

WORCESTER, MA

Background

Late in 1999, the Worcester Municipal Research Bureau received a planning grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The purpose of the grant was to provide resources necessary to complete the planning phase of a citizen-driven municipal performance project. This involved maximizing community involvement, refining and finalizing performance measures, and completing the preliminary in accordance with data collection efforts. This phase has been successfully completed, and what follows is a detailed outline regarding the achievements of three primary goals. They are as follows:

- Connect government goals to community results
- Produce a comprehensive municipal data inventory
- Utilize benchmarking data to help the City achieve its goals

What were the start-up costs?

While no mention is made of the initial planning grant amount, the projected funding for the implementation during a three year and three phase process is as follows: Year 1, Phase I - \$228,735; Year 2, Phase II - \$150,650; and Year 3, Phase III - \$171,925; plus expenditures for a total of \$416,310 for the three-year period.

What is the citizen perception of local government?

The challenges facing Worcester's Fire and Police Departments gives some semblance of the citizenry's perception of local government.

The public's perception of the Police Department has suffered due to a few notable incidents in which the use of force has generated significant community backlash. This controversy has led to an ongoing debate within the community as to whether a civilian review board is needed to oversee police activities. In addition, the City is still struggling with the aftermath of the tragic fire of December 1999, which took the lives of six firefighters.

The City Manager and the City's Human Rights Commission are currently developing new policies and procedures to better deal with citizen complaints regarding police actions. Public debate about the mission of the Fire Department has repeatedly advocated an expanded role in Emergency Medical Services (EMS). A recent report issued by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health indicates that the Fire Department may not have been adequately prepared for its traditional firefighting duties at the time of the tragic fire. This was identified under Public Safety indicators developed for the Worcester Benchmarking Project as public safety priorities for the community.

Why was a particular service chosen for study?

The Research Bureau's benchmarking project will complement the recent decision of Worcester municipal government to participate in the ICMA performance measurement program. Data drawn from the ICMA reports will be used where appropriate, particularly data which compare

the performance of Worcester’s municipal services to other comparably sized communities throughout the country.

What indicators were used as measures of performance or to determine outcomes?

Indicators have been designed to assess progress towards achieving the five goals contained within the City’s strategic plan, which was developed in 1994 by a committee of citizens appointed by the City Manager. These five goals and their accompanying objectives are as follows:

- Economic Development To expand the municipal tax base and create jobs
- Public Safety To promote safety and security in Worcester through deterrence, Arrests, and preventive efforts
- Municipal Services To improve the condition of the City’s infrastructure and enhance municipal service delivery, thereby providing a safer, healthier, and a more aesthetically pleasing environment
- Education To improve student academic achievement
- Youth Services To improve services provided for the youth in the City

What process (es) was initiated?

1. **Economic Development**

Like many older medium-sized American cities, especially those in the Northeast, Worcester has faced significant challenges regarding the health of its tax base. Over the past several decades, the City has been transformed from an industrial city into one where the two largest employment

sectors are healthcare and higher education. Worcester is home to UMass Memorial Healthcare, the Fallon Health Maintenance Organization, and the \$215 million Worcester Medical Center. A number of successful private biotechnology firms have based their operations in Worcester which is, in part, due to the presence of these medical institutions and the ten colleges and universities in the immediate area. These include UMass Medical School, WPI, Clark University, Holy Cross College, Becker College, Assumption College, Worcester State College, and a campus of the Boston-based Massachusetts College of Pharmacy.

Worcester's economy has lagged behind the rest of the state. Between 1994 and 1999, the growth in total value of Worcester's commercial and industrial property was half that of the state economy as whole. Accordingly, the Economic Development goal identifies growth in the City's tax base and job creation as the two primary objectives of the City's economic development. A series of subordinate indicators have been developed to help Worcester's citizens and municipal officials assess future progress. They are as follows:

- Growth of commercial and residential tax base
- Municipal Tax Rate
- User-Friendliness of Business Permitting Process
- Downtown Commercial Property Vacancy Rate
- Job Growth
- Amount of Private Investment
- Abandoned and Distressed Property

Two of the seven indicators will require conducting original research, while data for the remaining five will be obtained from existing secondary data sources (i.e., federal, state, and local databases). Assessing the user-friendliness of the business permitting process will require the development of an original customer satisfaction survey, which the City has agreed to distribute to each permit applicant.

