



**Human Services Funding:
A Framework for Improved Outcomes
through Strategic Investments**



August 2015

LEADERSHIP ICMA CLASS OF 2015

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

The City of Tacoma, similar to most urban communities, is challenged with substantial human service needs. Strained federal and state resources typically fail to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations, which in turn impact the well-being of individual residents and families, along with the overall community. The City of Tacoma embraces its role in fostering a vibrant city and strives to close the gap of unmet need by making strategic investments in human services organizations. The residents of Tacoma also support this role, as demonstrated by the passage of the Mental Health Sales Tax in 2012.

The City of Tacoma seeks to establish a new evidence-based framework by which to make decisions for allocating funds for human services contracts to non-profit organizations, based on community need. Extensive research was conducted on the history of human services funding in Tacoma, community-identified priorities, the current funding process, and best practices in this field. The Collective Impact model, along with the work completed by the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County, highlight the importance of measuring the effectiveness of programs and services, and of marrying these measures to both a higher shared vision and on-the-ground funding decisions. The report includes numerous recommendations based on research finding that range widely, but align into two main themes: policy-oriented funding framework recommendations, and process-oriented funding application recommendations.

The policy-oriented funding framework recommendations are grouped into four categories:

- Recommendations associated with the *clear articulation of the community's vision* include using Tacoma 2025 to guide other plans, processes and programs; fully aligning the 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan funding priorities to Tacoma 2025's desired outcomes and measurement system; and for the City of Tacoma to assume the role of backbone organization for human services funding in the community; and explore the connecting roles outside the human services sector to harness other community strengths and assets.
- The second category pertains to the *significance of measurement and data* and includes recommendations such as considering unified, open data as a public good and establishing a cohesive, well-defined data collection and analysis methodology; creating a Data & Engagement policy that anchors data as a key element of community decision making; considering the capability of the resources currently available to the City to achieve this data system; looking to best practices in data driven decision making; and developing benchmarks, key performance indicators, and pivot points.
- Recommendations associated with accurately identifying community needs, including completing a comprehensive community needs assessment, and conducting a community asset inventory.

- The final category includes only one recommendation, which is to explore the opportunities and implications – both the potential benefits and challenges – of a true evidence-based funding system.

The process-oriented recommendations pertain directly to the City of Tacoma’s human services funding procedures, and include continuation of the Stabilization Fund and Innovation, Planning and Capacity Building Fund; consideration of removing essential services (and evidence-based programs; pending Tacoma’s interest and capacity to move in this direction) from a competitive process; building and maximizing the capacity of the Human Services Commission and other volunteers; implementing measures that help non-profits better navigate the application process; and instituting a ‘pre-application’ process.

Background

In January 2015, the City of Tacoma engaged members of the 2015 Leadership ICMA class (L-ICMA Team) to undertake an exploration of the City's human services funding model and business processes. The aim of the study was to establish a new evidence-based framework by which to make decisions for allocating funds for human services contracts to non-profit organizations, based on community need. Since agreeing to a scope of work with the City of Tacoma, the L-ICMA Team has undertaken the following steps:

- a review of the City of Tacoma's present practices around human services contracting, including its systems and processes for evaluating human services grant applications, making funding decisions, and measuring outcomes;
- a review of the relationship between funding practices and the City's strategic framework, including an evaluation of the alignment between the City's Human Services Strategic Plan, and the City's overarching community plan Tacoma 2025;
- a literature review of best and common practices around human services contracting; and
- a comparison of practices of various peer and "best practice" communities identified by the City of Tacoma and the L-ICMA Team.

The outcome of this study, as indicated in what follows, is not a prescriptive "plug and play" framework for the City of Tacoma. Rather, the findings and recommendations below suggest a series of changes that, if taken together in an integrated way, can usher in a new approach to human services funding in the City – a data-driven approach that can measure and, ultimately, demonstrate the City's effectiveness in meeting community need.

On-Site Visit and City of Tacoma Interviews

Approximately 30 interviews were conducted with internal and external stakeholders during and after the L-ICMA Team in-person visit from March 16 to 18, 2015. Multiple staff from the Human Services Department, Office of Equity and Human Rights, Office of Management and Budget, and City Manager's Office collaborated with the L-ICMA Team specifically on this project. Additionally multiple human services providers, community funders, a representative from the Human Services Commission, and two members of Tacoma City Council participated in providing context to the L-ICMA Team specifically for this project. The interviews were instrumental in understanding the processes undertaken in the funding of human services in the community, as well as perceptions of the opportunities and challenges for the City of Tacoma going forward.

Data Gathering and Review

The L-ICMA Team collected and reviewed a range of data sources to inform its exploration of new pathways for the administration of human services funding by the City of Tacoma. Key City of Tacoma documents included within the review are:

- 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan
- Tacoma 2025: Shared Vision, Shared Future
- The Equity and Empowerment Initiative Plan

- Funding Process Task and Timeline
- Human Services Funding Application
- Human Services Commission Application Rating Tools
- Mental Health & Chemical Dependency (MHCD) Coordinated System of Care
- Community Services/MHCD Application Process: Staff Survey
- Community Services/MHCD Application Process: Human Services Commission Survey
- Community Services/MHCD Application Process Survey Results Analysis
- Mandated Outcomes List
- Community Services/MHSUD Outcomes Based Evaluation Policies - July 2014
- Community Service/MHSUD Standard Agreements
- 2015-2016 Funded Programs
- Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development - Five-Year Strategic Plan and Annual Action Plan (March 2015 drafts)
- Various applications submitted by non-profit organizations (funded and non-funded)
- **TacomaData**

Additional research was undertaken to understand possible approaches and best practices that could be applied to help Tacoma strengthen its approach to human services funding. Based on discussions between City of Tacoma staff and the L-ICMA Team, a total of 14 peer and “best practice” communities were initially identified to be interviewed for the purposes of this study. Based on further exploration by the L-ICMA Team, interviews were conducted with seven of these 14 communities. Discussions were undertaken with individuals responsible for administering social services funding on behalf of the following communities:

