

# FINDING OUT WHAT'S WORKING · IN AMERICA AND BEYOND

SIMONE BRODY

» *What Works Cities collaborates with participating municipalities to review their current use of data and evidence, understand where they are utilizing best practices and identify areas for growth. Through its expert partners, What Works Cities then designs a customized approach to help mayors address a variety of local issues including economic development and job creation, public health, and social services.* «



“When I became Mayor of this city, we decided that we were going to be a group of people who made decisions based on facts and data”.

Declarations like these – in this case, by Kansas City, Missouri Mayor Sly James – are the underpinning of a growing movement in City Halls across America and throughout the world. These cities are dedicated to the expanded use of data and evidence as a method to improve outcomes for their residents.

James’ statement could be attributed to one of any of the 39 city leaders currently engaged with What Works Cities (WWC), the Bloomberg Philanthropies national initiative helping American cities enhance their use of data and evidence to engage residents, make government more effective and improve lives.

How did Mayor James, as one example, turn his commitment to data into action after his 2011 election? Among other acts, Kansas City launched KCStat, a performance management system that monitors the City’s progress toward its five-year citywide business plan; established Open Data KC, Kansas City’s robust open data portal; and established a regular, closely-watched citizen survey conducted annually to assess residents’ level of satisfaction with city services as well as their priorities for improvement.

Figure 1: Blight is a problem on both sides of the state line. Kansas City, Missouri, recently auctioned off \$1 homes. Now Kansas City, Kansas, is trying a data-driven approach<sup>1</sup>

**DEFINING THE NEED**

An April 2015 Pew Foundation survey<sup>2</sup> showed that fewer than 1 in 20 Americans could produce a single example of how government used data to improve lives. In an era of increasing distrust in institutions, can cultivating a culture of transparency help rebuild that trust from constituents and increase civic engagement? Many city leaders believe it can.

As it turns out, while cities are awash in data, local governments need support to “transform their data into action.” This was the theme of the first WWC Summit in April, 2016 held in NYC to bring together 200 city leaders and experts from 53 cities for a brainstorming session and an opportunity for city leaders to meet their peers. A recent analysis by The Bridgespan Group of the first What Works Cities applications, representing 40 percent of mid-sized cities in the United States, revealed that while 64% of cities track progress towards key goals, only 30% have a process in place for analyzing and following up on that information. Similarly, while 70% indicated their commitment to using data and evidence to make decisions, only 28% currently modify existing programs based on the results of evaluations.

**THE WHAT WORKS CITIES PROGRAM**

Turning cities' commitment to data and evidence into practice that makes effective use of data is at the heart of What Works Cities, which celebrated its 1-year anniversary in April, 2016. The What Works Cities initiative is a three-year, \$42 million effort to support mayors and local leaders in 100 mid-sized U.S. cities with technical assistance and peer-to-peer learning opportunities to make government more effective. The program helps cities:

1. Create sustainable open data programs and policies that promote transparency and robust citizen engagement;
2. Better incorporate data into budget, operational, and policy decision making;
3. Conduct low-cost, rapid evaluations that allow cities to continually improve programs; and
4. Focus funding on approaches that deliver results for citizens.

Applicants apply to join the program on-line

(www.whatworkscities.org). Bloomberg Philanthropies has assembled a world-class group of expert practitioners to work directly with city leaders and front-line staff.

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A consortium of leading organizations has been assembled to inspire, challenge, and support cities. Together, these partners are delivering a comprehensive program of support, promoting tested as well as innovative new approaches.

- Results for America is leading and coordinating the What Works Cities partner consortium and advancing a nationwide dialogue on the need for cities to use data and evidence in decision making.
- The Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University is working with cities to assess the current state of What Works practices, and supporting implementation and enhancement of open data and performance management programs.
- The Government Performance Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School is supporting cities in improving the results they achieve with their contracted dollars.
- Sunlight Foundation is helping cities craft meaningful and sustainable open data policies.
- The Behavioral Insights Team is helping cities conduct real time, low-cost evaluations of programs so they can continually improve city services.

People often ask: how do you define a What Works City? The What Works Cities Standard reflects a set of aspirations and activities that create a strong foundation for the effective use of data and evidence within city government. The four components - Commit, Measure, Take Stock and Act – build on each other and reflect the practices that city leaders have taken on across the United States to advance the effectiveness of their governments.

