Presentation is a key part of making performance information useful. Too often performance information provided by departments is unclear, and difficult to comprehend, especially for elected officials who have little time to pore over tons of data. This guide suggests actions to help assure that information you receive is presented in an understandable and useful manner.

Also of great importance is the quality of the data provided to you. “Garbage in; garbage out.” This old adage is equally applicable to the performance information council members receive. Being able to trust the data is very important to local elected officials.

### Summary of Actions

- Ask questions about the reliability and timeliness of the outcome information provided.
- Establish a data quality control process that includes both internal and external “audit” procedures — if not already in place.
- Request that data be checked when it is particularly important or when something “just doesn’t seem right.”
- Seek information from citizen surveys, informal citizen feedback, agency complaint tallies, citizen advisory boards, and other organizations to supplement other sources.
- Require that outcome information be provided well in advance of budget hearings to give time for adequate review of the information.
- Request information that will help determine whether the current level of service is good or bad.
- Ensure that the performance reports are easy to read and understandable.
- Seek regular reports on key outcome indicators.
- Request that staff summarize the findings of their performance reports and highlight material likely to be of special interest to elected officials.

### ACTIONS

**Obtaining reliable outcome data.** Elected officials want to make sound decisions on services being provided they need relevant measures of results that contain reliable information.

**ACTION:** Ask questions that indicate an interest in the accuracy and timeliness of the outcome information. For example, ask whether the accuracy of the data has been checked and how current are the data provided.

**ACTION:** Make it clear to the administration that it has the primary responsibility for data quality control and is accountable for data quality.

**ACTION:** Discuss the validity of data with appropriate departments.

**ACTION:** Ask each department to provide a summarized description of its efforts to check the accuracy of the outcome data.

**ACTION:** For data that are particularly important, or when something “just doesn’t seem right,” ask for a review of the data. Ask the department to discuss the validity of the data being reported and why it believes the data are reliable. (See Examples: San Jose, CA)
A Municipal Action Guide

**ACTION:** Ask departments to identify the sources of data they are providing.

**ACTION:** Provide for some form of periodic independent review or audit, such as periodic reviews of samples of the outcome information, especially for key indicators. If the auditor can do performance auditing, ask the auditor to periodically test samples of the data and the systems used to gather the data. *(See Examples: Austin, TX)*

**ACTION:** Avoid an “I gotcha” approach in reviewing results data. This type of attitude can encourage the departments to tweek the indicators or be less responsive to future request.

**Getting timely outcome information.** Because elected officials are busy during the year, especially during the budget season and can have little time to review and react to the data provided to them it is important that they receive relevant outcome information in a timely manner throughout the year.

**ACTION:** Require departments to provide outcome information well in advance of budget hearings or program reviews so that outcome information is not seen for the first time at the time of the hearing.

**ACTION:** Schedule key program and issue reviews during the year between annual budget sessions. Include in these reviews a focus on results and establish a schedule for council reviews of programs and issues expected to be of particular interest. If a special issue arises during the year, hold special reviews to address it.

**Obtaining information from multiple sources.** Information from sources outside the government can sometimes provide valuable checks on government data and can provide information on outcomes not covered by internal data collection.

**ACTION:** Seek outcome information from such other sources as:

- Feedback from citizens. Day-to-day interactions with citizens can provide confirmatory information, but the representativeness of that information may be limited;

- Information collected by organizations outside the government, such as nonprofit organizations and businesses; and

- Comparison data from other similar governments.

**ACTION:** Compare findings from citizen and business surveys to other information provided to the council and assess the extent to which the information is consistent. *(See Examples: Coral Springs, FL)*

**ACTION:** Ask departments for summaries of department complaint tallies. Hold special hearings on the quality of those services for which council members have received many complaints or otherwise have concerns.