- Allegheny County, Pennsylvania
- Denver, Colorado
- Fairfax County, Virginia
- Fulton County, Georgia
- Hennepin County, Minnesota
- Mecklenburg County, North Carolina
- San Antonio, TX
- Vancouver, British Columbia

The research undertaken through the interview process was supplemented by a review of literature and frameworks identified by the City of Tacoma and the L-ICMA Team, which seemed relevant to better understanding a range of contracting, outcome based, evidence-based and collaborative models that have been brought to bear in the complex task of administering social service funding. This includes such documents as:

- Funding for Results: A Review of Government Outcomes-Based Agreements (Published by the Beeck Center for Social Impact & Innovation at Georgetown University, November 2014)

- Outcome--Based Evaluation: Faith-Based Social Service Organizations and Stewardship (Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D., Claudia Horn, Calvin W Edwards, Karen M Woods and Collette Caprara, March 29, 2007)
- Approaches to Performance Based Contracting for Social Services (Lawrence L. Martin)
- Performance-Based Contracting for Services: A Survey of NIGP Members (Lawrence L. Martin, Clifford McCue, Mamoon Allaf and Tina Borger)
- An Outcomes-Based Funding Model for the University of Maine System (Developed by The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems)
- Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of HOPWA-funded Programs (Prepared by Clegg and Associates, Inc., Seattle, Washington, June 2001)
- Designing Outcomes-Oriented Performance Measures for Social Services, Presentation at Measuring and Improving Social Service Programs in Government Conference, Sacramento, California (Margaret A. O'Brien-Strain and Ursula M. Bischoff, February 2001)
- The Journey to Evidence-Based Programming: Changing the Face of Social Services (Lisa Williams-Taylor for the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County)
- Collective Impact (John Kania & Mark Kramer, Issue 95, Winter 2011, Stanford Social Innovation Review)

Of the literature referenced above, two examples stand out for the L-ICMA Team as especially illuminating in considering new approaches to human services funding for Tacoma: the collective impact model material and the research on Palm Beach County. Both examples highlight the importance of measuring the effectiveness of programs and services, and of marrying these measures to both a higher shared vision and on-the-ground funding decisions.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT MODEL

The collective impact model – initially identified by the City of Tacoma as a possible reference point for this study – is a framework with the following five essential components: a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and a backbone support organization. Shades of many of these component pieces of the framework show up explicitly in the key recommendations that the L-ICMA Team makes for the City of Tacoma.

BEST PRACTICE

The Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County operates as a special district of local government and levies property taxes to fund services for children and families in Palm Beach County. The Council's guiding principles include an emphasis on primary prevention and intervention services, innovation, and high quality research and fiscal and programmatic accountability. Over the past decade, the Council has conducted extensive research into evidence-based program funding. It has published its findings in the document, "The Journey to Evidence-Based Programming," which includes a specific case study on the implementation of these practices.

While these two approaches definitely were theoretical touchstones, the L-ICMA Team did not approach this project with a single theoretical model in mind and then graft it onto what Tacoma Human Services does. Rather, we have taken what we perceive are some of the best elements of these paradigms and applied them based on what seemed best able to be considered by the City of Tacoma, given the different levels of scope.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The recommendations that the L-ICMA Team proposes for the City of Tacoma range widely, but they align into two main themes or categories:

- The funding framework, which includes considerations around the importance of strategic vision, a strong coordinating role for the City of Tacoma, data-driven decision-making, accurate identification of community needs, and evidence-based programs; and
- The funding process, which considers dimensions of the City's approach to administering different funds, the competitive process, the level of technical assistance available to service providers, and the role of human services staff and the Human Services Commission.

The section below on the L-ICMA Team's findings commences with a consideration of the funding framework.

Funding Framework

1. *Clear Articulation of Vision*

Recommendation 1.1 – Use Tacoma 2025 to Guide Other Plans, Processes and Programs

Like other progressive local governments interested in meeting the needs of its community, the City of Tacoma has undertaken a robust community engagement and strategy development exercise to better grasp -- and ultimately better address -- the priorities of its community. The product of this engagement -- Tacoma 2025 -- articulates the key focus areas the City of Tacoma will seek to advance in its investment of human and financial resources.

Given the comprehensive citizen-focused efforts with over 2,000 Tacoma residents participating in the development of Tacoma 2025, including over 300 residents that attended the July 30, 2014 event at the Convention Center and over 100 residents that attended the review of the first draft of the document, the City of Tacoma can be confident that the desired outcomes articulated in the plan reflect what the people of Tacoma want. With a strong, clear vision in hand, the City of Tacoma has a beacon that it may use to guide all of the other plans and processes nested beneath it. For all of these reasons, a key recommendation is to use Tacoma 2025 as the basis for all other planning documents and funding processes that guide and support the administration of human services funding. Further discussion on the level of current alignment between Tacoma 2025 and the 2015-19 Human Services Strategic Plan, and areas where alignment can be strengthened, is addressed below.

Recommendation 1.2 – Fully align the 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan funding priorities to Tacoma 2025's desired outcomes and measurement system.

The extensive public involvement in the development of *Tacoma 2025* and its widespread support indicate this document should serve as the strategic vision for the community. The alignment of the 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan to *Tacoma 2025* is important to ensure consistent, clear strategic goals. Table 1 below illustrates the identified alignment between the priorities articulated in the 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan and *Tacoma 2025*.

Strong Alignments are noted when the 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan Funding Priority directly and clearly aligns with community priorities identified in *Tacoma 2025*. *Potential Alignments* are indicated when the Human Services Strategic Plan Funding Priority could potentially be interpreted to align with community priorities identified in *Tacoma 2025*. In these cases, additional refinement of the Human Services Funding Priority may result in more strategic investments of human services funding to address community priorities.

