



**INVEST IN WHAT WORKS
LOCAL MONEYBALL FOR GOVERNMENT CASE STUDY**

Seattle: Measuring Outcomes to Improve Outcomes

September 21, 2015

On February 17, 2015, Mayor Ed Murray of Seattle announced the launch of a government performance dashboard and an open budget website to improve the city’s accountability and transparency efforts. During his 2015 State of the City Address, Mayor Murray recognized Seattle’s on-going need to measure and improve government performance given the city’s expected growth pattern. His commitment to the use of data and evidence supports his vision for Seattle as a “Safe, Affordable, Vibrant, Interconnected and Innovative City for All.” He stated, “If Seattleites are to have confidence that City Hall can meet today’s challenges they must be able to measure the city’s performance....”¹ Following the mayor’s public commitment to using data and evidence rather than traditions, Seattle has taken several steps to implement his vision, including two key initiatives:

- [Performance Seattle](#), the city’s performance dashboard, which displays real time data to capture the city’s progress on achieving 81 performance standards and goals outlined in performance plans developed by city departments²; and
- [Open Budget Seattle](#) which is a part of the mayor’s commitment to improving transparency in the city’s budget-setting process reflecting the mayor’s policy agenda for basing budgetary decisions on measurable outcomes.³

Taken together, both of these efforts encourage the city to set more targeted goals, improve tracking of progress, leverage performance with fiscal resources, and ultimately,

¹ Information in this section comes from the City of Seattle, “Mayor delivers ‘State of the City’ address,” accessed at <http://murray.seattle.gov/mayor-delivers-state-of-the-city-address/#sthash.9BkLr8x5.dpuf>.

² For more information on Performance Seattle, see <https://performance.seattle.gov>.

³ For more information on Open Budget Seattle, see <http://openbudget.seattle.gov/#/>.

achieve better outcomes for its citizens.⁴ This case study highlights how these initiatives are improving city services for Seattle’s citizens.

The success of these efforts to date is clear. For example, the evidence and data-driven approach taken by the Seattle Department for Early Learning and Education has reaped significant gains. The Families and Education Levy demonstrates the potential performance improvements reflected in data-driven approaches. Seattle’s Levy has accomplished the following⁵:

- Increased the number of students served by a [Levy summer learning program](#) to 1,500 students served by July 2015⁶;
- Increased the percentage of 4-year-old children in city-supported preschool classrooms on track to meet kindergarten readiness expectations⁷;
- Provided health services to 1,500 students through [Levy-funded school-based health centers](#)⁸; and
- Increased attendance at Homework Help sessions by 10 percent over the 2014 academic year for a total of 12,400 attendees⁹.

Performance Seattle

[Performance Seattle](#) is a dashboard that tracks key performance indicators (KPIs) in the areas of Public Safety, Utilities and Environment, Transportation, Housing, Human services and Education, Community and Economic Development, Operations and Innovation, and Parks, Recreation, Library and Arts.

At launch, the dashboard included performance metrics outlined by nine city departments, and will eventually monitor indicators outlined by 28 department performance plans.¹⁰ Progress toward these indicators is marked by “achieved,” “on

⁴ This information is taken from personal correspondence with City leaders.

⁵ For more information on the Families and Education Levy program, see <http://www.seattle.gov/education/about-us/about-the-levy>. For more results from 2014- 2015 (mid-year), see Seattle Department of Early Learning and Education, <http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OFE/Results/Reports/Mid-year/14-15%20FEL%20Mid-YearReportOnePager.pdf>.

⁶ For more information on this KPI, see <https://performance.seattle.gov/stat/goals/q248-ga4i/uxeh-r5qu/vtb5-jth4>.

⁷ For more information on this KPI, see <https://performance.seattle.gov/stat/goals/q248-ga4i/uxeh-r5qu/rff-f5re>.

⁸ For more information on this KPI, see <https://performance.seattle.gov/stat/goals/q248-ga4i/uxeh-r5qu/eye6-z8zh>.

⁹ For more information on this KPI, see <https://performance.seattle.gov/stat/goals/mfyh-i4i9/4q79-v3a2/gvgx-q5uy>.

¹⁰ Information in this section comes from the City of Seattle, “Mayor Murray’s State of the City speech as prepared” accessed at <http://murray.seattle.gov/mayor-murrays-state-of-the-city-speech-as-prepared/#sthash.pQB5jn3M.dpuf>.

track,” “near target,” or “needs improvement.” In addition to tracking progress toward achieving performance standards, Performance Seattle lists additional information about each indicator including:

- General information about the target;
- Why the target is important;
- Metrics used for evaluation;
- Strategies and programs aimed at meeting the goal
- Historical trends, visuals, and maps; and
- Links to more information.

