



Closing the Data Gap:

How Cities Are Delivering Better Results for Residents

A Monitor Institute by Deloitte report, in collaboration with What Works Cities

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Executive Summary

The data-driven movement that began in just a handful of cities six years ago has now spread far and wide. Hundreds of cities, both large and small and in every region of the country, have embraced a new approach to local governance. City leaders and staff are moving beyond old practices based on precedent or instinct. Instead, they're using data to make more effective operational, programmatic, and policy decisions. And residents are reaping real benefits, from improved services to greater visibility into how their local government works.

Consider the progress that cities in the What Works Cities (WWC)¹ community, launched in 2015 by Bloomberg Philanthropies and now the leading national network for data-driven city leaders, have made across four foundational data practices in the last several years:

- 🎯 **Performance management:** The percentage of cities monitoring and analyzing their progress toward key goals **has more than doubled** (from 30% to 75%).
- 🎯 **Public engagement:** The percentage of cities engaging with residents on a goal and communicating progress **has more than tripled** (from 19% to 70%).
- 🎯 **Releasing data:** The percentage of cities with a platform and process to release data to residents **has more than tripled** (from 18% to 67%).
- 🎯 **Taking action:** The percentage of cities modifying existing programs based on data analytics **has more than doubled** (from 28% to 61%).

The results: greater transparency around how and why decisions are made, more effective and efficient operations, and improved services. For example, 60% of city officials surveyed in the WWC network reported improved emergency response times, and 70% reported that their cities are systematically using data-informed decision-making to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. More than half of survey respondents also reported improving their use of data to make budget decisions, award city contracts and/or shift procurement dollars, and deliver city services more efficiently, effectively, and/or equitably. This kind of progress builds residents' trust in government and better outcomes.

It also reflects the broad culture shift underway in city governments across the country, demonstrating that an evidence-informed approach is possible for all U.S. cities. Today, more than 250 municipal governments across the country are changing how they do business and tackling local challenges by putting into place critical data infrastructure and/or improving data skills.

This report, prepared by Monitor Institute by Deloitte,² details important changes across the local governance landscape while also underscoring cities' appetite for further progress. The achievements over the last six years are substantial—but in so many ways, cities are just getting started.

¹ Since 2015, WWC has provided a growing national network of cities with technical assistance, standards of excellence, and peer learning opportunities to support the adoption of data-driven approaches. See the Appendix for more about WWC.

² Monitor Institute by Deloitte researched and wrote this report in collaboration with WWC.

Introduction

Better services. Smarter and more efficient use of tax dollars. Greater transparency and civic engagement.

All of this has resulted from the data-driven transformation that has moved through city halls across the country during the last six years. The way scores of municipal governments do business has changed. Residents are becoming more engaged with their local government while reaping tangible benefits. For instance, cities are using and sharing data to steadily improve a wide array of city services, from emergency response and public transit options to expanded access to financial assistance and internet connectivity.

This report details how a growing movement of local government leaders embracing data-driven practices have improved cities and the lives of residents around the country. Monitor Institute by Deloitte worked in collaboration with national initiative What Works Cities (WWC)³ to assess how cities have progressed since WWC's inception. The national picture it draws incorporates insights on cities' data practices from WWC program data, dozens of interviews with city leaders, staff, and external experts, and a survey of officials from 44 cities in WWC's network.

Prior to 2015, there were only a few cities in the country that had adopted a data-driven approach to improve decision-making; many thought data-driven government was only for largely populated cities. But in six short years, there has been a broad and deep culture shift in American city halls.

A critical mass of cities is helping staff improve their data skills, investing in critical data infrastructure, and adopting data-and-evidence practices. This enables cities to operate more efficiently and effectively, and to better serve their residents. WWC, the primary network for city leaders embracing data and evidence for decision-making, has grown participation from nothing in 2015 to 254 cities today, reflecting that the way municipal government works is being transformed across the country. This transformation spans all regions and government types: the largest cities in the United States as well as smaller cities with fewer than 100,000 residents.

The broad spread of this culture shift in city governments across the U.S. demonstrates that a data-driven and evidence-informed approach is possible for all U.S. cities.

³ Launched in 2015 by Bloomberg Philanthropies, What Works Cities is a national initiative with the mission of helping cities use data and evidence more effectively to tackle their most pressing challenges. WWC operates as a collaboration of four national organizations: Results for America, the Behavioral Insights Team, Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University, and the Government Performance Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School. See Appendix for more about WWC.