For reference, the Tacoma 2025 Community Priorities are:

- 1: Health and Safety – *A safe city with healthy residents*
 - 1A: Improve neighborhood safety
 - 1B: Increase active living
 - 1C: Improve overall health

- 2: Human and Social Needs – *All Tacoma residents are valued and have access to resources to meet their needs*
 - 2A: Increase housing security
 - 2B: Improve services to youth and vulnerable populations
 - 2C: Reduce poverty

- 3: Economic Vibrancy and Employment – *A vibrant and diverse economy with good jobs for all Tacoma residents*
 - 3A: Increase the number and quality of jobs throughout Tacoma
 - 3B: Diversify Tacoma’s living wage business base
 - 3C: Improve neighborhood business districts
 - 3D: Strengthen downtown Tacoma as a business core and residential option

- 4: Education and Learning – *Thriving residents with abundant opportunities for life-long learning*
 - 4A: Close the education achievement gaps
 - 4B: Prepare people to succeed in Tacoma’s workforce

- 5: Arts and Cultural Vitality – *A vibrant cultural sector that fosters a creative, cohesive community*
 - 5A: Increase participation in arts and culture
 - 5B: Embrace Tacoma’s diversity of people, places, and cultures
 - 5C: Leverage and strengthen Tacoma’s arts and cultural assets

6: Natural and Built Environment – *Outstanding stewardship of the natural and built environment*

6A: Increase transportation options

6B: Sustain and improve Tacoma’s natural environment

6C: Grow and enhance the vitality of Tacoma’s neighborhoods

6D: Improve and maintain Tacoma’s streets

7: Government Performance – *Efficient and effective government, guided by engaged residents*

7A: Ensure accountable, efficient, and transparent city services

7B: Engage residents, stakeholders, and partners in the future of Tacoma

7C: Strengthen the City’s fiscal sustainability

**Table 1:
Alignment of Tacoma 2025 Community Priorities with
2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan Funding Priorities**

2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan Funding Priorities	Tacoma 2025 Community Priorities
Meet Basic Needs of Tacoma Residents (40% Competitive Funding)	
Prevention of and pathways out of homelessness are available which connect individuals and families with housing and/or supportive services tailored to their unique needs.	Strong alignment with 2A
Residents have access to healthy food and optimal nutrition year-round.	Potential Alignment with 2B
Interpersonal and intimate violence/abuse is reduced.	Potential Alignment with 2B
Prepare Children and Youth for Success (35% Competitive Funding)	
Parents/caregivers have the skills to provide quality environments for children and/or have the skills to recognize, intervene in, and reduce the effects of negative childhood experiences and trauma.	Potential Alignment with 2B
Barriers to academic success are reduced so students graduate with competence and confidence.	Potential Alignment with 4A
Unaccompanied youth, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth experiencing homelessness, and children experiencing exploitation have the safety, resources, and skills to meet their needs.	Strong Alignment with 2B

Prepare Children and Youth for Success (35% Competitive Funding) - CONTINUED	
Gang prevention, intervention and/or suppression services are available in Tacoma neighborhoods that are disproportionately impacted by gang crime.	Potential Alignment with 1A
Increase Employability, Self-Determination and Empowerment for Adults (20% Competitive Funding)	
Education, training, and individualized employment support services are available that enable all residents, especially historically marginalized populations, to enter and/or progress in the job market.	Strong Alignment with 4B
Opportunities for individuals to build upon their strengths are available so that they can live as independently as possible and have options for positive and meaningful involvement in the community.	Potential Alignment with 2B and 7B
Enhance Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Services Jail and Hospital Diversion (20% Competitive Funding)	
Expand services providing direct care to individuals leaving hospitals or crisis facilities and/or being released from jail.	Strong Alignment with 2B
Increase coordinated support for crisis intervention systems through community-based care for individuals.	Strong Alignment with 2B
Increase housing inventory for programs diverting individuals from jail and/or engaged in the client discharge process from hospitals and crisis facilities or released from jail.	Strong Alignment with 2A and 2B
Enhance Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Services Programs Targeted to Help Youth (35% Competitive Funding)	
Increase support for Tacoma Public Schools' elementary students struggling with mental health and/or substance use disorders.	Strong Alignment with 2B
Expand prevention and early intervention for youth struggling with mental health and/or substance use disorders.	Strong Alignment with 2B

Enhance Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Services *Programs Targeted to Help Youth (35% Competitive Funding) - CONTINUED*

Support innovative programming designed to strengthen the family unit where youth are identified to have a mental health and/or substance use disorder.	Strong Alignment with 2B
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Enhance Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Services *Community-based Care (20% Competitive Funding)*

Programs focus on addressing the unmet needs of at risk/vulnerable populations struggling with mental health and/or substance use disorders.	Strong Alignment with 2B
Meet the needs of Tacoma citizens struggling with co-occurring disorders (mental illness and substance use) and/or dually diagnosed (co-occurring intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and a mental illness).	Strong Alignment with 2B
A reduction of the mental health impacts resulting from interpersonal and intimate violence/abuse.	Potential Alignment with 2B

Enhance Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Services *Reduce Chronic Homelessness (25% Competitive Funding)*

Support innovative programming designed to reduce the impacts of chronic homelessness for Tacoma businesses.	Potential Alignment with 3D
Support innovative approaches that reach out to and engage chronically homeless individuals.	Strong Alignment with 2A and 2B
Support innovative programming designed to ensure chronically homeless individuals, once housed, remain housed.	Strong Alignment with 2A Potential Alignment with 2B, 2C, and 4B

Recommendation 1.3 – The City of Tacoma, and more specifically, the Human Services Division of the Neighborhood and Community Services Department, should assume the role of backbone organization for human services funding in the community.

Downstream from the requirement for a strong vision -- which Tacoma 2025 articulates -- is a commitment to ensuring the vision translates into appropriate community action. Best practice literature on effective administration of social/human services funding identifies the importance of a strong, central coordinating body or function that can help knit together the various interests and parties responsible for developing social policy and delivering programs and services so as to bring a vision to life. The collective impact model, as articulated by John Kania and Mark Kramer, and noted briefly above, identifies this function or body as the “backbone support organization” and indicates that it is one of five essential components (the others being a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities; and continuous communication) in developing a human services system that can create social change.

BACKBONE SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

The backbone support organization must have *“a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly” (Collective Impact, p. 40).*

Under existing conditions within the community, and within the context of the role typically played by municipalities in delivering quality of life services to citizens, **the City of Tacoma is – and is best positioned to continue to be – the backbone support organization for human services**; indeed, it provides for service providers some version of many of the various elements described in the definition above. However, the complex, multi-dimensional communities that we today inhabit require an approach that is more robust, resilient and integrated than that which the City of Tacoma presently provides. As the Stanford article indicates, “a fundamental change” is needed.” The article continues: “It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single non-profit or to build that organization’s capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive” (p. 41).

