

## CASE STUDY

To Better Serve Residents, **Atlanta** Recreated its Performance Management System to First Meet the Needs of City Departments



**THE CHALLENGE:** The City of Atlanta needed to overhaul its approach to performance management when the existing performance management system was no longer delivering the desired and expected results.

**THE APPROACH:** Former Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed's [Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance](#) reinstated and reimagined the city's performance management system in late 2012. The City placed departmental staff at the center of the effort and focused foremost on how data collection and review could help city staff better deliver services and respond to the needs of residents. This unique approach was in stark contrast to traditional performance management systems, which focus on first serving the needs of the Mayor and government agency leaders.

**THE RESULTS:** Since 2012, Atlanta's Performance Management system has helped produce significant improvements in city service delivery across many government departments, including a 38% and 41% increase in the ontime completion of service requests in the Department of Public Works and the Department of Watershed Management, respectively.

**RESULTS**  
FOR AMERICA

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## INTRODUCTION

The City of Atlanta overhauled its approach to performance management in 2011 when it was no longer delivering the expected results.

In late 2012, former Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed's [Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance](#) launched a citywide effort to reestablish and maintain a performance management system that would meet the needs of city departments and help staff serve city residents more effectively and efficiently.

This work was led by Matt Malament, who served as the Director of the Atlanta Mayor's Office of Innovation and Performance and a Results for America Local Government Fellow. Part of his role was overseeing the Budget and Performance Team and the Special Projects and Innovation Team, which are comprised of 13 staff members including five who are responsible for the city's performance management system.

In order to overcome previous barriers, the new initiative reengineered how the previous performance management system had been developed and implemented by first forming strong relationships with city staff and asking how a performance management system could help them better serve city residents.

By starting with the needs of city departments first, and working from there to develop a larger, more robust system to track their progress towards citywide goals over time, the Atlanta Mayor's Office of Innovation and Performance was able to develop trust, relevance, and buy-in with city staff to ensure applicability across the government.

## THE CHALLENGE

Upon entering office in January 2010, former Atlanta Mayor Reed and his leadership team lacked important performance and trend data and, as a result, had to make several assumptions when making policy decisions. This was due to the absence of an active performance management system that was tied to strategic goals and outcomes for city government. Atlanta's city agency leaders were tasked with making smart investments in order to improve residents' wellbeing, yet the lack of consistently relevant and actionable data hampered their ability to clearly understand and communicate how they were serving the needs of Atlanta residents. Previous attempts to develop and integrate a citywide performance management system under prior Mayoral administrations had failed because they proved to be adversarial, cumbersome, and limited in their usefulness across stakeholders.

**Performance management**, as defined by the U.S. Office of Performance Management, is the systematic process by which an agency involves its employees, as individuals and members of a group, in improving organizational effectiveness in the accomplishment of agency mission and goals.<sup>1</sup>

### **Performance management includes:**

- Planning work and setting expectations.
- Continually monitoring performance.
- Developing the capacity to perform.
- Periodically rating performance in a summary fashion.
- Rewarding good performance.

## THE APPROACH

In late 2012, a small internal effort was launched by former Mayor Reed's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance to create an effective and sustainable performance management system. This time, the approach would place city departmental staff at the center of the effort by focusing on how data collection and review could help them better deliver services and respond to the needs of residents. Initially, the team had to overcome departmental resistance due to a general fatigue from past performance management efforts and doubts about the project's relevance.

Atlanta's Innovation Delivery and Performance team uses the following four-step approach in its work with each city department:

1. Review previously established metrics in Atlanta and research metrics used in other jurisdictions;
2. Engage in an iterative process with city department staff before arriving at an initial set of metrics that are relevant and timely for departments to track;
3. Work together, sometimes for over a year, to establish data collection processes; and
4. Continue to maintain relationships with departments, serving as a resource and helping to troubleshoot data challenges over time.