1. COMMIT	2. MEASURE
What Works Cities leaders make powerful, public commitments to getting better results for their residents by using data and evidence.	What Works Cities leaders use the data and tools at their disposal to measure progress and engage residents along the way.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ DEFINE GOALS AND PROGRESS: The Mayor and city leaders work collaboratively to define city goals and the measurable progress they intend to see toward meeting those goals.</li> <li>→ STATE COMMITMENT PUBLICLY: The Mayor speaks publicly about using data and evidence to inform policy, funding, and management decisions.</li> <li>→ ENGAGE RESIDENTS: The Mayor engages residents regularly about progress on city priorities, and provides data and evidence to discuss achievements and challenges.</li> <li>→ COLLABORATE AND GALVANIZE: The Mayor builds buy-in around using data and evidence and empowers city leaders to effectively harness these resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ COLLECT DATA: The city systematically collects high-quality, relevant, administrative and performance data.</li> <li>→ FOCUS ON RESULTS: The city uses outcome-based performance measures to determine the impact of its core operations and contracted services.</li> <li>→ SHARE OPENLY AND OFTEN: Through the public release of accessible data, the city enables residents and other decision-makers to track and discuss progress on important public services and programs—and promotes a culture of government transparency and accountability.</li> </ul>
3. TAKE STOCK	4. ACT
What Works Cities leaders consistently review and reflect to measure progress, learn, and make corrections and improvements.	What Works Cities leaders use data and evidence to inform major decisions and take action.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ UNDERSTAND PERFORMANCE: The Mayor uses a citywide performance management system to enable decision-makers to understand trends, spot opportunities, advance citywide goals, and improve outcomes for residents.</li> <li>→ ASSESS PROGRESS: The city uses data and evidence on an ongoing basis to assess progress toward goals and support continuous improvement.</li> <li>→ EVALUATE IMPACT: The city regularly evaluates programs and services to determine and improve their impact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ USE DATA AND EVIDENCE TO INFORM DECISIONS: The city's review of data and evidence informs the city's planning, budget, funding, and management decisions.</li> <li>→ FACILITATE PUBLIC USE OF DATA: The city empowers the public—including citizens, journalists, local institutions, researchers, and entrepreneurs— to use city data to create value for residents and communities.</li> <li>→ USE EVIDENCE OF IMPACT: The city uses evidence of impact from a range of evaluation methods to inform new and improve existing policies and programs.</li> <li>→ REDIRECT FUNDS: The city redirects funds away from policies and programs that do not show measurable impact or contribute to city goals.</li> </ul>

Figure 2: The What Works Cities standard<sup>3</sup>



Figure 3 (left): City of Providence joined WWC in June 2016. The City of Providence will establish open data practices to make data more accessible to residents and community stakeholders<sup>4</sup>



Figure 4 (right): Snow removal truck on the streets of St. Paul

## PROGRESS TO DATE

"Using data and being able to show the data, changed what could be perceived as something subjective to something that's openly objective," said Doug Robertson, City Manager of Little Rock, Arkansas, during April's WWC Summit.

Jackson, Mississippi Mayor Tony Yarber was elected to office in April, 2014, after waging a campaign focused on creating an "environment of transparency" within government. In the year since being named a What Works city, Jackson has established a new Office of Innovation and Performance, inventoried city data, signed an open data policy, and in early April announced the launch of an open data portal.

Yarber explained that having its data accessible to the public went beyond a symbolic act of transparency to "creating an environment where the community, citizens, anybody around the world or around the country had an opportunity to interface with the City of Jackson. And to do that in a way that actually told the story the way that the story should be told: using real data, using data to be able to influence how we get things done, using data to drive discussions, and at the end of the day using the data to improve the city."

Cities report that effectively using data enables them to make progress combatting some of their biggest challenges:

- By crunching the numbers, Jackson realized it could achieve faster compliance from landlords of blighted properties if the oversight

responsibility was moved to the Jackson Police Department from the city's Planning Department; the city increased the number of blighted buildings that were destroyed from just five buildings in 2014 to 115 in 2015 - and realized a savings of more than \$600,000 (a fact disclosed at one of the city's first "Jack-Stat" performance management meetings bringing together the city departments).

- In Las Vegas, the city targeted intersections with the greatest number of traffic accidents, deployed additional resources to those areas, and decreased crashes by 26%, left-turn accidents by 61%, and congestion by 25%.

- In Saint Paul, Minnesota, where government's response to snow emergencies is a critical indicator of City Hall efficacy, Saint Paul's use of data analytics enabled the Public Works department to more nimbly deploy snow removal trucks to the neighborhoods that needed it most, effecting a 20% decrease in residents' complaints and a 40% savings in road salt.

In their collaboration with the What Works Cities experts, many cities are learning to make use of their data through open data portals and by conducting a thorough inventory of the city's data. The inventories often bring to light for the first time the location of key data sets, breaking down silos among departments in City Hall, and encouraging more effective collaboration and problem solving. And by making the city's accessible and updated information available on

an open data portal, cities are inviting collaboration with residents as well as with local app developers, academics, businesses, and others who can collaborate with the city to address critical challenges. Cities are also working to establish key metrics that enable leaders to chart their progress toward strategic goals, and more.

Seattle, for example, is partnering with the Government Performance Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School to improve the results they achieve with their contracted dollars – in Seattle's case, the city is focusing its homeless provider contracts on reducing homelessness, not just providing daily services to its homeless population.