Using Data and Evidence to Achieve Meaningful Results for City Residents

The ultimate goal of creating data- and evidence-informed city cultures is to improve the lives of city residents. As cities use data to inform decision-making, they can better determine the needs of their residents, be more inclusive of resident feedback, and more comprehensively tackle complex issues. In our research, we found consistent evidence that cities are increasingly using data to tackle resident issues in new ways, and that this data-driven approach is leading to improved outcomes for residents.

These improved outcomes include results such as reduced emergency response times, more expansive public transit options, fiscal support for vulnerable populations, improved access to digital broadband, increased housing stability, greater opportunities for small business growth, and increased access to quality educational opportunities for low-income families.

Furthermore, in a recent survey, four out of five cities in the WWC network reported that over the past five years, they have improved their use of data and evidence to benefit their residents. Cities have reported using data-driven approaches to address a wide range of critical challenges such as public safety, health and human services, housing and homelessness, equity, and workforce development.



Four out of five city officials state that their cities have improved their use of data and evidence to drive better outcomes for residents.

For instance, **nearly 90% of cities report better using data to engage residents and/or community stakeholders.** To illustrate, in San Jose, CA, city teams undertook a multipronged outreach campaign, including targeted outreach to historically disenfranchised neighborhoods, in order to more accurately identify who did not have access to broadband. With this and other data in hand, San Jose created heat-maps of digital deserts across the city and developed a comprehensive long-term strategy to close the digital divide by negotiating outcomes-based contracts with major telecom providers, operationalizing nearly 900 strategically placed small cell sites (nearly 2,000 more are permitted for construction), and improving broadband access for thousands of previously unconnected households.

When the COVID-19 pandemic required more immediate solutions to providing residents with digital access, the city again engaged stakeholders, such as local and county school networks, parents, and community organizations, to inform how many Wi-Fi hotspots were needed. With this information, the city worked quickly to

negotiate orders for nearly 13,000 high-quality hotspots to be distributed to families with school-age children that needed them most.

Other examples of key outcomes in WWC cities include:

- ③ **60% reported improved emergency response times (fire, police, and/or ambulance).** For example, in Cincinnati, OH, city leaders used data to determine the root causes of delayed call pickup times. After identifying communications gaps, lack of information-sharing between city and county dispatchers, and opt-out options for call takers, they developed a multiple-point action plan and used their performance management meetings to track progress on their emergency dispatch metrics. Within a few months, Cincinnati was able to meet the national standard for call answer times. Their dispatchers were able to answer over 90% of emergency calls in fewer than 10 seconds, up from a prior rate of 40%.
- ③ **49% reported improved neighborhood safety.** For example, by proactively engaging residents and supplementing the city's data with resident experience, Little Rock, AR, identified a top safety priority for the community: nonfunctioning streetlights. This information enabled the city to devise a solution in partnership with neighborhood associations to increase reporting and better track broken streetlights in specific neighborhoods. Through one "community walk," for instance, five times the number of broken streetlights was logged into the city's 311 system than in the entire previous year, providing the city with better data to repair the broken lights.
- ③ **37% reported measurably reduced waste, reduced emissions, or improved air or water quality.** For example, Cambridge, MA, used data by tracking contaminants in recycling carts to identify the most frequent sources of contamination and develop a plan to reduce contaminated recyclables. The city was able to reduce contamination by more than half, from 11% to 4%, making Cambridge a national leader in recycling. The city also saved \$100,000 on waste removal costs, and improved the resiliency of the city's recycling program.

The importance of building city data capacity to meet residents' needs was driven home during the pandemic.

The importance of a data-driven approach to improve resident outcomes has been underscored **during the COVID-19 emergency**. Cities with crucial data skills and practices in place were able to pivot quickly to respond to the ever-evolving challenges the pandemic presented, leaning on existing infrastructure, culture, and staff knowledge to immediately stand up crucial data command centers and public information dashboards in the early months of the pandemic and make critical decisions affecting public health, safety, and well-being. COVID-19 has illustrated the importance of investing in and building foundational data skills and practices that enable a city to respond quickly in the face of disaster.

70% of surveyed city officials in the WWC network reported that their cities are systematically using data-informed decision making to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. This includes steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19, reduce COVID-19 deaths, provide financial relief to residents in need during COVID-19, and/or minimize the harmful consequences of COVID-19.