The City has also agreed to collect data regarding the time that elapses between the submission of an application for a business permit and a final decision. The City will be instrumental in providing data pertaining to abandoned and distressed properties. The City Manager has agreed to have staff members at the Office of Planning and Community Development collect and make available data, which will allow one to track changes in the number of abandoned and distressed properties, as well as evaluate the City's degree of success in terms of renovating these troubled properties for productive reuse.

2. **Public Safety**

As aforementioned, Worcester's Police and Fire Departments have been experiencing a number of challenges over the past years, which have unfortunately resulted in a community backlash.

Performance indicators for the Public Safety goal are as follows:

- Crime Rate and Clearance Rate by Type of Crime
- Police Community Relations
- Allegations of Police Misconduct

- Emergency Services Response Times

Data for three of the four public safety indicators (crime and clearance rates, allegations of police misconduct, and emergency services response time) are being provided by the Worcester Police and Fire Departments and the Emergency Medical Services Department at UMass Memorial.

The Research Bureau has been working extensively with the staff of Worcester Police Department Crime Analysis Division to ensure that they will be able to report crime and clearance rates at both the citywide and neighborhood levels. The Police Department's lead crime analyst has developed an innovative Police Statistical Area (PSA) reporting system, which will provide neighborhood residents with detailed information about criminal and police activity in their communities. Continuing work with the Police Department will hopefully result in the development of valid measures of police-community relations.

3. **Municipal Services**

The daily operations that have a substantial effect on the quality of life of Worcester's citizens are administered by a number of departments. The department delivering the majority of such services and which is most amenable to performance measurement is the Department of Public Works (DPW). The DPW is responsible for street maintenance, garbage collection, and managing the City's water and sewer operations. The subordinate indicators below reflect the priorities of the community groups convened by the project:

- Citizen Satisfaction with the delivery of services
- Snow Clearance Effectiveness

- Citizen Involvement
- Library Usage
- Physical Condition of Neighborhoods
- Effectiveness and Cost Efficiency of Municipal Services

Data for five of the six municipal services indicators will be provided by municipal agencies. In two instances, these data will require additional analysis (i.e., citizen survey responses, neighborhood breakdown of citizen involvement data). The City Manager has agreed to add several new questions to his annual citizen survey, which will enable the team to better assess citizen satisfaction with a variety of municipal services, including police and fire services, parks, and recreation and neighborhood planning and development.

Once provided, data on snow clearance, library usage and information contained in ICMA project reports, will be reported without much additional analysis. Assessing the physical state of Worcester's neighborhoods will require a much more substantial investment of time and resources. The efforts to measure this indicator will attempt to replicate the ComNet project, undertaken by the Fund for the City of New York (FCNY). Barbara Cohn and her team at FCNY have tentatively agreed to serve as consultants to the Research Bureau's project. They will provide technical assistance to project staff and assist in instructing volunteers from the various neighborhoods to be examined. Volunteers will be briefed regarding the proper procedures for collecting data about the physical conditions of their neighborhoods. The final conditions to be measured will be decided by the neighborhood representatives. They are expected to include the

condition of neighborhood streets and sidewalks, the cleanliness of public spaces, and the presence of graffiti on area buildings.

4. **Education**

As a result of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, the budget for the Worcester Public Schools has almost doubled from \$106 million to \$192 million in seven years. In exchange for this large infusion of funds from the state, every district is required to have all students participate in the annual Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests in four subject areas: English language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and History and Social Science. These tests allow an assessment of student achievement at the level of individual students, schools, and districts.

Recognizing that improving student achievement requires parental as well as municipal commitment, the extent of parental involvement in the public schools will also be tracked by the Worcester Benchmarking project. The WPS will collect and compile data for attendance at all schools for a "get to know our school night" and parent-teacher conferences.