“ A strong performance management strategy enables me, and the individuals serving on my leadership team, to continually improve operations and ensure that the highest level of performance is realized. However, performance management alone is not enough. To ensure the highest level of success for our City, it is critical that performance management is part of an overall framework focused on driving innovation in City government and results for our citizens. ”

— **KASIM REED**  
Former Mayor  
of Atlanta





## THE APPROACH (CONTINUED)

Beginning with the Atlanta Departments of Public Works, Police, Fire, and Parks, which had continued to track performance over time as part of their regular processes, Atlanta's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance was able to develop examples of how its performance management system was serving city staff and residents. These examples were then used when speaking with other city departments about the potential benefits of using data collection and review to improve city services.

Over time, more and more departments saw their peers produce tangible success by working with the Mayor's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance to collect and use data points that were timely and relevant to their work to help drive operational performance. As a result, over the next five years, over 20 city departments and agencies began regularly and actively participating in the city's performance management system.

Central to the Mayor's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance team's success was building relationships, being flexible, and developing consistent communication channels. First, they emphasized relationships over data and focused on helping departments solve their challenges, rather than collect

data. Regular lunches, in person meetings, and ride-alongs with city staff helped the team get to know their colleagues and identify departmental goals and common challenges. For example, by participating in ride-alongs with the Fire Department, the team was able to identify and address operational issues that were delaying the amount of time it took staff to leave the station after alarms were sounded.

Second, they employed a flexible and pragmatic approach to working with departments. For example, they were willing to work with each department, no matter their level of readiness, in order to accomplish the shared goal of developing a robust set of metrics to collaboratively shed light on and solve operational challenges. In one instance, a department had no data analysts on staff and, instead, had tasked an administrative assistant with being the data liaison for the department. By working in partnership with the Innovation Delivery and Performance team, the department was able to develop relevant metrics and a data collection methodology and, over time, the department chose to hire a data analyst to enhance their operational capacity.

Lastly, the team developed varied communication channels to regularly deliver relevant performance data to different stakeholders.

## THE APPROACH (CONTINUED)

### Multiple Uses for Performance Data

- Monthly meetings led by the Mayor's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance with one to three departments to discuss metrics and troubleshoot issues. These optional yet well-attended "performance roundtables" are held to help departmental staff understand what the data shows is happening within their departments and help drive performance and problem solving among colleagues. Every city agency has the opportunity to participate.
- Monthly Cabinet briefings are an opportunity for city agency leaders to share data with the Mayor and other city leaders on departmental progress toward reaching citywide goals. This, in turn, allows city leadership to examine systemic trends and determine potential policy and programmatic efforts to support underperforming initiatives. During Cabinet briefings, former Director Malament typically presented three to six metrics and reviews their performance. Commissioners are then asked to discuss how they had improved performance or what they were doing to improve performance. The Mayor then provides specific direction around the level of performance improvement he would like to see and the timeframe.
- Monthly performance memos on policy significant topics are drafted for the Mayor by the Innovation Delivery and Performance team outlining top trends across the city. These performance memos for the Mayor were only instituted after departmental performance management data and review meetings proved useful.

## TIPS FOR REPLICATION

- **Relationships are Key:** Performance management staff must build trust and rapport with the staff responsible for providing data—likely middle managers and data analysts. Also ensure department leadership is brought into the process. Most importantly, put the relationship first and worry about performance management second.
- **Be Flexible and Practical:** Do not let perfect be the enemy of good. The data will never be perfect, so focus on moving the ball forward rather than waiting for 100% of the information. Defer to departments about the most important metrics for their needs.
- **Do Not be Afraid to Iterate:** Especially in the beginning, metrics and tactics will likely need to be adjusted on a regular basis to achieve useful information.
- **Keep the Work Timely, Relevant, and Positive:** Staff engage when the work focuses on metrics and challenges that are interesting and important to them. Focusing on how to help troubleshoot and problem solve helps build a collaborative environment.
- **Develop Strategic Communication Channels:** Identify how to best deliver performance data to various stakeholders. By tailoring to their needs, performance data will be relevant and engaging.
- **Track Outputs Rather than Outcomes:** While outcomes help to identify progress toward overarching goals, such as improved well being, they are difficult to hold departments accountable for due to the many external forces that impact outcomes. Departments can control outputs, such as the percentage of eligible children served, more easily. Identify those outputs that lead to desirable outcomes.