Examples among cities include:

- ③ Phoenix, AZ, applied neighborhood economic and demographic data to direct its COVID-19 messaging and communications efforts in a targeted way, including placing point-of-sale video messages in both Spanish and English in grocery stores in neighborhoods with high refugee and immigrant populations and in communities of color. In addition, the City implemented multilingual social media campaigns and extensive Spanish media outreach via radio, TV, and print. Within a few weeks of the messages being disseminated, the city doubled the number of people who were being tested – reaching vulnerable communities, a priority for the city.
- ③ In Glendale, AZ, city officials reallocated funding and quickly digitized the application intake and review process for their community assistance [program](#) during the height of COVID-19. By more efficiently managing and tracking the data from the influx of relief applications newly flooding the program, in two quarters alone the city safely delivered almost \$9 million in COVID-19 relief funds to over 2,000 families in need of rent and utility bill assistance, representing a more than 800% increase in direct assistance to vulnerable residents over the entire prior fiscal year.
- ③ When the pandemic began, Long Beach, CA, immediately pulled together a “data strike team” and in just a few weeks’ time, created user-centered data dashboards and situational tools for guiding internal decisions. For example, in deciding where to deploy rapid testing and later vaccination sites, the City looked to see where cases of COVID-19 were located along with housing density, race, and income data, and chose six sites based on that information. Long Beach has since been touted by national media as an early [leader](#) in vaccination rollout, with its resident vaccination rate outpacing the vaccination rates of both its home county and state, as well as the U.S. Additionally, when it came time to decide how to disburse over \$40 million in federal CARES Act funding, city leaders utilized the information the data team had been monitoring all along and paired it with other quantitative and qualitative information to dedicate over \$21 million to programming and organizations supporting specific communities most affected by COVID-19.
- ③ Using rigorous evaluation and behavioral science methodology, city leaders in Seattle, WA, determined the most effective way to expand access to their Utility Discount Program, which offered income-eligible residents significant discounts on their light and utility bills. By doing so, thousands of households were [relieved](#) of financial burdens during the height of the city’s stay-at-home orders.

“
When a pandemic hits, [a data] culture is very important because the organization has got to respond. And it’s only going to respond with data if that’s the culture you built.”

—Former Mayor Andy Berke,
Chattanooga, TN

The pandemic also revealed the benefits of cities’ investments in a data-driven approach relative to other levels of government, as official responses to the crisis have required rapid access to data from across different levels of government and

revealed areas of weakness and lags in the system. In our interviews with experts and city officials, we repeatedly heard that cities are further ahead in the field than states are. Due to the investment cities have made over the past six years to build more data infrastructure and stronger data-driven cultures, they appear to be at the forefront of the data movement now shaping various levels of public administration in the U.S.

A data-driven approach leads to more efficient and effective city government.

Using data and evidence to inform decisions can create better-run city governments, with residents ultimately benefiting from their cities' improved operations. Without the systems, processes, and policies in place to regularly incorporate data into the city's daily and long-term decision-making, cities often rely on precedent to conduct core actions. Examples of this include awarding city contracts to legacy vendors regardless of past outcomes or using only anecdotal evidence from a limited number of sources to make decisions about funding city programs.

Over the past six years, a majority of surveyed cities reported improvements in their use of data and evidence to make key decisions, leading to more efficient and effective government outcomes. Among cities in the WWC network:

- ③ **More than four out of five report better using data to deliver city services more efficiently, effectively, and/or equitably.** For example, Scottsdale, AZ, made the decision using various data, including location data, to close a long-standing fire station, opening a new [state-of-the-art](#) fire station in a different location to increase the percentage of the city's population within a four-minute response coverage area by 30% and better serve residents.
- ③ **Four out of five report better using data to make budget decisions.** For example, city officials in Arlington, TX, regularly tracked ridership data for a pilot rideshare program in order to understand trends in usage and methodically allocate additional funding to expand the pilot based on the data. By making data-driven budget decisions to continue expanding the rideshare's coverage area multiple times over the course of several years, the city was ultimately able to [expand the program citywide](#) in 2021, providing the residents of Arlington with their first-ever citywide public transit system.
- ③ **More than three in five report better using data to repurpose dollars or defund ineffective programs.** For example, Tulsa, OK, shifted \$500,000 of federal funding from a citywide first-come-first-served strategy to one focused on the city's poorest neighborhoods, after analysis showed that existing processes were not helping the city's most vulnerable communities.
- ③ **More than half report better using data to award city contracts and/or shift procurement dollars.** For example, before beginning a project to construct 65 additional miles of fiber optic infrastructure to improve the quality of internet access across the city, Boulder, CO, designed an improved procurement process that prioritized results for residents and value for the city, rather than dictate

how the work must be performed. The new process and the corresponding data inputs considered in evaluating bids allowed the city to save \$8 million and subcontract with a broader set of partners, including small and minority-owned businesses, while ensuring minimal disruption to communities.

