data Accuracy

The strength and value of performance measurement systems is dependent on the accuracy of the data being used and reported on. Some cities have addressed this issue by putting into place audit protocols before relying on certain internally collected data. Data accuracy is also an important issue for the relationship between external organizations and government entities that measure performance – external organizations often don't trust self reported government data and government officials question the validity of external data.

How to Use Technology to Limit the Cost and Maximize the Benefits of Performance Measurement

Some cities and organizations have mastered the use of technology to develop accountability systems, others have not. Participants may benefit from the

collective knowledge of the network with regard to employing technology for the evaluation of processes such as vendor selection and purchasing. Additionally, useful knowledge in dealing with technology updates, implementing scalable systems, and integrating systems and ensuring cross-system communication/interface (i.e. 311 systems and cellular communications technology, data collection and reporting systems, 311 systems and web-based submission and reporting technology) may be helpful to network participants who are struggling with evolving technologies.

How to Create Buy-in From Key Players in the Accountability System

Internal performance measurement initiatives are sometimes thwarted by a lack of support from key players inside of the government. Lack of executive support is a major impediment to internalization. When a city's leadership is not committed to performance measurement, department heads can freely ignore efforts at

Knoxville, Tennessee

Knoxville is currently in the beginning stages of a comprehensive strategic planning effort that will utilize indicators that feed from the City's 311 system and relevant service departments. This new accountability effort has originated from the City's executive leadership. Top-down buy-in is key to any accountability process that requires the involvement and performance of departmental, mid-level and service-level managers. Executive leadership can greatly increase chances of success by modeling commitment to accountability in the beginning stages of planning.

enhancing internal accountability. Departmental resistance can be aggressive or passive, through deception or outright noncompliance. Some cities may benefit from the experience of network participants who have managed to mitigate or eliminate obstacles to internalization. Local government officials may also benefit from thinking strategically about how to overcome these obstacles with the assistance of non-governmental organizations that can act as allies in performance measurement efforts.

How to Engage the Public and Community Based Organizations in the Measurement Process

Members of the public can play an important role in the development of local government accountability systems and may be a valuable resource for neighborhood-based data collection and reporting. In different cities, there are varying degrees of interaction between local government and members of the public and community-based organizations. Network participants may benefit from the experience of other participating entities with respect to the development of a framework for organized community comment on governmental performance, for community-based data collection and reporting (either through the 311 system or through alternate means) and for community indicators that can be used to feed into enterprise-wide or departmental strategic plans. Specifically, network participants can benefit from lessons learned in different cities on the use of survey and focus group research in identifying indicators of import to the public, as well as to government officials.

Salisbury, North Carolina

Salisbury, North Carolina used funding from the National Center for Civic Innovation for a citywide customer satisfaction mail survey that was sent to 1,100 customers and returned at a 38% response rate. The survey instrument itself contained about 40 questions about satisfaction with a wide range of products and services offered by the city.

The second round of NCCI funding was used for conducting multi-phase focus group research. For this phase of data collection, three constituencies were targeted: business leaders, neighborhood associations/non-profit organizations and a demographic and socioeconomic cross-section of citizens. The first hour of the focus group was devoted to asking participants what they felt a good customer service experience looked like, regardless of whether the delivery was implemented through the public, private or non-profit sectors. The remainder of the sessions covered the desired format of the performance report, using performance reports from other jurisdictions as possible models. This information was then used to develop a report that would be informative yet easily read and understood by the general public.

How to Use Customer Service Evaluation to Improve Performance

One area of performance measurement where members of the public must be involved is in assessing local governmental customer service. Some cities possess robust customer satisfaction evaluation systems with complete feedback loops that facilitate high levels of responsiveness. Other cities are in the beginning stages of implementing customer service evaluation systems, and still others are in the pre-planning stage. Network participants may benefit from the knowledge of other cities by learning about how to develop usable customer services measures and survey instruments that can reliably capture them, implement practical data collection methods, employ useful analytical techniques, and use customer service information to realign programs to improve service.

MetroCall 311

MetroCall 311 is the non-emergency call center that serves the Louisville - Jefferson County area. The center has been in operation for seventeen years, and is one of the first true 311 call centers in the country.

MetroCall 311 has implemented a system of customer satisfaction with several components. The call center has an active "mystery caller" program in which customer service is measured by evaluators who call in to the system. These callers evaluate call center responses in terms of demeanor, response times and follow-up are measured and reported back to call center and city leadership.