They will also distribute surveys to teachers and principals to determine the extent to which they "reach out" to parents to attend conferences, and to promote parental involvement in their children's education at home and/or school. These surveys were developed by and have been used in similar settings by Clark University Professor, Wendy Grolnick. The results of these surveys will be provided to the Research Bureau for analysis.

In addition to traditional measures of school performance (i.e., standardized test scores, attendance, and dropout rates), the indicators developed for Education address other student outcomes, including post-graduation placement and the degree of satisfaction employers have with students and graduates of the Worcester Public Schools. Employer satisfaction will be measured using the results of an original survey designed in cooperation and administered by the WPS. This survey will be completed by employers who have been directly involved with Worcester Public School students and graduates by virtue of their participation in internship and summer jobs programs sponsored by the WPS and the City.

The indicators for Education are as follows:

- Level of Parent Involvement in Public Schools
- Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Scores
- Attendance and Dropout Rates
- Post-Graduate Placement
- Local Employer Satisfaction with Worcester Public Schools
- Student Mobility

5. **Youth Services**

This municipal goal has proven challenging to benchmark since the vast majority of services provided to Worcester's youth are delivered by private organizations and institutions (i.e., churches, synagogues, boys and girls clubs, etc.), each of which serves its own constituency and obtains its funding from a large number of public and private sources. Therefore, the indicators

selected have been designed to focus on problems in the community, which reflect the extent of the need for youth services in Worcester. The indicators presented below reflect the priorities of the community groups convened. These groups agreed that the data collected would help them determine whether the present array of services adequately addresses the needs of Worcester's youth. It will also generate an informal public discussion regarding the best ways of delivering youth services to those who need them. The data for the following indicators will be drawn from state and federal secondary data sources:

- Presence of "At Risk Youth"
- Teen Pregnancy Rate
- Infant Mortality Rate
- Extent of Juvenile Crime

Concurrently with the development and refinement of performance measures, the Research Bureau has been engaged in identifying and developing data collection strategies and methods designed to generate reliable performance measurement data. Many of these performance indicators are readily available from federal, state, and municipal agencies. In addition, the Research Bureau will work with each municipal department to develop mechanisms to ensure that self-reported data is accurate and collected in the same manner each year. Other performance measures will require conducting original research.

Who have been involved in initiating, developing, and using performance measurement?

Maximizing community involvement was the first step in the planning efforts. Early in the grant period, three additional Advisory groups were assembled to support the group of community leaders and neighborhood representatives who had contributed to the development of preliminary performance measures, all of which were based upon the City's strategic plan. These additional groups were composed of representatives from a number of Worcester's neighborhood associations and community development corporations. These three groups met with the Research Bureau staff several times, and played a key role in helping to refine the performance measures and develop accurate maps of Worcester's neighborhoods. The groups also participated in three public forums sponsored by the Research Bureau, which focused upon developing strategies for revitalizing Worcester's neighborhoods.

The development of a neighborhood cabinet, originally proposed by the Research Bureau, was revisited by a participant at one of the aforementioned forums convened to discuss strategies for revitalizing Worcester's neighborhoods. This cabinet will be composed of representatives from Worcester's neighborhoods and municipals, and serve as a neighborhood issues advisory board to Worcester's City Manager and City Council. Its main purpose is to use the Research Bureau's indicators as tools for developing public policy priorities; to increase citizen involvement; and to promote governmental accountability. Worcester's City Manager has encouraged the formation of the neighborhood development cabinet, and it is anticipated that it will be formally established by the Worcester City Council. In addition, in his FY 2000 budget message, Worcester's City Manager publicly agreed to cooperate with the Research Bureau on the Worcester Benchmarking project and committed to considering project findings when developing future municipal policies.

The Research Bureau turned its attention to a systematic review of performance measures literature, and began to visit and consult with those who have been engaged in other citizen-driven performance projects on the Northeast. The staff at the Research Bureau met with the following personnel: Carol Dwyer and Bill Coplin of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University; Marc Holzer and Kathe Callahan of Rutgers University-Newark; Barbara Cohn and her team from the Fund for the City of New York; and Jay Fountain, Dean Mead, and Wilson Campbell of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). During these visits, the Research Bureau learned about each project and received feedback and suggestions regarding their performance measures, as well as some useful advice.