One Chief Innovation Officer of a major U.S. city interviewed compared the landscape in her organization between 2015 and now, said, ***“I’ve seen in [our city] certainly...an evolution of how people understand what data is all about, the difference being [that now] we take data not just to have data, but to use it to actually change people’s lives and change the way that we deliver service.”***

City Halls across the country are increasingly able to leverage data and evidence best practices to drive better decisions.

What It Takes: Transforming City Practices

Getting to more effective local government and better outcomes for residents requires the hard work of adopting foundational data practices, developing data skills across a broad swath of city staff, and putting in place critical data infrastructure. Over the past six years, cities have undertaken this transformation by investing in critical skills and capacities, and shifting city culture.

A 2016 study⁴ conducted by WWC in collaboration with The Bridgespan Group concluded that city leaders nationwide were committed to using data and evidence to improve their residents’ lives but lacked the critical resources and expertise to do so successfully. The study reported that improving cities’ data and evidence skills was a necessary foundation for cities to be able to effectively address challenges such as safety, economic development, and affordable housing, as well as to respond quickly to crises and address long-term sustainability and resiliency.

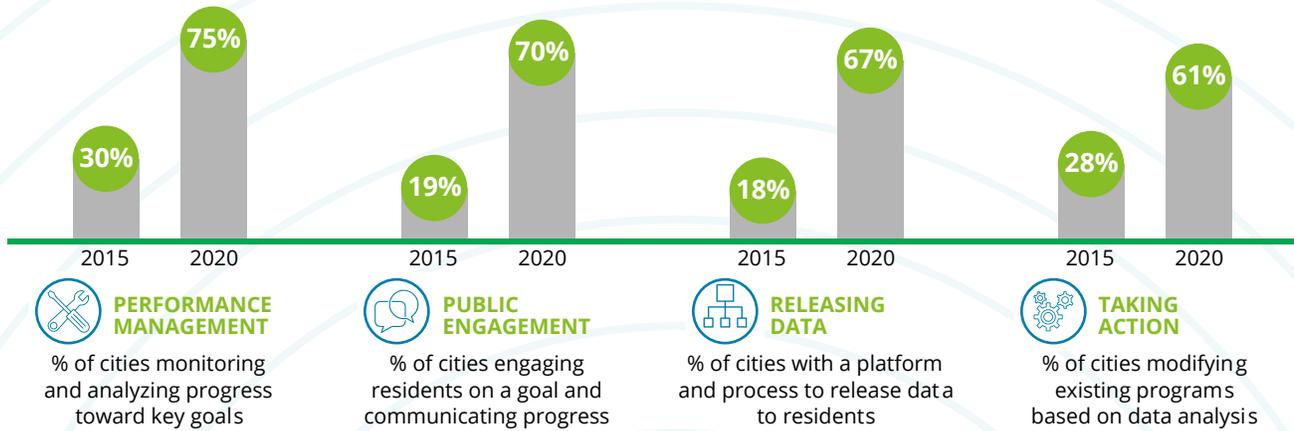
Analysis of the data and evidence skills of cities in the WWC network shows the transformation in city government since that study. The percentage of cities with foundational data practices skyrocketed across the four categories highlighted in the 2016 report: **performance management, public engagement, releasing data, and taking action.**

“
You cannot go from being not data-driven to data-driven in a crisis...Cities have been on a journey. It’s been much more of a conversation than at the state level, so a lot of cities came into this with stronger muscles, greater capacity.”

—Jennifer Pahlka,
Founder, Code for
America

4 Based on research and analysis conducted over 2015 and 2016. The full report can be found [here](#).

Cities are closing the four key gaps identified in 2016⁵



To illustrate, examples of cities applying these foundational practices include:

