



A Blueprint to Certification

5 Steps to Accelerate Your City's Path to Certification

Within the past year, more than 180 cities expressed interest in [What Works Cities Certification](http://bloombg.org/2ncW9PH) (<http://bloombg.org/2ncW9PH>) a first-of-its-kind national standard of excellence in city governance. Regardless of where they are in their data journey, cities understand the importance of incorporating data and evidence in decision-making, and many are looking for leading practices to follow, resources to help them achieve their goals, and a community of cities with which to share challenges and solutions.

Although Certification is awarded to high-performing cities, the program focuses on the fundamentals of data-driven governance and supports all cities as they build a strong foundation to effectively make decisions, and ultimately, provide better services. When a city pursues Certification, the learning process can have a ripple effect across municipal government.

Whether your city is new to this work or already somewhat experienced in utilizing these practices, here are five steps—complete with What Works Cities resources—to help accelerate your city's work toward Certification.

Public commitment from executive leadership sets a city up for success.

The path toward Certification starts with a clear mandate from and the support of a city's chief executive. To build a successful foundation for data-driven decision-making, local governments need the support of their mayors and/or city managers. One way a chief executive in government can demonstrate commitment is by issuing an executive order, policy, and/or mandate about open data, evaluation requirements, or modification of programs. Another way is by publicly communicating city goals around data and evidence and regularly sharing progress with the community. A passionate executive who can clearly articulate the value of data and evidence and who can make that value concrete for both municipal employees and residents is an essential advocate for a data-driven government.

Resources:

[Open Data Policy Guidelines](http://bit.ly/1Y61zc0) (<http://bit.ly/1Y61zc0>)

[Telling the Story of What Works](http://bit.ly/2F5hPXm) (<http://bit.ly/2F5hPXm>)

Setting citywide priorities builds the foundation for a data-driven government.

Fostering a citywide data-driven culture requires a big-picture framework. By developing citywide strategic priorities, certified cities are finding ways to tie data directly to goals that not only guide decision-making, but also are designed to have a direct impact on residents' lives. Building a performance management program is a key way cities can identify and set measurable, time-bound, and publicly available goals (e.g., a Vision Zero effort to eliminate all traffic deaths in ten years) and measure progress. Because the purchasing of goods and services from the private sector underpins so much of the work cities do, employing results-driven contracting strategies is vital for cities to ensure that they're maximizing limited public dollars and producing desired outcomes. These strategies include setting out clear goals, structuring the contract in accordance with those goals, measuring key metrics to evaluate progress, and actively managing contracts to collaboratively troubleshoot problems during the course of the contract. For cities embarking on results-driven contracting for the first time, start by identifying key procurements, contracts, and grants that are of strategic importance and in alignment with city priorities. By setting clear goals, charting your headway, and sharing those advancements with residents, cities can build trust and accountability while successfully addressing critical problems.

Resources:

[Getting Started with Performance Management](http://bit.ly/2n3KYMb) (<http://bit.ly/2n3KYMb>)

[How Cities Can Improve Their Procurement of Goods and Services](http://bit.ly/2rwwOYr)

(<http://bit.ly/2rwwOYr>)

Designate the right leaders to foster a data-driven culture and drive priorities.

Investing in the right leaders to drive a culture of data use is just as crucial as having a strong public commitment from a chief executive. The best cities in the country are identifying and investing in individuals and teams to set and work toward data-driven goals. From analysts to chief data officers and beyond, these leaders need the agency to set priorities, build teams, and execute on strategy on citywide data, performance management, procurement, program evaluations, and reallocation of city funds. Fundamentally, these individuals and teams should be given an enterprise view of how data-driven strategies can be implemented across departments and agencies. In designating an individual or team to take on such work, cities should develop job descriptions that clearly define expected roles and responsibilities. The creation of such positions is itself a demonstration of cities' commitment to data-driven governance and keeps governments accountable for making evidence-based decisions. Cities can further deepen the impact of these critical staff by investing in training opportunities that grow their skills.

Resources:

[Sample Job Description: Chief Data Officer](https://goo.gl/63qY6V) (<https://goo.gl/63qY6V>)

[So You Want to Start a Data Academy](http://bit.ly/2BONkXP) (<http://bit.ly/2BONkXP>)

Before applying new solutions, identify what doesn't work.

Data-driven solutions come from understanding what isn't working. Taking stock, one of the four components of the [What Works Cities Standard](http://bit.ly/2DHO3uC) (<http://bit.ly/2DHO3uC>), requires cities to consistently review and reflect on the data and evidence they have to learn and make improvements. Certified cities have a comprehensive understanding of what practices, programs, and policies are not meeting desired goals and objectives. Initiating low-cost, or randomized, evaluations of priority city programs and services is a great way to identify what is and is not working, and to what extent. Unlike more traditional evaluations and audits, low-cost evaluations return results quickly, which can be used to inform operational and policy changes within specific programs. The highest-performing cities are going a step further: repurposing funding from programs that aren't working toward ones that are.

Resource:

[Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Behavioral Insights](http://bit.ly/2n3szPA)

(<http://bit.ly/2n3szPA>)

Build on what's already working.

No city needs to reinvent the wheel or go it alone, and replicating other cities' successes provides an opportunity to accelerate your own progress. For smaller cities with fewer staff and more limited resources, not having to start at square one is a particularly strategic way to maximize the impact of staff and funding alike. As we visited certified cities, we heard over and over again how thriving programs and policies were built by first looking to other successful models and then adapting them to fit their city's specific needs—or by examining models that didn't work in other cities and learning from those mistakes. Being a top-performing city doesn't necessitate knowing everything; rather, it involves knowing how to maximize resources, which includes leveraging the knowledge of others. Likewise, cities should look to their own prior successes, determine what made them work, and apply insights gleaned from that analysis to future endeavors.

Resources:

[What Works Cities Certification: What Excellence Looks Like in Local Government](http://bit.ly/2F8uEAq)

(<http://bit.ly/2F8uEAq>)

[What Works Cities Toolkit](http://bit.ly/21maoQk) (<http://bit.ly/21maoQk>)

The keys to success are available to any city. We're excited to see how Certification guides cities' next steps as they develop the data-driven tools to address their toughest challenges and improve life for their residents.