Reporting Results: Translating Performance to the Public

Some cities and organizations have fully developed performance reporting campaigns that penetrate virtually every medium available. Other cities have extreme difficulty in communicating their performance to external customers. Some network participants may benefit from the experience of other entities that have been able to effectively craft and disseminate their accomplishments by creatively working through various media, establishing a report format that is readable and easily understood, and educating the public with regard to what information is available, what it means, where to find it and when it will be available

Durham Department of Budget and Management Services

In Durham, performance information is disseminated to the public in several ways. Performance information is published annually in the budget document as well as in an annual performance report document that is published and distributed to all of the newspaper subscribers in the city (50,000 households). The annual performance report document is also distributed to the local libraries and presented in community meetings. Performance information is also presented on "City Hall This Week", a weekly show on government-funded television. Additionally, performance information is presented on the local government's web page.

Durham has a high number of community-based groups and initiatives that, in one way or another, function to measure and report on local government performance. One important initiative is a community-based accountability project that is a partnership between the city, the county and the community. Durham has over 200 neighborhood associations and an Inner Neighborhood Council (INC) that is a coalition of all the neighborhood associations in the city. The INC meets once per month and leads one of the performance outcome sessions. Universities and non-profits participate, and join based on their interests and focused outcomes desired for each area. The county has begun to require non-profits that receive county funding to participate in this process. The school system participates, as well as a number of grant programs in which funding is provided to non-profits for general purpose projects and community development initiatives. For example, Partners Against Crime, a community group originally created out of the local law enforcement block grant funds, has evolved into a group that meets once per month on everything from violent crime to illegal dumping. City representatives attend the monthly meetings and present statistics and performance to the group.

The local press can also potentially play a significant role in the translation of governmental performance to the local citizenry. Reporters in several cities in this study indicated, however, that there were a series of obstacles to effective coverage of government performance information.

- In some cases, overall coverage of local government is limited by the number of governments in a given metropolitan area served by one media market.
- High rates of staff turnover prevent the necessary development of expertise in performance measurement and the formation of relationships that facilitate information exchange between the press and public officials. This lack of content knowledge and information networks often result in infrequent or inadequate coverage of local government performance.

- Recent corporatization of local newspaper organizations have emphasized the financial bottom line over in-depth reporting, so that reporters that remain on staff are often overburdened with many assignments that take priority over issues of local government performance.
- Obtaining data from public organizations is often a difficult and labor-intensive activity. Reporters are also concerned that government and non-government agencies with specific agenda may skew information to their benefit or refuse to release sensitive data.
- Organizations that do agree to release data often do not have the resources necessary to compile it into a workable format, and frequently charge fees for this service.

Despite these obstacles, most members of the public rely on media coverage for learning about what local government is or is not doing. The Network could work with the press to identify ways to overcome these obstacles and improve local reporting on performance measurement.

Strategic Plan Development and Governmental Accountability

Very few cities were found to have a comprehensive strategic planning process in place that uses measures based on goals that feed into the mission in a system of continuous improvement. Performance initiatives in some cities may benefit from the knowledge of network participants that have implemented accountability systems (whether comprehensive or not) based on higher-level strategic goals at the enterprise (city) or departmental level.

Nashville Results Matter

Results Matter is a four-year old comprehensive strategic planning/performance measurement initiative implemented through the Office of Management and Budget/Finance Department of Nashville Metropolitan Government. This government is one of the few local entities with a comprehensive strategic planning process in place. Approximately 95% of non-school Metro budget dollars are covered by strategic plans that include agency-wide mission, goals and program measures that penetrate to ground level operations through reallocated performance budgets and program-aligned personnel management systems.

The development of strategic plans is facilitated through the “Black Belt” model, where internal facilitators lead the leadership and front-line staff of each department through the planning process. Once plans are developed, they go through content, Metro-wide and Mayoral review before they are cleared for implementation. Once cleared, departmental budgets are reallocated to a performance budgeting structure based on the framework of the strategic plan.

What the Network Will Do

Initially, the Southeastern Network will provide the following resources for its members in addressing the issues outlined above:

Annual Conference and Workshops

The Network will organize an annual one-day conference with workshops to address the above topics. The conference will include both regional and national practitioners and scholars to speak on these issues.

Website and Listserv

The Network will have a web presence, providing a one-stop source of information on best practices and new innovations on areas of interest to practitioners. In addition to the website, members will be able to participate in a listserv.

Expand the Network

Founding members of the network will actively seek to involve other cities and organizations that already have performance measurement systems or projects, as well as cities and organizations that are just beginning these efforts.

Peer-to-Peer Technical Assistance

Members of the Network will participate in a system of peer-to-peer technical assistance. Network members will be able to gain on site technical assistance from practitioners engaged in best practices in their own jurisdiction.

How the Network Will Work

The Southeastern Network will be governed by a seven-member steering committee of local government and other officials. The Southeastern Network will be staffed by the Chattanooga-based Community Research Council.

Organizations will be asked to make annual contributions determined by a sliding scale based on the size of the organization and/or jurisdiction. In addition, there will be fees associated with participation in the annual conference and to take advantage of peer-to-peer technical assistance, although both programs will be subsidized by annual contributions and outside grants.