- 🎯 **Performance management** in action: In Memphis, TN, the city's department heads and the mayor regularly come together to track and monitor progress against goals and review performance metrics in order to improve services across the city. For example, in the last several years, Memphis' Department of Animal Services, which had been tracking progress toward the goal of improving its animal save rate, was able to increase the rate to over 90% in 2020, up from just 46% in 2014.
- 🎯 **Public engagement** in action: City leaders in Topeka, KS, make it a practice to regularly communicate the city's infrastructure goals with their residents through a variety of data. They share measurable performance targets, how taxpayer dollars are being spent for road repairs, and, using predictive modeling, what could be accomplished with continued investment. In 2018, 61% of Topeka voters [approved](#) a ballot measure extending a half-cent sales tax for 10 years to fund street maintenance projects. This positive outcome was supported by the city's ongoing efforts to communicate and engage with residents about city priorities.
- 🎯 **Releasing data** in action: Baton Rouge, LA's open data program, [Open Data BR](#), provides direct access to nearly 50 datasets that cover everything from real-time traffic information to progress on major capital projects. Open Budget BR, for example, provides a full view into the city-parish's annual budget, helping residents better understand how revenues are being used to support city operations and how resources are prioritized. Open Data BR has had over 3.1 million views since its launch in 2015, and through the tools provided by the city, residents have created over 71,000 visualizations and other tailored views of the data.
- 🎯 **Taking action** in action: Washington, D.C.'s public school district (DCPS) [ended](#) its Extended Year Program in FY20 after attendance and assessment data did not provide evidence of improved outcomes, alongside feedback from school leaders. In the FY20 budget, DCPS began a three-year investment in a 1:1 device program for students in grades 3-12 and also expanded an evidence-based

⁵ 2016 indicators are based on self-reported answers in a study carried out by The Bridgespan Group for What Works Cities. 2020 indicators are based on cities' WWC Certification assessment responses, externally validated by Results for America.

community school model, Connected Schools, whose first cohort of schools had shown above-average growth on key family and community engagement metrics compared to the district as a whole.

In addition to the four categories identified above, cities continue to improve on other foundational data practices⁶ such as: evaluation (from 27% to 45%) and stakeholder engagement (from 37% to 63%).⁷ In Longmont, CO and Seattle, WA, for example, city leaders used rapid evaluation trials to determine the most effective way to increase enrollment in city utilities rebate and discount programs so that more income-eligible residents could benefit from the savings. And in Buffalo, NY, the City offers its residents a citizen-focused data academy that introduces enrollees to data fundamentals, teaches them how to use datasets published to the city's open data portal to benefit their communities, and equips them with analytic and technical data skills. These skills can bolster residents' efforts to create a higher quality of life in their communities, from helping to strengthen neighborhood improvement grant applications to simply developing a better understanding of how the city is operating.

Cities have spread data capabilities widely among staff and across departments.

Cities have also **deepened their “bench strength” in data and evidence skills**. Whereas five years ago cities might have single, isolated positions or offices, data skills and practices are now spread more widely across people and departments. This creates broader culture change in the use of data and evidence to inform decision-making, and it ensures data-driven practices last beyond changes in administrations.

When the WWC network was first developed, there were one or two people in each city government designated to support data-driven projects through the technical assistance that WWC provided. In the past six years, there has been a sea change in the breadth and depth of data skills across cities. Today, WWC works with more than 11 city leaders in each city on average on projects.⁸ Cities have also moved from limited centers of data expertise, located in a specific role or department, to widespread use. In the city officials' survey, more than half of participating cities reported having spread data practices to eight or more departments or agencies.

“
We’ve been starting to peel the onion and starting to see all these interlocking opportunities. Not only is executive-level leadership participating in this, but our staff are leading the way forward on this in articulating what the strategic path around technology, innovation, and data governance will look like going forward for our city.”

—Mayor Danene Sorace,
Lancaster, PA

6 The practice of Evaluation looks at whether cities are “leveraging evaluation results to make decisions.” The practice of Stakeholder Engagement looks at how cities are “leading efforts to educate and activate the community to better understand and use city data to address citywide challenges.”

7 Evaluation and Stakeholder Engagement foundational data practices are based solely on WWC Certification program data and the progress made by cities is based on comparing specific criteria between their initial assessment and most recent.

8 Calculated from internal WWC program data.

Changing the Landscape of Local Governance Nationwide

Systematic change in city governance is difficult to achieve, requiring not just behavior change in a handful of leading cities, but also a broader shift in what is considered best practices. The sheer number and diversity of cities now actively working to increase data capacity and skills among leaders and staff creates a tipping point in spreading a culture of data across all types of cities. The participation of the nation's largest cities signals the importance of this work, and the involvement of a diverse range of cities shows that a data-driven approach is possible for all U.S. cities.

Today, a critical mass of cities support data-driven, evidence-informed governance, with an increasing number of cities meeting the national standard of excellence for well-managed, data-driven local government. The number of cities committed to data and evidence for decision-making is notable for both its rapid growth and the diversity of participation.