**ACTION:** Use advisory boards and commissions to gather and review outcome information.

**ACTION:** Review relevant reports from private nonprofit organizations likely to have such information. *(See Examples: Washington, D.C.)*

**Determining if reported results are good or bad.** Key to elected officials understanding reported results is for them to be able to compare their community’s results to benchmarks.

**ACTION:** Request that the outcome reports include comparisons to various benchmarks. Benchmarks likely to be relevant include:

- Prior year levels;

- Targets set by the administration for the reporting period;

- Outcome levels by district or neighborhoods and/or by other demographic breakouts; and

- Data from other comparable local governments for similar services.

**Assuring results information is provided to them in a useful and clear format.**

Performance reports can be difficult to read or may not provide the information in such a way as to meet the decision needs of council members. Performance reports can sometimes provide loads of data, often mixing together outputs and outcomes, but do not discuss the implications of the data.

**ACTION:** Identify readability problems in performance reports provided to the council and its committees. Ask staff to improve formats to be more useful to council members. Attachment 2-1 is an example of increasingly easy to
Getting Good Quality Information

produce maps. The map shows the results for an important outcome indicator broken out by geographical segments. Such a presentation is likely to be of considerable interest to elected officials.

**ACTION:** Ask staff to identify and analyze the material likely to be of most interest and importance to council members and to highlight unexpectedly poor and good performance and make recommendations based on their analysis.

**ACTION:** Ensure that the council is provided with easy to read and understandable performance reports. The bar chart and two graphs in Attachment 2-2 are examples of useful visual presentations that help readers see the main points.

**ACTION:** Provide guidance about the level of detail that will normally be appropriate for the council and its committees. The level of detail needed will likely vary depending on the particular circumstances.

**ACTION:** Ask departments to list separately outputs and outcomes, labeling and grouping them for ease of use.

**ACTION:** Encourage departments to collect as much performance information as they believe they need to manage their services, but to consult with council as to what performance information needs to be presented routinely to the council.

**ACTION:** Ask citizen’s advisory committees to review performance information reports for usefulness and clarity.

**Frequency with which performance information should be provided to elected officials.**

Based on how it is to be used elected officials need performance information at various times during the year. Yet it is important to not overload management with requirements to report information to frequently.

**ACTION:** Consider requesting quarterly or mid-year reports on key outcome indicators if the council deems them necessary. For special circumstances, the council might want performance information even more frequently. *(See Examples: Carlsbad, CA and Coral Springs, FL)*

**ACTION:** Require that relevant performance information be provided well before budget hearings to allow adequate time for council member review.

**ACTION:** Be aware of the load being placed on staff to gather and report performance information.

**Handling large amounts of data.** Council members are often faced with an overload of information and are busy people. They often do not have time to review the information provided in a timely manner.

**ACTION:** Ask staff to prepare a summary of each performance report and highlight the information/data they believe is likely to be of importance and interest to council members. This summary might be in the form of a “dashboard” or “score card” that focuses on “key” indicators that are reported regularly but are limited in number. Attachment 2-3 is an example from Mecklenburg County, North Carolina of one form of a scorecard.

**ACTION:** Ask departments to present what they believe to be the highlights of the information in clear and understandable formats, such as using bar charts and other more visual formats.

**ACTION:** Retain the ability to look at more detailed performance information when council members need to examine specific programs or policies in more depth.
EXAMPLES

San Jose, California

In a San Jose City Council study session on the proposed 2002-2003 Operating Budget, a council member noticed that two performance indicators for Traffic Safety Services, “Number of traffic accidents” and “Number of crashes at 10 highest crash locations” did not seem right. He suggested that the indicators be reported on per-capita or per-miles-traveled basis to reflect more accurately whether traffic accidents were increasing because of lack of agency action or because of increase in the population or number of cars used. He also noticed an error in the reporting of data on “Number of miles traveled (in billions)” because the number shown in the budget seemed too low. The Chief of the Police Department acknowledged that an error had occurred in reporting billions of miles traveled.¹