As of August 10, 2015, 81 KPIs were posted on the dashboard. Of these, 58 KPIs have been identified as “achieved,” “on track,” “near target,” or “needs improvement.” The other 23 KPIs are output indicators meaning they don’t have targets or goals—they include language such as “track percentage of…” or “increase.”

Of the 58 KPIs identified on the dashboard, Seattle has made the following progress:

- 6 percent of KPIs have been achieved in 2015 - all related to education;
- 62 percent of KPIs are on track for achievement;
- 16 percent of KPIs are near their target; and
- 16 percent of KPIs need improvement.¹¹

Performance Seattle in Action: Utility Discount Program for Low Income Households

In 2014, Mayor Murray set a goal to double enrollment in the [Utility Discount Program](#) from 14,000 to 28,000 by the end of 2018. In January 2014, it was estimated that 72,000 Seattle households could be eligible for the program. The initiative offers rate assistance to Seattle Public Utilities and Seattle City Light customers with incomes below 70 percent of the state median income. The assistance program provides a 50 percent discount for water, wastewater, and solid waste pickup services and a 60 percent discount for electrical services. This program demonstrates the mayor’s commitment to affordability.¹²

The program met its 2014 target of enrolling 16,800 households. By the end of 2015, the city hopes to enroll an additional 2,800 households. City leaders cite three strategies that have led to this upward trend:

- Recruiting and enrolling more people by getting the word out about the program;
- Improving the enrollment process via an online application and streamlining

¹¹ These percentages were calculated by Results for America staff based on performance achievement as of August 10 2015, for more information visit <https://performance.seattle.gov>.

¹² Information in this section comes from the City of Seattle, “Performance Seattle” accessed at <https://performance.seattle.gov/stat/goals/8tdg-dkwe/jdy4-g2ge/bkag-rm2c>.

- automatic qualifications for households enrolled in other benefit programs; and
- Retaining customers by extending the timeline for re-certification from 18 months to two years.¹³

Performance Seattle in Action: SeaStat

After a crime spike in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood in 2014, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) piloted a new program to reduce crime and improve public safety. Launched in 2014, [SeaStat](#) is aimed at quickly addressing crime hotspots based on analysis of crime data and community reports of incidents. During the pilot stage in 2014, the data reflected a 13 percent increase in overall crime compared to the same eight month period in 2013. Data from SeaStat helped police anticipate and predict when and where crimes were likely to occur, thus informing SPD’s policing strategies.

SeaStat has shown some success in improving outcomes for city residents. The city credits SeaStat with helping to reduce burglaries by 26 percent at the end of 2014.¹⁴

SeaStat has also contributed to:

- A 25 percent decrease in robberies on Capitol Hill;
- A 40 percent decrease in robberies in the Rainier Valley;
- A 12 percent decrease in car thefts; and
- A 16 percent decrease in car prowls.¹⁵

The SPD meets bi-monthly with staff at other agencies to review the data and develop strategies to reduce crime. These meetings help staff assess what works, and develop alternatives if they are not.¹⁶ SeaStat has helped the police department to deploy resources smartly and effectively. Seattle is one of a growing number of cities across the country using data-driven strategies in their police departments.¹⁷

Although Seattle has a large amount of data to help create and track KPIs, city leaders have cited the need to develop a data-driven policy framework moving forward. Major barriers to implementing an ideal framework, however, include the varying amounts of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Information in this section comes from the City of Seattle, “SeaStat” accessed at <http://www.seattle.gov/police/seastat/>. For more information on SeaStat crime data, see <http://www.seattle.gov/police/Seastat/default.htm>.

¹⁵ These data come from the City of Seattle, “Mayor Murray’s State of the City speech as prepared” accessed at <http://murray.seattle.gov/mayor-murrays-state-of-the-city-speech-as-prepared/#sthash.pQB5jn3M.dpuf>.

¹⁶ Information for this section comes from the SPD Blotter, “SeaStat: What is it? And how policy using it to disrupt crime trends,” accessed at <http://spdblotter.seattle.gov/2014/09/17/seastat-what-is-it-and-how-are-police-using-it-to-disrupt-crime-trends/>.

¹⁷ Information in this section comes from *The Seattle Times*, “Police credit SeaStat with drop in crime at end of year,” accessed at <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/police-credit-seastat-with-drop-in-crime-at-end-of-year/>.

data, quality of data collected across departments and a lack of interdepartmental coordination.