When the WWC network was first established, there were only a handful of cities equipped with the structures and skills needed to act on data-driven decision-making across the enterprise. Six years later, city officials in 254 participating cities are now sharing their successes. They come from cities from every geographic region in the country, as well as cities with different governance structures (such as council-led and mayor-led cities).

The network also spans the range of city size, including cities with fewer than 100,000 residents and the largest cities in the United States. More than half (56%) of the largest U.S. cities (populations of 250,000 or more) are now part of the WWC network, with more than 68 million U.S. residents living in cities that have committed to a data-informed approach to governing.

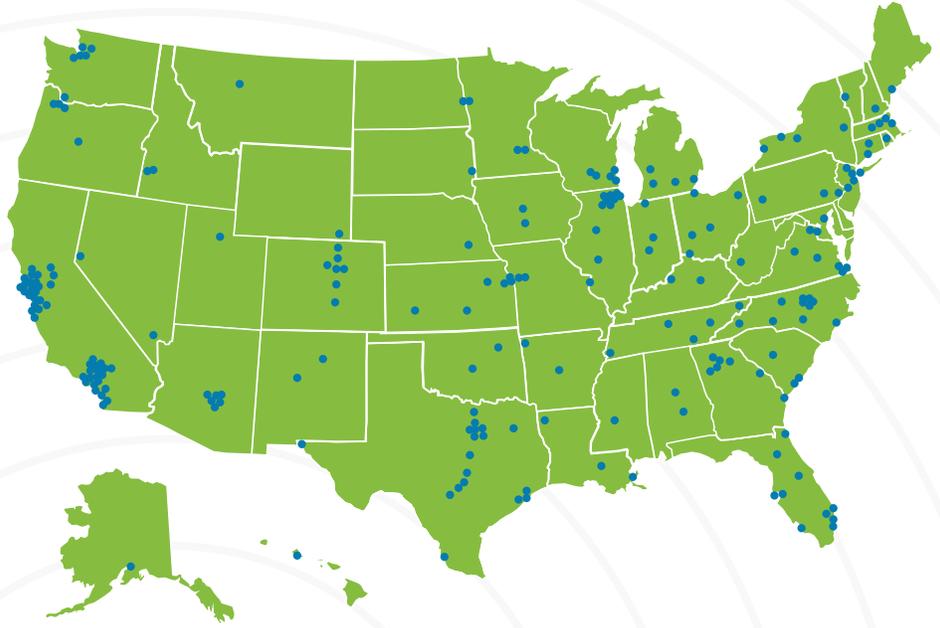
As the number of cities using a data-informed approach to decision-making and governance climbs, the number and range of successful solutions that other cities can draw on and learn from expands as well.

Because of the substantial number of cities involved in the WWC network, thousands of city officials across America are now exposed to WWC's ideas, including the WWC Standard.⁹ And cities are learning from each other as well, through programs that enable cities to learn what has worked elsewhere and through peer sharing in the WWC network.

⁹ The What Works Cities Standard is the national standard of excellence that details the people, processes, and policies foundational for well-managed, data-driven local government. It includes eight areas of practice, such as data governance, stakeholder engagement, performance and analytics, and results-driven contracting. The WWC Standard serves as criteria for the WWC Certification program.

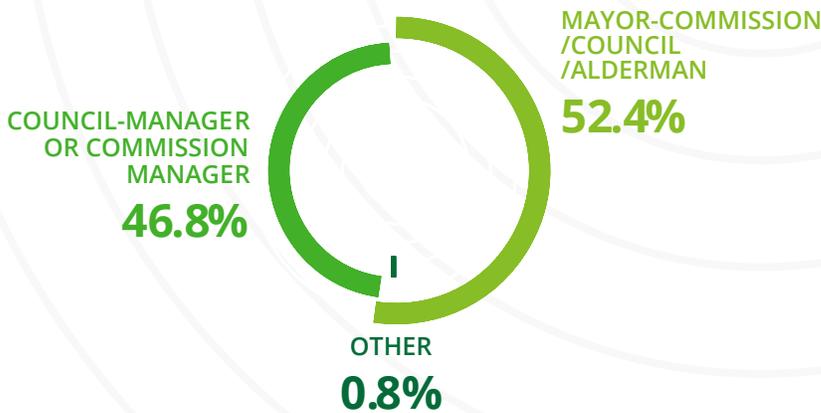
Map of U.S. Cities in the WWC Network Today