Recommendation 1.3.1 – Explore the role in connecting other funders under a single banner

In a world where integration of various actors into a collective, coordinated single vision – developed through the engagement of the range of community-wide interests

– is so important, a vital step for the City of Tacoma (as the backbone support organization) is to take the necessary steps to align what it does, funds and measures under a single banner.

In practical terms, this means nesting the Human Services Strategic Plan within the vision and outcomes outlined in the Tacoma 2025 plan – a community-developed “higher level” document to guide the City’s and community’s direction (and actions) over the next decade. The question of alignment between these plans was addressed previously, and the sorts of data and measurement considerations that are needed to support alignment will be addressed later in this report. What is relevant for this section is “the how” – that is, the importance of the City of Tacoma human services staff committing to engaging with community and stakeholders as it builds its measurement system.

Given the recent and extensive public and stakeholder participation on Tacoma 2025, engagement with funded and non-funded human services agencies on how to approach human services funding and strategies that support meaningful outcomes will need to be undertaken judiciously and efficiently so as to not duplicate already-confirmed community perspectives, but, instead, build upon them. Time and capacity constraints within human service agencies further emphasize the importance of approaching this process with care.

There is no need to re-open consideration on Tacoma 2025’s direction, but where attention is required is to re-open engagement with the community as it relates to the development of human services outcomes that all organizations need to share. This is an essential role of the backbone support organization and is where the City of Tacoma Human Services Division needs to orient itself – to move itself beyond funder of programs and individualized outputs to become a key facilitator in the direction-setting process and a co-creator with community in bringing about improved social outcomes.

BEST PRACTICE
Engage the community in the development of shared human services outcomes.

The concept of “backbone support organization” is positioned, in the research on collective impact, within a social service model that could enable collaboration across and among funding agencies – a framework outside the scope of this report, which focuses primarily on the role of a single organization administering human services funding. However, over the long term, the City of Tacoma Human Services should consider whether it can play a role as – or in ensuring the creation of a – backbone support organization that can pull together funding agencies and municipal governments from across the wider community to unite under a single vision, with shared outcomes to strive for and measures to chart progress towards achieving the vision.

There is precedent within the community of greater collaboration among funders. Interviews with City of Tacoma staff indicate that greater cross-agency collaboration existed in the past, primarily because of the presence of a dynamic coordinator from the Tacoma Urban Network who acted as the glue for pursuing community-wide

outcomes and collaborative behavior among funders. While this process dissolved in recent years, as a result of the disappearance of this coordinating presence and subsequent decisions by some funders to “go it alone”, staff indicated some support for this past behavior and mind set, and a level of interest in exploring how to move back to a greater level of cross-agency collaboration. Finding ways to better collaborate across funding agencies can improve how community resources are leveraged, minimizing duplication and maximizing the impact of limited funding dollars. Increased outreach from City of Tacoma staff to other funding agencies – invitations to other funders to be part of upcoming City of Tacoma direction setting or to co-fund pilot projects – could be important steps to strengthen relationships among funding agencies and set the stage for exploring a more robust collective impact model as outlined in the research.

Recommendation 1.3.2 – Explore the connecting roles outside the human services sector to harness other community strengths and assets (employers as the provided example)

As it builds its capacity in community coordination and mobilization, the City of Tacoma Human Services Division may also consider moving beyond playing a role in bringing together the funding agencies and service providers and also find ways to reach outside of the world of social services to bring results.

For example, the Human Services Strategic Plan acknowledges that “The City of Tacoma has a number of assets to help address [the Increase Employability, Self-Determination, and Empowerment for Adults] strategic priority. Tacoma is a major business center for the South Sound Region and is home to the largest port in Washington State. The Port of Tacoma and Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) are two traditional anchors of the local economy, with the Port alone employing over 28,000 workers alone.

Targeted industry clusters in health care/medical services, aerospace manufacturing, clean water technology, cyber-security, international logistics and trade all provide living wage jobs that lead to self-sufficiency. Residents of Tacoma also have access to higher education institutions in the Pierce County and neighboring Thurston and King Counties, including eight four-year universities and colleges, and 15 community and technical colleges” (2015 - 19 Human Services Strategic Plan, p. 16).

The City of Tacoma could better enable such major employers and post-secondary institutions to help create the social change that the City seeks by bringing them into a wider and collective process. It stands to reason that there are untapped resources in these sectors – as it relates to social health outcomes – because they have not been brought into a larger discussion. The backbone support organization, so vital to collective action, should explore how it can include these sectors at the front end, and in so doing, make better use of their strengths and capacity.

2. Measurement Matters

Recommendation 2.1 – Given the fundamental importance of data to effective decision-making, the City should place a high priority on establishing an approach to human services that is more data driven.

At the core of any effective evaluative process, there is data. There exists the evidence and information upon which educated decisions are made. Without data, decisions can only be made based on prejudice, bias, intuition, emotion, whimsy or favor. The City of Tacoma seeks to create a

WHY MEASURE

“Data inspires progress and galvanizes change. To know where we need to go, we need to know what we’ve achieved – where progress is being made and where major challenges remain” (Pally, 2014).

funding model that is devoid of these biases. The ideal model is one that utilizes evidence and analysis to provide a rationale upon which policy makers may evaluate progress towards their stated outcomes and goals. The importance of data in decision-making cannot be overstated. It is required to define needs, set goals, make decisions, and to evaluate progress. Indeed, data is the pin upon which all of our decisions are hinged. Research conducted by MIT concluded that “the more companies characterized themselves as data-driven, the better they performed on objective measures of financial and operational results. In particular, businesses in the top third of their industry in the use of data-driven decision making were, on average, 5% more productive and 6% more profitable than their competitors” (McAfee & Bryn, Jolfsson, 2012).

Presently, the funding decisions made within the City’s Human Services system are linked thematically to measurable outcomes in the priority areas; however, the absence of a comprehensive approach that clearly links outcomes in the Human Services Strategic Plan with the decision-making process for funding – whereby the actions of organizations and the outputs derived from those actions can be measured by Key Performance Indicators and linked to desired strategic outcomes – limits the value of the high level alignment between plan and funding.