Kansas City expanded its existing performance management practice through its work with WWC partner the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University by embedding data-driven management practices throughout city departments.

Other cities, such as Louisville, Kentucky and New Orleans, Louisiana are working with What Works Cities partner The Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) to utilize behavioral science to design low-cost randomized control trials. These trials, or evaluations, are sent out to city residents via text message or letter, and are designed to determine how best to encourage residents' participation and compliance with the city in actions such as showing up for free medical exams, paying taxes, and following through on their applications to become police officers.

Luckily, this work isn't happening in a vac-

uum and is designed to be shared. In addition to the game-changing on-the-ground support that WWC is providing cities, we're cultivating a powerful learning community that is allowing leaders from all of our cities to exchange ideas, share solutions to challenges, and illustrate the power made possible when we use data and evidence to get results.

Michael Baskin, Chief Policy Officer in the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee, says budget directors are often "wary of big dollar saving promises that never pan out," while departments are frustrated by not having the ability to invest in new ideas. Baskin found one possible answer at the recent WWC Summit while taking an early morning run with a practitioner from a city across the country who manages an innovation fund that provides revolving loans to departments that are testing new ideas. "We connected with like-minded city-doers to swap solutions."

## NEXT STEPS

At the inaugural What Works Cities Summit, Mayor Michael Bloomberg urged the group to: "Copy other people's ideas. Who cares where they come from?"

We have good reason to believe cities are eager to develop their capacity to fully utilize data and evidence and to learn from each other. In the one year since its launch, What Works Cities received applications from 140 cities in 41 states, nearly half of all eligible cities in the country. With the current 39 cities we've select-

ed, What Works Cities is now partnering with cities with annual municipal budgets exceeding a combined \$48 billion, representing 14 million Americans. In just one year, these cities are already making measurable progress:

- What Works Cities has worked with cities to enact and expand 14 Open Data policies to establish sustainable open data practices;
- Cities have launched 15 low-cost evaluations, allowing governments to quickly test the best methods of encouraging citizen participation in programs and services; and
- The Government Performance Lab is helping cities improve the results they achieve through their contracts related to homeless services, workforce development, minority vendors and street construction, worth a total of \$135 million.

But this is only the beginning. What Works Cities will expand to 100 cities in the next two years. In that time, we will continue to nurture the developing community that is allowing these leaders to learn from a constantly-growing peer network. We will also be launching a certification program to recognize and celebrate cities for their achievements in data and evidence usage; motivate city staff and leaders, and advance a national movement of cities that are eager and equipped to make progress with their use of data and evidence in decision-making.

While our current focus is US cities, the possibilities are endless with regard to future collaboration with world-class cities across the globe. "Results for All," an initiative of What Works Cities partner Results for America (RFA) is undertaking a landscape study to better understand the infrastructure that governments around the world are building to support use of evidence and data to inform policy and funding decisions. RFA is conducting this global scan with an eye towards bringing together the policymakers, practitioners, and experts from countries around the world with the capacity to scale the deployment of evidence-informed policymaking to improve results. This work could lead to additional opportunities for WWC to build relationships in other countries with like-minded mayors and policymakers.

In America, Bloomberg Philanthropies and

its partners are working with cities to create a blueprint for how to help cities use data and evidence to improve lives and engage residents, but we know that similar good work is happening in cities and countries around the world.

In the words of Michael Bloomberg: "Cities have a lot more in common with one another than they have differences...The problems come from the cities and the solutions come from the cities." ♦

#### ENDNOTES

1 Retrieved July 19, 2016 from <http://kcur.org/post/tackle-blight-kansas-city-kansas-will-crunch-numbers#stream/0>

2 <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/21/open-government-data/>

3 Retrieved July 19, 2016 from <http://whatworkscities.bloomberg.org/about/>

4 Retrieved 23 July 2016 from <http://whatworkscities.bloomberg.org/cities/>

5 Retrieved July 19, 2016 from <http://results4america.org/press-room/twelve-cities-join-works-cities-expanding-wave-local-government-leaders-accelerating-use-data-evidence-improve-lives/>



Figure 5 (right top): According to the results from June 13, 2016<sup>5</sup> 39 cities in 25 states are now part of the initiative

Figure 6 (right bottom): Michael Bloomberg welcomed Mayors and city leaders to the first What Works Cities Summit in April, 2016 in New York City. Left to right: WWC Executive Director Simone Brody; Victorville, California Mayor Gloria Garcia; Mesa, Arizona Mayor John Giles; Denton, Texas Mayor Chris Watts; Michael Bloomberg; Tacoma, Washington Mayor Marilyn Strickland; Cape Coral, Florida Mayor Marni Retzer; Kansas City, Missouri Mayor Sly James; Jim Anderson, Bloomberg Philanthropies