## THE RESULTS

Over the past five years, Atlanta's Innovation Delivery and Performance team has established a performance management system that is trusted, relevant and used by all 20 city departments to improve city services.

This is evident in the:

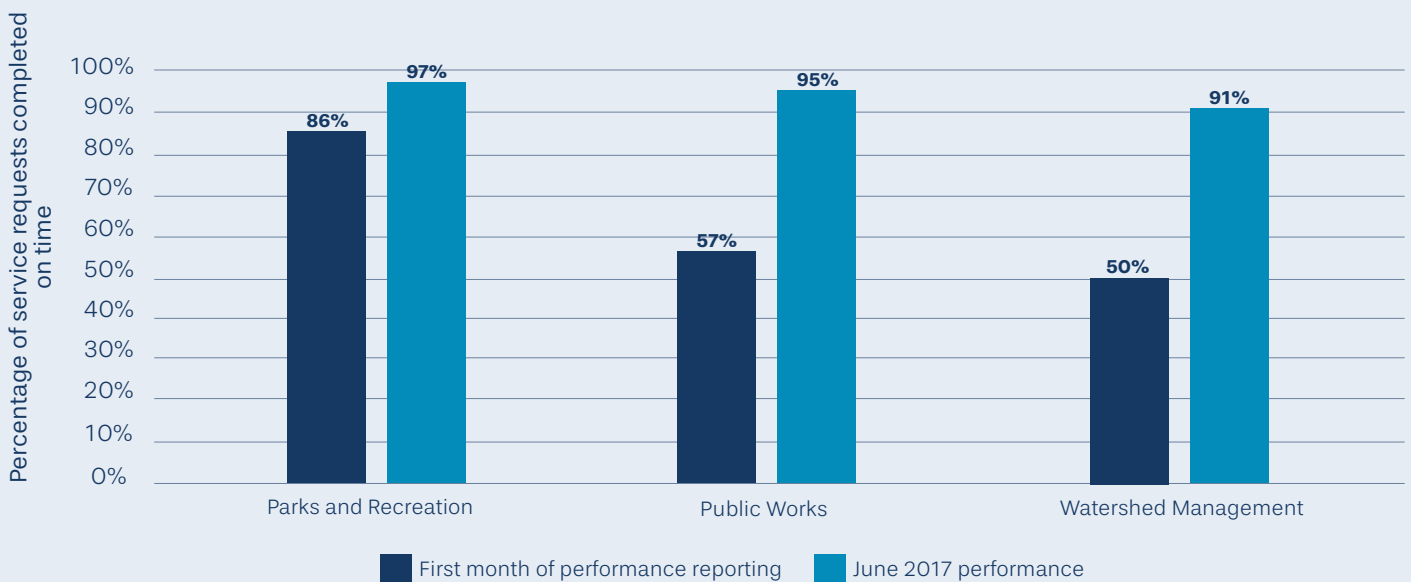
- *voluntary* monthly submission of performance management data from each department to the Mayor's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance;
- high attendance at all levels of city staff at *voluntary* performance roundtables; and
- fact that each of the 20 city departments *voluntarily* repurposed available vacant positions and carved out money to employ a data analyst in their own department to further support this work because they recognized the value in these positions.