Outcome measures that providers are expected to advance in order to receive funding seem mostly focused on holding providers to account with respect to what they said they would do, or, at best, measuring improvements within providers’ own programs, which, indeed, is one element of outcome measure; but since the providers’ outcomes are not linked in a coherent, data-driven way to a larger human services outcome articulated in the Human Services Strategic Plan, it is difficult to know to what extent the programs funded advance the City of Tacoma’s interests or vision.

With this as the backdrop, the L-ICMA Team has identified a number of key recommendations it feels should be acted upon by the organization to improve its

approach to human services funding. The most resource-intensive and challenging-to-implement of these recommendations deals with exploring the opportunities and realities of a truly evidence-based funding approach.

The City of Tacoma has identified an interest in moving in this direction – and with good reason. True evidence-based programs demonstrate effectiveness based on research and can represent the highest return on investment for funders. They have demonstrated with high probability that the methodology, approach, and activities implemented will lead to the desired long-term outcomes (Williams, p. 15). This approach reduces investments in unproven, exploratory, and experimental methods, which can be expensive and ineffective. But while the potential benefits are many, an organization considering a move in this direction must understand the rigor, costs and patience required within a “full-blown” evidence-based system.

Some of the known challenges include a lack of proven programs (Williams, p. 35); identifying the balance between community uniqueness and adherence to strict program protocols (Williams, p. 36); shifting from outcomes evaluation to process evaluation based on adherence to program protocols (William, p. 38); the fact that evidence-based programs may be more expensive (Williams, p. 39) and may take longer to demonstrate results; the readiness of staff, service provider community, and elected officials (Williams p. 39-43); and the potential consequence that more popular, but unproven programs may lose funding (Williams, p. 1).

Further discussion of evidence-based funding, and some commentary on its current and potential applicability in the Tacoma context, will unfold near the end of this section, with the L-ICMA Team’s overall conclusion that it may not be an approach that fits easily and uniformly within the City of Tacoma’s present conditions. Should a comprehensive evidence-based system for human services funding not be in the immediate future, a more data-driven approach to this business area should nevertheless be pursued.

Recommendation 2.2 – Consider unified, open data as a public good and establish a cohesive, well-defined data collection and analysis methodology that can help Tacoma evaluate the community’s progress towards its collective goals.

The City of Tacoma should become a primary stakeholder in seeking and making public investment in a unified, shared data collection and analysis system. Ideally, this would be driven by a corporate approach to data that the Human Services Division – as well as all other parts of the organization – could use. In taking such a corporate approach, the City of Tacoma could not only measure human services outcomes, but could look at outcomes city wide. Sources within this unified approach to data would be a combination of existing third-party sources, existing corporate sources, and other specific data sources generated by the City of Tacoma where gaps exist. This would provide for the opportunity to view trends alongside environmental variables, dashboard progress, highlight challenges, and uncover the previously unnoticed. As a

simple example of how two separate data sets come together to help find better public solutions, the Office of Equity and Empowerment already has a best practice that looks at service levels using geo-spatial data collected by public works to identify gaps in service provision to underserved areas. The unification of data city-wide and community-wide will take isolated pieces of information from siloed functions and help stitch them together to paint the community-wide picture. If community-derived strategic plans paint the picture of what success looks like to a community, unified data is a tool that helps the community decide how the pieces fit together to make that picture a reality.

Having this “Community Databank” As Dr. Daun-Barnett from the University of Buffalo puts it: “Allows Local communities to use data to identify the unique challenges they face, and the strategies they should use to improve upon those” (Daun-Barnett, 2014). Governments by and large don’t create solutions to public problems, particularly social problems. They’re simply not good at it, they’re clunky, slow and deliberate, but the truly great governments don’t need to be; they simply need to facilitate systems and provide resources through which the people in their communities can create the solutions. Tacoma can help facilitate by changing the way it does social spending, so that it produces more experimentation, establishes more rigorous evaluation of innovative ideas and pays more attention to performance in its decision making (Liebman, 2014).

Specific to the human services community in Tacoma, investment into a unified, shared data structure that not only serves the City’s goals, but also serves the greater

KEY COMPONENTS

Key Tenets of a collective data system would include such considerations as:

- Shared, collaborative understanding for the data to be collected, and analyzed.
- Have broad demographic measurements and metrics, acutely defined population measurement and metrics, and large-scale environmental measurements and metrics. Build a system that allows for specialization and innovation.
- Identification or creation and collection of relevant datasets that are updated at least to the frequency at which evaluation must occur, as defined by the primary purpose of the data. The more “live” the data, the better.
- Understand that data sources that currently exist can and should still be utilized and aggregated into the data library.
- All of the data must be transparent, publicly accessible and readily usable for all parties to draw their conclusions.
- The data systems should not overly burden providers and collectors; know that capacity building will have to occur at all levels.
- Reward collection and participation at all levels.

Tacoma community at large, would be of great benefit. The benefit would be even more conspicuous if such an investment were made within an “open data” approach. Data that is made available openly and in a timely fashion allows the community to provide its own analysis, thereby exponentially increasing the decision-making resources available to the community. The human services community would not have to rely on intuition, but would have concrete data that could help them be agile in service provision, responding to current documented needs. No longer would the community be restricted to only the analysis made by resource-constrained staff or paid consultants. Rather the community, private partners, other public partners, and citizens could all capture information and help formulate good public discussions. As in all public goods, sometimes the best public investments are not made with return on investment in mind, but rather are made simply for the public good; to advance society and aid in providing betterment of the human condition, where no profit motive exists. To this end, the growing body of research that suggests that data-driven decision making leads to better outcomes is, in fact, an investment in better public solutions (Lieberman, 2014).

Recommendation 2.3 – Create a Data & Engagement policy that anchors data as a key element of community decision-making.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AROUND DATA

Building on the successes of Tacoma 2025, and its broad community support, the City could engage its stakeholders again to understand what information the community needs now, and in the future. This engagement would be the next revolution in turning Tacoma’s progress flywheel, resulting in a deeper understanding of what drives Tacoma.