Open Budget Seattle

Mayor Murray's 2015-2016 budget proposal included a commitment to begin paying for performance. The budget proposal referred to this initiative as "prudent financial management" that increases transparency, enhances innovation, and improves government organization.¹⁸ A key component of this proposal is its commitment to using data, evidence, and outcomes – not tradition – to drive government functions and to shift toward a performance-based accounting system that pays for better outcomes.¹⁹

[Open Budget Seattle](#) tracks two city budget streams: the operating budget and capital budget, which amount to \$6 billion annually. Open Budget breaks down each funding stream into various subcategories so website visitors can compare spending on different services and projects. The website also displays historical budget data.²⁰

Open Budget Seattle in Action: Performance-Based Contracting in Senior Care and Anti-Hunger Programs

In 2014, Mayor Murray announced the need for performance and results-driven contracts from service providers that address critical needs with the highest impact. In 2015, the Human Services Department (HSD) shifted \$4,267,406 toward outcomes-based contracts in two areas: food and meal assistance and senior centers. This shift demonstrates the government's commitment to allocating public resources in effective programs.²¹ Seattle hopes to increase the number of outcome-based contracts moving forward.²²

¹⁸ Information from the City of Seattle, "Murray Proposes 2015-2016 Budget," accessed at <http://murray.seattle.gov/murray-proposes-2015-16-budget/#sthash.ItcEYEP4.dpbs>.

¹⁹ Information about the City's budget reforms come from *The Seattle Times*, "Mayor unveils budget, wants performance-based accounting," <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mayor-unveils-budget-wants-performance-based-accounting/>.

²⁰ Information in this section comes from the City of Seattle, "2015-2016 Budget Highlights factsheet accessed at <http://murray.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/budget-highlights-9-22-final-v4.pdf>.

²¹ Information in this section comes from the Human Services Department, "Seattle Human Services Department Announces \$4.2 million investment in senior and anti-hunger programs," accessed at <http://humaninterests.seattle.gov/2014/11/24/seattle-human-services-department-announces-4-2-million-investment-in-senior-and-anti-hunger-programs/>. For further information on grantees and awards, see http://coshumaninterests.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/20141124_2014-Seniors-Center-and-Food-and-Meals-RFI-Awards.pdf.

²² This information comes from Human Services Department, "Seattle Human Services Department Announces \$4.2 million investment in senior and anti-hunger programs," accessed at <http://humaninterests.seattle.gov/2014/11/24/seattle-human-services-department-announces-4-2-million-investment-in-senior-and-anti-hunger-programs/>.

Open Data Portal

Collecting and reporting accurate data is a key component of making sound budgetary decisions. Innovative cities have also taken steps to make that data open and transparent to the public so that citizens can hold government accountable and can help solve problems using that data.²³

Although Seattle does not have an open data policy codified through executive or legislative action, it has an [Open Data Portal](#). Launched in 2010 under the leadership of the city's former Chief Technology Office, the portal provides public access to datasets generated by the government.²⁴

Open Data Portal in Action: Hack the Commute

In March 2015, Seattle residents leveraged 150 transportation-related datasets available on the portal during a “Hack the Commute” competition to design applications and tools to improve commutes across the city. Data experts, coders, innovators, and activists developed tech-based tools to help commuters identify faster travel routes that were multi-modal, more efficient, and safer. The Open Data portal demonstrates the potential for data to improve commutes and increase safety at relatively low costs.²⁵

Conclusion

Seattle is working to transform itself into a data-driven city with a robust performance management system. Current efforts like Performance Seattle and Open Budget Seattle are complimented by other efforts including open data initiatives, CitiStat (slated for implementation in 2016) and data-driven budgetary decisions. These strides in data and transparency show that local government policies and programs can make measurable improvements in people's lives.²⁶

²³ Information in this section comes from the Sunlight Foundation, “Open Data Policy Guidelines,” accessed at <http://sunlightfoundation.com/opendataguidelines/>. For more information on Local Open Data, see <http://sunlightfoundation.com/policy/local/>.

²⁴ Information on this section comes from Socrata, “How Seattle Built an Economy of Service,” accessed at <http://www.socrata.com/stories/city-seattle/>.

²⁵ Information in this section come from the City of Seattle, “Hack the Commute” accessed at <http://hackthecommuter.seattle.gov/#sthash.SyxkcHiX.0j17qF1i.dpbs>.

²⁶ Information in this section comes from personal correspondence with City leaders.

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About the Invest in What Works Policy Series

This report is part of Results for America’s Invest in What Works Policy Series, which provides ideas and supporting research to policymakers to drive public funds toward evidence-based, results-driven solutions. Results for America is improving outcomes for young people, their families, and communities by shifting public resources toward evidence-based, results-driven solutions. We are doing this by building a strong, bipartisan coalition to support investing in what works; developing and advancing the next generation of evidence-based, results-driven practices, policies, and programs; and supporting leaders at all levels of government to invest in what works.