Partnerships have also been developed with community leaders in Hartford, CT; Providence, RI; and Springfield, MA. These cities are similar in population to Worcester and are often compared to it. The goal is to encourage their continued participation in these projects so that all four cities can compare their performance on issues of common concern. The staff at the Research Bureau also met with staff members of the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council (CPEC) and the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC). Both organizations have expressed considerable interest in collaborating with the Research Bureau on this current project. The Research Bureau is in the process of locating an appropriate partner in Springfield, MA.

Other partnerships have been established with the United Way of Central Massachusetts and the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, which have been participating in a complimentary effort designed to measure “community health” in Central Massachusetts. In exchange for some

financial support, the Research Bureau has agreed to collect certain data for Worcester and approximately thirty nearby towns. After developing a demographic profile of each community using census data, the Research Bureau will collect certain social, economic, and public health data. The indicators will include each community's income and occupational makeup, type and availability of housing, rate of infant mortality, teen pregnancy, and prevalence of infectious diseases. The purpose of this data collection and analysis is for these foundations to have the background information necessary to make informed decisions regarding community needs and to determine which projects to support. In addition to adding a regional dimension to the project, the benefit to the Research Bureau is to compare Worcester's performance to that of its neighbors. This will also provide additional funding, which will help to ensure that the project continues well beyond the three-year grant period.

In order to measure municipal performance at both the citywide and neighborhood levels, the Research Bureau has worked extensively with officials from the City's Office of Planning and Community Development and the Worcester Police Department, as well as the neighborhood advisory groups to develop maps defining the City's neighborhoods. This allows for correspondence with the U.S. Census tract boundaries and police reporting districts, as there is a need to have these neighborhood areas recognizable and viewed as valid by their residents.

What obstacles were encountered throughout the process?

The cities mapping process has been more complex than anticipated. The development of each neighborhood map required the Research Bureau staff to meet on numerous occasions with

participants in the community groups and other residents of the individual neighborhoods. It was also necessary for the Research Bureau's staff to become conversant on GIS software employed to create the maps to be used to map neighborhood level data produced by the project. And, as aforementioned, the team worked with the Fund for the City of New York to develop a method that will allow for the replication of the ComNet project in a number of Worcester's neighborhoods.

Has the community recognized any immediate benefits?

Broadening community participation has had a number of positive effects on the project. First, it led to a re-evaluation of the preliminary performance measures. This resulted in a more focused set of measures that take account of the priorities of Worcester's residents. Second, the participation of these three groups strengthened the legitimacy of both the project and the performance measures, which they helped to develop. Finally, the involvement of the Advisory groups has inspired the development of a new collaboration between Worcester's neighborhood leaders and its municipal government.

What were the lessons learned?

One common lesson that emerged from the review of the performance measurement literature concerned the importance of keeping data collection, and simplifying reporting in order to facilitate improved public understanding and promote governmental cooperation. In doing so, the Research Bureau decided to limit the number of performance measures reported, thereby ensuring that the results of its team's efforts would not be ignored because they contained too much information and were difficult for the general public to digest. Rather than eliminate

measures that had been identified as important to the community, it was decided to disseminate results of performance measurement efforts in five separate reports released periodically to correspond with each of Worcester's five strategic goals. This approach ensured that the number of performance measures contained in any one report would be manageable, thus facilitating public understanding. It would also provide an opportunity for citizens to maintain a year-round focus on community conditions and the performance of Worcester's municipal government.

What one thing should be recommended to a community that is considering this process?

While no one notable recommendation was made, the Research Bureau's emphasis on developing partnerships can be inferred as key to their project's success. Such partnerships include the community's participation, meeting with those who have conducted similar citizen-driven performance projects in the past and have experienced some degree of success, enlisting the support of the political and administrative arm of the local government leaders, and developing partnerships with thirty neighboring cities with demographical characteristics similar to that of Worcester.

If given the opportunity to conduct a similar study, what one thing could be accomplished differently?

While data on the Research Bureau's experience with Worcester during the funding of the initial grant was available, similar information is unavailable as to its experience in the current three year project.