The use of performance management by city departments has helped staff improve response and completion times for city services, directly

impacting residents. For example, the Atlanta's Department of Public Works and Department of Watershed Management moved from 57% and 50% of service requests completed on time during their first month of performance reporting to 95% and 91%, respectively, as of June 2017.<sup>2</sup>

In both cases, the Mayor's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance worked with the departments to establish metrics that focus on the most important results that each department is responsible for delivering, along with a regular reporting schedule for these metrics. Each department then pushes reporting on these metrics out to all levels of the organization and all the way to the front line, including at plants and facilities throughout the city. This allows employees to receive weekly feedback on how their performance is affecting overall departmental performance, which helps to instill a performance-based culture in these areas. In addition, the Mayor's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance engages with the departments on specific performance challenges that require additional analytics work to solve, such as how to best distribute bucket trucks throughout the city to fix street lights.

### IMPROVEMENTS SUPPORTED THROUGH PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



SOURCE: CITY OF ATLANTA 2016 PERFORMANCE REPORT

## THE RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Performance management has transformed how Atlanta city government operates and how it communicates with the public. For example, each year, Mayoral priorities such as public safety, infrastructure, and economic performance metrics are tracked and made available in the [City of Atlanta Performance Report](#), which enables the city to clearly communicate how they are serving Atlanta residents. In 2015 the Innovation Delivery and Performance team launched new open data websites which enable the public to access financial and departmental data:

- [Focus on Results \(FOR\) Atlanta](#) highlights key city performance metrics.
- [Atlanta Budget Explorer](#) provides access to city financial reports.

Most recently, the Innovation Delivery and Performance team undertook the integration of performance metrics into the city's budget to better tie investment decisions to city outcomes, and former Director Matt Malament was promoted to the Mayor's Cabinet.

Going forward, the Mayor's Office of Innovation Delivery and Performance team's work towards a robust data system continues as they pursue direct access to data. Currently, they receive aggregated data on a metric by metric basis, but the ability to pull the data directly and do more analysis faster would be preferred. A Chief Data Officer could champion these and other data and evidence-based initiatives.



## ABOUT RESULTS FOR AMERICA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Results for America's Local Government Fellows program was founded in September 2014 to provide an advanced group of local government leaders in diverse and influential cities and counties across the country the knowledge and support to implement strategies that consistently use data and evidence to drive policy and budget decisions on major policy challenges.

With the support and guidance of Results for America, the Local Government Fellows lead their governments toward advanced stages of data-driven and evidence-based policymaking in order to address major policy challenges in their communities. The **16 cities** and counties represented in the Fellowship collectively

represent more than **28 million** people and **\$148 billion** in local government spending.

### RFA engages its Local Government Fellows in:

- Defining short- and long-term policy goals;
- Developing research partnerships with academics;
- Sharing best practices and demonstration projects;
- Problem solving among peers;
- Receiving individual feedback and coaching; and
- Participating in a national network and peer cohort.

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- Matthew Malament, former Director of Innovation and Performance
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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Visit the FOR-Atlanta site to explore city performance metrics through various graphs and visuals: <http://foratlanta.atlantaga.gov/>
- Visit GovEx to find more resources on performance management in local governments: <https://govex.jhu.edu/topic/performance/>
- Learn more about Performance Management Systems by visiting the U.S. Office of Performance Management: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/performance-management/overview-history/>
- Learn more about Results for America's **Local Government Fellowship** at: <http://results4america.org>



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## REFERENCES

1. "Overview & History." U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Accessed June 23, 2017. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/performance-management/overview-history/>
2. City of Atlanta 2016 Performance Report. The first month of reporting was April 2013 for the Department of Public Works and January 2014 for the Department of Watershed Management.

“ *Performance management is the bedrock of everything we do. It allows us to effectively measure and improve performance in core service delivery areas, which in turn improves service delivery and outcomes for our constituents.* ”

— **MATT MALAMENT**  
Former Atlanta  
Director of Innovation  
and Performance

## PHOTOS

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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 committed to improving outcomes for young people, their families, and communities by shifting public resources toward programs and practices that use evidence and data to improve quality and get better results.

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Invest in  
What Works  
Policy  
Series

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