Over 200
Cities Are
Taking a Data
Approach¹⁰

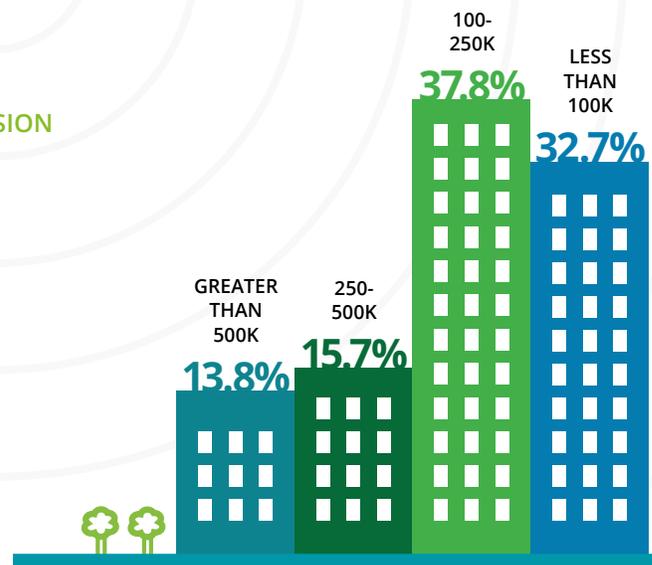


How These Data-driven Cities Break Down...

...By Governance Structure



...By Population Size



...By US Region



¹⁰ N=254. This number counts U.S. cities with a population of at least 30,000 that have participated or are currently participating in at least one of WWC's programs and/or trainings, including WWC Certification, technical assistance, learning cohorts, and online courses through the WWC Academy.

For example, over 100 cities in the WWC network have been or are a part of multi-week group trainings. The goal is to have cities learn from their peers who have implemented proven programs that tackle a pressing challenge or are leaders in implementing specific data skills. Cities are now more able to spread data-informed solutions and share what's working and what's not across a range of key policy challenges, from homelessness to equitable economic development. They have models of excellence and stories they can tell about impact in their communities. And the participation of hundreds of cities from all across the country has led to broad acceptance of the importance of data-driven local governance.

“
Cities are paying attention to what their colleagues are doing. We learn from each other, we borrow, go on the website, steal ideas, whatever the case may be... As the leading voice out there, WWC has driven these ideas and many, many others are utilizing them whether they're in the program or not.”

—Former Mayor Michael A. Nutter,
Philadelphia, PA

Where Data-Driven Cities are Headed

The nationwide movement of cities embracing data and evidence to inform decision-making has rapidly transformed cities' cultures and practices over the past five years. The impressive strides that cities have made in closing key data gaps puts them in a strong position to lead and make material gains on urgent issues of national importance.

In this vein, our research uncovered a few areas where data-driven cities are looking ahead at important issues that require increased attention to continue improving city government and positively impact the lives of their residents. These cities are positioning themselves to more directly address complex issues such as racial inequality and economic insecurity, leverage new data and evidence skills to advance on matters of equity and resident trust, and embed stronger and more inclusive resident engagement mechanisms. Cities are also looking to expand collaboration across public administration and to deepen their data and evidence practices at the department level.

Key areas of focus for cities include:

1. **Focusing on the use of data and evidence to foster trust from residents:** The shifts in the political landscape that have taken place over the past few years are encouraging city leaders to focus on the role that data and evidence can play in improving transparency and advancing residents' trust in municipal governance.
2. **Embedding equity in cities' use of data and evidence, and leveraging data and evidence to drive equity:** City staff and mayors are looking to further embed equity in their use of data and evidence, and to use data to more equitably deliver government services. For example, city governments are wrestling with how best to collect and use data in order to systematically advance more

equitable resident outcomes and to ensure that decisions are representative of the communities they serve.

3. Advancing a bottom-up approach to learn from and engage residents:

To advance equity in cities' use of data and evidence and to improve resident engagement processes, experts we spoke to highlighted the importance of pursuing a "bottom-up" approach to collecting resident feedback, where data-driven governance efforts by the city are tied to strong, grassroots community outreach strategies.

4. Collaborating and sharing data with other public administrations (e.g., counties, states, other cities):

The lack of a shared vision around data and evidence among states, counties, and local administration is a significant challenge for cities trying to make an impact on areas that do not cleanly fall under the responsibilities of a single city jurisdiction but that have a substantial impact on resident outcomes such as health and education.

5. Standards of excellence and key metrics for specific city services:

Noting the similarities in the range of services that local governments traditionally provide in cities across the nation, some city staff are looking for guidance and standards at the department or issue-specific level (e.g., public works or waste management) that help them collect and monitor the right data to reach excellence in their delivery of these services, following the best practices in the field.