Austin, Texas

When several members of the Austin City Council expressed concern about whether park maintenance dollars were employed efficiently and effectively, the independent city auditor conducted an audit. Members were concerned about complaints, safety issues, and obvious maintenance backlogs at most parks. The audit found that citizen satisfaction with park maintenance had decreased from 82% to 75% in the past five years based on citizen survey conducted for the city and that the parks and recreation department did not routinely assess the condition of parks facilities. The audit findings were discussed at a meeting with the responsible council committee. The committee requested that parks management provide data that could be used to determine maintenance needs as well as ways to pay for those needs.²

Coral Springs, Florida

The City Commission of Coral Springs, FL felt it needed data on what businesses wanted and needed. City staff initiated an annual Business Survey in addition to its annual Citizen Survey. Based on information from this survey, combined with information from other sources, such as focus groups, the Commission modified the city’s signage ordinance.³

Commission members of Coral Springs, FL also receive quarterly performance reports that include data on “Key Intended Outcomes” and core service measures.⁴

Washington, D.C.

The private nonprofit Washington, D.C. Kids Count Collaborative report “Every Kid Counts in the District of Columbia,” provides data on 40 outcome indicators for the District including data on the conditions of children for each of the city’s eight wards and each of 39 neighborhood areas.⁵

Carlsbad, California

Carlsbad Council Members receive monthly performance reports and query staff about the data.⁶ The monthly report is in addition to an annual city “State of Effectiveness” report and the city’s budget, both of which include performance information.

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¹ Video Recording, 23 May 2002. City of San Jose Council Meeting/Study Session. Part 1 of 2. City of San Jose, CA.
³ E-mail communication from Kevin Knutson, Director of Communications & Marketing (formerly Budget Director), City of Coral Springs, FL, (June 2, 2006) and telephone interview with Rhon Ernest-Jones, former Mayor, City of Coral Springs, FL (July 7, 2006).
⁴ E-mail communication from Kevin Knutson, Director of Communications & Marketing (formerly Budget Director), City of Coral Springs (June 2, 2006).
⁶ E-mail communication from Joseph Garuba, Assistant to the City Manager, Carlsbad, CA (June 2, 2006).
Attachment 2-1

Attachment 2-2

Examples of Code Enforcement Performance from Prince William County, VA

These survey questions are only asked every other year and were not asked in 2002 or 2004.
## Getting Good Quality Information

### Attachment 2-3

Example from Mecklenburg County, NC of Scorecard on Efficiency and Effectiveness of Government

![Scorecard Results](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective &amp; Efficient Government Scorecard Results</th>
<th>FY03</th>
<th>FY04</th>
<th>FY05</th>
<th>FY06 Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2015 Performance Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bond Rating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To maintain Triple A bond rating, the highest possible score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees per Capita</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>629 employees per capita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To optimally manage demands for service at or below a rate of 700 positions per 100,000 County residents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Knowledge, Skills &amp; Abilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>74% Satisfaction Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have 80% or more of County employees satisfied with training and development opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Property Tax Revenue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have 51% or less of the County’s revenue from property tax dollars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Satisfaction Disparity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disparity in 42% of indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have no racial/ethnic disparities in employee satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resignation Rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3% Resignation Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have 6% or less of the County’s workforce voluntarily resigning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Retention Rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64% Retention Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To retain 80% or more of the County’s new hires for at least 2 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Tax to Household Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meck: 2.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have property tax revenue as a percentage of household income less than or equal to comparable size North Carolina jurisdictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Benchmark: 1.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

The scorecard illustrates the performance of Mecklenburg County, NC in various areas related to efficiency and effectiveness. The results are shown for the years FY03 to FY06, with green circles indicating a positive outcome and red circles indicating a negative outcome. The performance is evaluated against specific goals such as bond rating, employee satisfaction, and property tax to household income ratio. The image includes a table with detailed performance metrics and indicators, providing a clear visual representation of the county’s progress in these critical areas.