A simple example of what this effort might achieve is provided on the City of Spokane’s website. Spokane indicates the City’s core commitment to better public decision making in this way: “The Community Indicators Initiative of Spokane seeks to improve local, private and public decision-making by providing relevant data in an easily navigable website. The data will serve as neutral information for all parties involved.” Further, this best practice community indicates its goals are:

- To collect and share a broad spectrum of information for individual community members, policy makers, non-governmental organizations, businesses, business organizations, researchers, and the press.
- To track progress over time of various efforts toward a healthy, vibrant community.
- To measure the community's progress spatially via benchmarks outside of the County.
- To enable analysis of these trends.
- To create a forum for a discussion of the issues underlying the data, either on-line or in person.

Spokane also chose specific data principles when asking its steering committee to select indicators. Those principles were:

- Important to large numbers of the community
- Based on valid measurements, as defined by good science and social science
- Understandable to the general public
- Defined to allow comparisons to Washington State, the U.S. or those in similar-sized communities
- Available repeatedly over time to allow trend analysis
- Easily accessible
- Sourced from credible sites, largely federal, state & local governments

For the reader charged with implementation wondering what does “Data Engagement” look like, cities like Chicago, Boston, Spokane, Portland and Austin have blossoming “Open Data” and “Community Indicator” initiatives. Each of these cities openly shares their thoughts and ideas on implementation, but each of them worked collaboratively with the public through various types of innovative meeting settings; whether it was formal work sessions or informal “hack-a-thons” each City sought new ways to engage the public on the topic of data. The National League of Cities’ recent report on Open Data initiatives said that on the topic of stakeholder involvement, Open Data is a two-way process. Governments publish the data and society enriches and uses the data. It is, therefore, essential to encourage participation and engagement among multiple stakeholders including: community members; non-profits; universities; the press; businesses; City departments; and other levels of government. Many Cities adopt a flexible, and usually informal, approach to interact with the stakeholders. It is essential to encourage citizens’ participation during implementation and beyond (National League of Cities, 2014).

Some additional resources for implementation include programs like “What Works Cities”, a Bloomberg Philanthropies organization that is dedicated to the cause of data and evidence to improve results for residents. More importantly, it is seeking 100 mid-size partner cities for granting opportunities to implement data-driven community making. They intend to leverage such resources as the Behavioral Insights Team, the Government Performance Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School, the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University, Results for America, and the Sunlight Foundation. More information can be found at <http://whatworkscities.bloomberg.org/>. Additionally, the Sunlight Foundation – a national advocate for Open Data policies – is a good resource for tools, APIs and issue briefs on the subject of Open Data. Their Model Open Data Guidelines are included in the appendix of this document.

Recommendation 2.4 – Consider the capability of the resources currently available to the City to achieve this data system.

The City of Tacoma already has in place **TacomaData**, which is linked prominently atop the City’s website. This tool provides data and indicators in the forms of maps, plans, spreadsheets and schedules – all of which are viewable, exportable, graph-able,

SHOUT OUT

The City of Tacoma can modify, build, buy or partner to find the right solution, or may already have the capacity to implement a comprehensive data system. Of course, utilization of a City of Tacoma housed solution such as TacomaData is very likely to be successful, but other models such as a Public-Private Partnership, a grant-funded non-profit dedicated for such a purpose, or a Public-Public Partnership such as a university supported model like the relationship that the City of Spokane has with Eastern Washington University could also prove to be successful. The City of Spokane’s model could be scaled up to service the Human Services Community.

and otherwise useful to the end user. Data is grouped into functional categories such Business, City Administration & Finance, Community & Economic Development, Neighborhoods, Infrastructure & Transportation, Public Safety, Environment & Sustainability, Equity, and Human Services. Each of these functional areas has varying levels of data, and the timeliness of the data available seems to vary from category to category, with most having data at least as up to date as of year-end 2014. Some fresher quarterly reports are available, most notably in the Public Services category. However, more robust crime statistics and mapping is available through another tool called **TacomaCrime**, which is not directly linked from **TacomaData**.

Notably missing is a robust dataset in the Human Services category. The only three datasets in the Human Services category were a schedule of 2014 funded outputs, a map of funded entity locations, and a description of each program that was funded. Interviews with Tacoma staff highlighted their concerns around having collected good data, but not having a good toolset to use and analyze it. A core recommendation is for the Human Services Division to collaborate with the business area that maintains **TacomaData**, to derive, collect, report and connect the data that Human Services has with the database management tools of **TacomaData**.

A cursory review of the various data in each of the other categories of **TacomaData** highlights that much of the data available is either static geospatial data or output level data. This data is crucial and helps provide understanding of the various functions that are being undertaken. However, there is a real opportunity to enhance this tool to also measure and indicate outcome level details in each of these functional areas, as well as to be a connector for other higher level demographic data. Additionally, these isolated datasets benefit enormously from the ability to provide further in-depth analysis such as map layering, query functions, and co-charting functions, to name a few features.

The software as a service solution provided by Socrata enables the use of some of these advanced functions for anyone to use. However, the use of these tools is not clear at first and it would be our recommendation that instructional videos or other material be posted to educate users on how to use the data available.

Certainly the larger organizations in Tacoma, including the City itself, can export the data that is available and import it into any number of data analysis suites like SAS, Microsoft Access, SAP, Esri ArcGIS or other very capable software and dedicate the time to provide some digested analysis, charting, graphing and mapping of what the data might suggest; but the real goal in implementing a public data system should be to make those tools publicly available, if not inherently part of the feature set of the tool itself.

Citizens, business partners, and the non-profit community should be able to find answers to a question like “How many food banks service the Hilltop? How many are close to shelters? What is the need like? How has that changed over time? The answers to these questions individually can be answered by contacting various departments, and collecting the data from various other sources, but this effort is time-consuming, resource intensive and requires education and training to compile correctly. Instead, a data model that makes answering these questions easy, by the very nature of its utility, makes efficient use of the community’s resources and perhaps allows new questions and analysis that would have otherwise been abandoned because it was simply too difficult.

