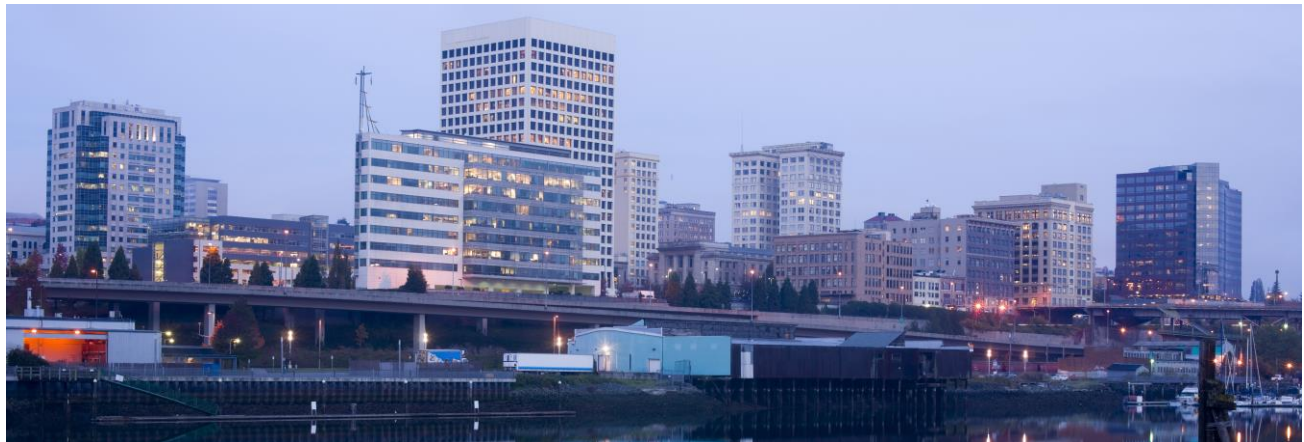# What Works Cities | Bloomberg Philanthropies

City Feature: Tacoma, WA

Leveraging Data and Evidence to Enhance Quality of Service for Residents

Setting the Stage

City Manager T.C. Broadnax and Mayor Strickland had been longstanding supporters of data and evidence based practices, and yet, they understood that these practices could play an even greater role in strategic planning and service delivery at every level of city government. Most importantly, the City was working on ways to improve the equity of service delivery whereby a strong data and evidence-based approach to service delivery would help them evaluate the equity of services so that decisions-making could be better informed by on the ground realities for residents and not assumptions.

The Opportunity

The city of Tacoma had been working with data and evidence-based practices for a while. They were already producing quarterly performance reports, Tacoma 24/7, which was a resident focused report on performance across 7 services areas and 24 key measures. Each quarter a department would be highlighted to present on its performance around key measures, history, targets, and comparative data. However, the City lacked a common, centralized approach and needed to better extend out the use of data and evidence based practices such that it permeated beyond the top leadership through to departments and finally to frontline staff. With the release of the city's strategic plan, Tacoma 2025, the city was well positioned to expand on their current practices.

Our Work Together

With commitment from both City Manager Broadnax and Mayor Strickland and enthusiasm from their team, What Works Cities (WWC) identified two ways for Tacoma to partner with the experts at the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University (GovEx), Results for America, and the Sunlight Foundation.

First, the City and the GovEx team worked together to build out a performance management program that would better help the city use data more effectively to drive decision-making and track progress towards its strategic goals. In particular, the City Manager and his team highlighted an opportunity to clarify and break down barriers around alignment between data reporting programs, such as with Tacoma 2025 and Tacoma 24/7. To address these challenges, Tacoma designed a framework for a stat program to be piloted and implemented with the budget for 2017-2018 to facilitate tracking and discussion of departmental and citywide indicators aligned with Tacoma 2025. The city also developed 2 and 10-year goals for each department aligned with Tacoma 2025 priority areas.
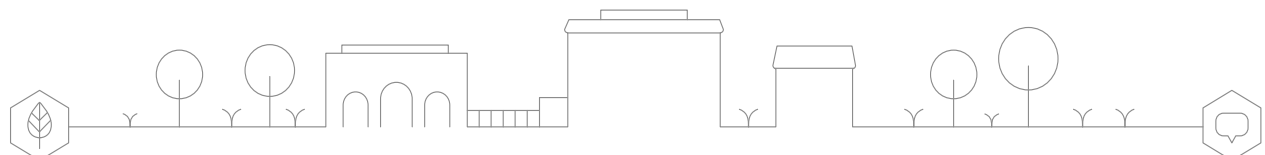
Second, the City and the GovEx team, along with support Sunlight, worked to expand the City's open data program and better integrating it into ongoing practices. City staff and leadership spoke to a need for city government to better communicate openly with residents and city councilors about their processes, decision-making, and recent successes. To address this gap, Tacoma developed and passed a City Council Resolution and a comprehensive administrative open data policy, while also creating a process for releasing their data. This included prioritizing datasets related to the Tacoma 2025 community strategic plan for consideration for public release.

Underlying both the performance management and open data work was an opportunity to begin dismantling departmental silos, reorienting the culture of government to data driven decision-making and incorporating data and evidence to all aspects of city decision-making.

Key Accomplishments

- Tacoma developed 2 and 10 year goals for each department aligned with Tacoma 2025 priority areas, began collecting performance measures for each goal, and engaged departments in training to set goals and targets on an ongoing basis;

- Tacoma designed a framework for a stat program to be piloted and implemented with the budget for 2017-2018 to facilitate tracking and discussion of departmental and citywide indicators aligned with Tacoma 2025;

- Developed departmental and citywide goals developed to be shared with residents via the biennial budget, finalized key community indicators with the Tacoma 2025 steering committee, and designed Tacoma's stat program to have a public reporting component;

- Tacoma drafted and passed a City Council Resolution stating Tacoma's commitment to open data, drafted an administrative policy to accompany the resolution, and set the stage for ongoing governance by identifying potential structures for an open data governance committee;

- Tacoma launched a data inventory process by working directly with departments to identify relevant datasets and began prioritizing datasets related to the Tacoma 2025 community strategic plan for consideration for public release;

- Tacoma included annual public reports in its open data resolution, launched interdepartmental conversations to identify relevant data to open across departments, and engaged Tacoma Public Utilities in discussions to continue to open high-priority utilities data.

The city of Tacoma has made significant strides towards City Manager Broadnax and Mayor Strickland's vision of bringing greater quality and equity of service for residents through a more responsive and open government.