Conclusion

This report captures only a small snapshot of the diverse ways that cities across the country are using data and evidence to improve government. The rapid progress cities have made across the country matters to improve the lives of residents. Examples of this have been noted, but there are many more instances and stories of innovative work happening in data-driven local government to explore and learn from.

Since 2015, as cities have steadily built skills, changed the culture of local government, and spread best data practices among staff and across departments, they have collectively made the case for the importance of investing in cities' data capacity and cultivating data- and evidence-driven governance practices. But this is merely an opening act. Propelled by their already considerable achievements, cities now have the momentum to build local governments that residents can truly count on.

Appendix

Methodology

Monitor Institute by Deloitte worked in collaboration with What Works Cities (WWC) to assess how cities in its network have progressed since its inception in 2015. We analyzed WWC's programmatic data, including WWC Certification data; conducted interviews with city leaders, staff, and external experts; and fielded a survey of officials from cities in WWC's network to produce the findings discussed in this report.

WWC data collected between 2015-2020. This included:

- **WWC program data** for city participation information and aggregate results on skill development, practice improvement, and issue focus areas, representing 254 cities that have participated in at least one of WWC's program offerings since 2016.
- **WWC Certification data** for performance trends, such as the number of cities that are now training city staff on key data skills and the change in this movement over time. This data is validated by What Works Cities, from 229 WWC Certification assessments representing 159 U.S. cities.
- **Case study examples** with reviews of specific city implementation efforts and outcomes that occurred between 2016 and May 2021.¹¹

Interviews with experts, city leaders, and city staff (26 interviews in total), conducted between December 2020 and May 2021. They included:

- **Expert interviews** for information about the broader city landscape and context of the field. Experts were asked questions about how the ecosystem has changed since 2015, what role WWC cities have played, and what are the current data-driven governance gaps in cities.
- **City leader and staff interviews** for information about cities' data-driven governance journeys, results, and future needs. City officials were also asked about how a city's engagement with WWC has contributed to its data and evidence efforts.

Survey of cities in WWC's network with responses for questions around cities' improvements in data and evidence practices and feedback on WWC's programs and overall engagement. The goal of the survey, administered in March 2021, was to collect attitudinal data on city officials' perception of their city's performance and to capture changes in data and evidence efforts.

The survey sample included responses from officials in 44 cities (27 states represented, and with 11 of those cities having been WWC certified or placed in WWC's certification honor roll). 73% of respondents were senior city officials in areas connected to WWC's work, and nearly 70% had worked at the city for four years or more, yielding a higher likelihood of survey respondents having good visibility over the city's evolution in data and evidence practices and ensuing impact. All respondents were provided the option to remain anonymous.

¹¹ Details from all city examples included in this report are current as of May 2021.

About What Works Cities

Launched in 2015 by Bloomberg Philanthropies, [What Works Cities \(WWC\)](#) is a national initiative that helps local governments use data and evidence more effectively to tackle pressing issues and improve residents' lives. WWC is a collaboration of four national organizations: lead partner [Results for America](#), the [Behavioral Insights Team North America](#), the [Government Performance Lab](#) at Harvard Kennedy School, and the [Center for Government Excellence](#) at Johns Hopkins University.

WWC provides a growing national network of cities with a standard of excellence for data-driven local government (the WWC Standard), technical assistance from each of its expert partner organizations, peer learning opportunities to support and scale the adoption of data-driven approaches to pressing problems and government operations, and a suite of online trainings and webinars design to build city staff capacity. Any city with a population of at least 30,000 is eligible to access WWC resources. Cities can also be selected to participate in longer-term cohort learning opportunities such as the [WWC Economic Mobility initiative](#) and the [WWC City Budgeting for Equity and Recovery program](#).

WWC's flagship program, [WWC Certification](#), provides a standard by which to assess the capacity of a city to use data for effective decision-making. The program is designed for cities to assess their foundational data practices, benchmark their progress over time, and develop a roadmap for building the infrastructure, skills, and culture needed within city hall to use data and evidence effectively and deliver results for residents. By recognizing local governments excelling in this work, the WWC Certification program provides models others can learn from. As of April 2021, 24 cities are WWC Certified, with dozens more rapidly progressing and on the cusp of achieving Certification.

The improvement in cities' data skills mentioned throughout this report is measured primarily from the data that WWC collects and confirms through a rigorous validation process. The data analyzed for this report comes from nearly 200 U.S. cities since the launch of the WWC Standard in 2017. To learn more, please visit: whatworkscities.bloomberg.org/certification.

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