Again, **TacomaData** is a very useful tool, and is likely achieving what it was originally installed for, but the City of Tacoma may be able to further maximize its utility by finding ways to unite data sources already available, include outcome level indicators, adding dashboarding, and adding enhanced analysis tools. The City should also consider adding the data from other sources within the community such as the United Way or other local non-profit partners with good datasets. There are some challenges to creating data use agreements, but a collective movement to change public problems is not aided by those who wish to hoard data. In keeping with the recommendation earlier in the report that the City (and its Human Services Division, in particular) assume the role of backbone support organization for the community, the City of Tacoma has an opportunity to be a leader in holistic community data collection and it should make the commitment to do so with the many resources it can leverage. The public sector as a whole may not have been the leader in the latest data centric business trends such as data-driven-decision making, rapid cycle innovation, and continuous process improvement, but it can be a leader in the collection, aggregation and public sharing of the data that communities need to make great strides forward.

Recommendation 2.5 – The City, the Human Services Commission and its partners should look to best practices in data driven decision making.

For each given strategic area in the Human Services Strategic Plan, the City should seek to identify not only the outcomes sought, but also the broad tactics in how those

outcomes might be achieved. A special emphasis should be placed on utilizing data in every step of the process, from issue identification, to dashboarding performance, strategic adjustment, to measurement versus strategic goals. The City should place deliberate thought into the source and process for development of the desired outcomes and tactics. Traditional models suggest that the professional human services staff could identify the tactics sought and bring those forth as policy recommendations to the Human Services Commission and subsequently the City Council. However, this same objective could be achieved by using smaller workgroups of the Human Services Commission which could conduct focused work to create the tactics sought. Alternatively, as staff and community members have indicated, there may be some solid groundwork in place to implement collective impact model cohorts to derive the tactics from the broader community agreed upon goals in the Human Services Strategic Plan and Tacoma 2025. Incidentally, this would help the Human Services Commission further adjudicate funding applications more efficiently because it requires less mental judgment and vagueness about whether a program can achieve broader higher level outcomes. It should also be noted that this process should be more inclusive of the community at large and not just of organizations that are currently funded to choose the outcomes. The ability to drive attendance, through pay point

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

The City of Tacoma should narrow its purchasing and grant making towards more specific ends, rather than high level funding allocations to general need areas. The City should look to procure programs and services with more specific outcomes in mind, as well as have a strong data driven correlation between program expectations and how program success will achieve the outcomes that the community and City co-designed. This collective vision must be rooted within a data-driven set of behaviors and decision-making to understand level of need, measure progress and advance the agenda.

requirements should not be the only outreach tool available to the City of Tacoma, particularly if it wishes to build trust among partner organizations.

Recommendation 2.6 –Develop benchmarks, key performance indicators, and pivot points. Make a special commitment to create shared metrics that help understanding the macro, the micro, the craft, the niche, the long term, near term and the short term. Above all else, make metrics timely, relevant and open.

When working with the community to derive these benchmarks consider questions like “How are these folks doing?” Keeping in mind that the City of Tacoma through its Equity and Empowerment policy seeks to ensure positive outcomes for all persons in Tacoma, targeted questions do have to be asked about specific populations to ensure that goals are being met. Other questions include: “How do we know how they are doing?” “Are they doing better or worse?” “How will we know? “Who will tell us? ”What is working?” “What are our guideposts?” “What do we know; not what do we think.”

MAKE MEASUREMENTS MATTER, BECAUSE MEASUREMENTS MATTER.

“There is a difference between numbers and numbers that matter... One of the most important steps in beginning to make decisions with data is to pick the right metrics. Good metrics “are consistent, cheap, and quick to collect.” But most importantly, they must capture something your organization cares about” (Frick, 2014).

As Diana Rauner simply illustrated in her 2013 presentation at the Chapin Hall Child and Family Policy Forum (The University of Chicago, May 2013) “one of things we learned, was to be obsessive about data, to ensure we understood how our kids were doing...what was going on and to be able to look at and document outcomes on kids. We understood that one of our challenges was that we did not have the intensity and evidence based practices that we need to really see changes in the kids...it became a necessary requirement to collect a standard set of data, this becomes the way we track whether we were doing what we’re saying doing and proves that it does work” (The University of Chicago, May 2013).

Seek to design metrics that are thoughtful and not just data collection for the sake of collecting data. Understand that data does not erase the need for vision or human experience and insight, but rather it informs it and sharpens it. The goal of these metrics is to provide the instrument panel the organization will use to understand where it is in its current course, and navigate its next course of action.

A key difficulty among stakeholders will be a paradigm shift from statements like “We already know what to do”; “We know that this method works” and “We’ve been doing this successfully for years”. The previous statements make their claim then scramble to find data to support their claim. Rather, in data-driven organizations the use of data exposes patterns, and allow leaders and stakeholders to frame conversations around issues that state “This is what the data shows, here are some opportunities that we can take advantage of” (Brynjolfsson, 2012). The move to data driven decision making and evidence based programming will no doubt take significant amounts of discipline on the part of City staff and elected officials, but they must go confidently armed with the knowledge that the community will be better for having taken up the work.

3. *Community Needs and Assets*

Before considering Recommendations 3.1 and 3.2 below, and their application to the City of Tacoma, it is important that the core concepts being discussed in this section are understood, and Witkin and Altschuld (1995) describe these terms very simply and succinctly.

A NEED is a discrepancy or gap between “what is” and “what should be.” The need is neither the present nor the future state; it is the gap between them (p. 5).

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT is a systematic set of procedures that are used to determine needs, examine their nature and causes, and set priorities for future action (p. 6).

WHAT IS A SYSTEM?

“A system is a set of regularly interacting elements that form a unified whole and organized for a common purpose. An important characteristic of a system is that all parts are interdependent. Anything that affects one part of the system has consequences for the whole” (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, p. 6).

Recommendation 3.1 – The City of Tacoma should consider completing a comprehensive community needs assessment.

After the alignment of the 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan with the Tacoma 2025 Plan – the importance of which is outlined in the section above – the City of Tacoma should undertake work to ensure it understands existing needs and to better understand the community assets available to meet them.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

“In the real world, there is never enough money to meet all needs. Needs assessments are conducted to help program planners identify and select the right job before doing the job right” (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, pg. 2)

Needs assessment concentrates on outcomes to be achieved, as opposed to just the method of delivering service. For example, reducing homelessness by X per cent is an outcome gained through a rapid re-housing program, which is a method. Needs assessments typically gather data to later establish methods intended to address specific purposes; set priorities and results criteria so that sound decisions are made when determining funding allocations; and lead to activities that will “improve programs, services,

organizational structure and operations, or a combination of these elements” (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, p.6).

While cognizant of the associated resource challenges, the L-ICMA Team believe that the City of Tacoma should complete a comprehensive community needs assessment using a three-phase model of needs assessment. Below is a high level suggested systematic approach that progresses through a defined series of stages (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995).

STAGE I, Identify the Existing - is designed to examine what is already known about the human service needs of the City of Tacoma; to define the extent of the needs assessment; and to increase buy-in for all stages of the assessment and key stakeholders. The City of Tacoma can consider that the 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan and Tacoma 2025 has accomplished this once full alignment of the two plans is complete.

Stage II, Collect and Examine Data - outlines the “what is” of human service assets to parallel this with the ideal of “what should be,” and to clarify the scale of the

gaps. Data collection was discussed extensively previously in this report and the recommendation of a community assets inventory will be discussed further below.

Stage III, Decision Making - is the connection between the analyses and the action. This stage is meant to answer significant questions, such as “What human service needs are the most acute in the City of Tacoma?”; “What are the potential assets and solutions?”; and “Which outcomes will produce the best solutions for human services concerns in Tacoma?” Furthermore, this stage is meant to use information collected in applicable methods to produce designed outcomes that impact performance.



Recommendation 3.2 – The City of Tacoma Health and Human Services Department should conduct a community asset inventory that identifies existing services and provider organizations.

If the City of Tacoma does not proceed with a comprehensive community needs assessment for human services for reasons of cost, capacity – or because the City determines that it already has a thorough understanding of the community need – an approach that may be complementary to the work the City has already done under both strategic plans would be to focus resources on further understanding existing community assets by conducting an inventory. The community asset inventory involves an all-inclusive look at the City of Tacoma’s existing services and provider organizations. Many municipalities focus solely on the needs or shortfalls that exist, and this is not surprising because these are significant to identify; however, it is also beneficial to focus on assets and emphasize what the community does have in place. These community assets can be used to meet those same identified needs and create measurable impacts.

As defined by The Community Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas (2014), “A community asset is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. And this means: a person, physical structure/place, infrastructure, community service, business, etc. This suggests that

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

Identifying these assets across the range of service areas will allow the City of Tacoma to become more strategic about ‘purchasing’ services based on the identified needs, as well as better communicate the deficient areas of service and inform the budgetary process by allocating or possibly reallocating resources appropriately.

everyone in the community can be a force for community improvement if only we knew what their assets were, and could put them to use.” This is a broad statement; therefore, inventorying service organizations and their specific capabilities a significant action. For example, the City could identify all current shelters in the community and inventory the number of beds that currently exist; in doing so, a total number of shelter beds can be accounted for when calculating and prioritizing needs.

The community asset inventory can also strengthen existing relationships with current providers and is an opportunity to build new connections that will stimulate more impactful health and human services outcomes in the future. In fact, the assets inventory should include even those assets that are not currently funded service providers for the Human Services Division (The Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, 2014). The community asset inventory is a fluid, living portfolio that should often be updated prior to funding cycles, align with the City of Tacoma’s strategic plans and aid in identifying key indicators of impact.

The Human Services Division should map the community assets based on the actual information. The 2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan (2014) has successfully laid the groundwork for a community asset inventory and mapping to be utilized to move the needle. Specifically, Appendix H – Access to Opportunity and Social Equity of the Human Services Strategic Plan explores a Communities of Opportunity model, which “advocates for a fair investment in all people and neighborhoods, to improve life outcomes for all citizens, and to improve the health of entire regions” (p. 52). The community asset inventory complements this work and enhances it by cataloguing and correlating actual resources in the City of Tacoma.

Whether or not the City of Tacoma maps the community asset inventory data, the next significant action is to utilize the identified assets. There is value in just increasing the Human Services Division’s awareness of what exists in the community, but sharing these results will expand the awareness of the community as whole and may encourage providers to address gaps by strategically expanding or repositioning their services to directly address deficit areas. Furthermore, recognizing these assets positions the City of Tacoma to become more strategic about procuring services founded on the needs, better communicate the actual gaps and make impactful decisions that move the needle.

4. Evidence Based Programs

As stated in the introductory section on the importance of data-driven decision-making, true evidence based programs undergo some level of scientific measurement to understand causality of a program. There is likely to be some confusion and broad interpretation among the community as to what “evidence based” truly means. Some might consider that if participants in a particular program achieved a desired outcome that it stands to reason that the program has provided evidence that the program is successful.

KEY COMPONENT

A true evidence based approach includes common elements such as: a strong theoretical foundation; intended for a developmentally appropriate population; quality data collection and procedures; and evidence of effectiveness.

For a program to show effectiveness, generally there must be strong evidence that the program results are the direct result of the activities of the program; an evidence based program is scientifically evaluated by controlling variables and taking all other considerations into account that there is a causal link between a person participating in a program and achieving the desired outcome (Childrens Services Council of Palm Beach County, 2007). This approach ensures that

the treatments and services, when used as intended, will have the most effective outcomes as demonstrated by the research. It will also ensure that programs with proven success will be more widely disseminated and will benefit a greater number of people.

Recommendation 4.1 – Explore the opportunities and implications – both the potential benefits and challenges – of a true evidence-based funding system

Given the multitude of human services that the City of Tacoma provides through its funding, perhaps not all program areas will benefit from evidence based research. The reasons for such decisions might arise from such conditions as evidence-based programs and practices do not exist for all identified needs or for all target populations, or that researching programs in order to define them as evidence-based is very expensive. Additionally, implementing evidence-based programs can be very expensive and it is very likely that providers may not have the capacity to implement an evidence-based program (Childrens Services Council of Palm Beach County, 2007). However, despite the challenges of implementing evidence-based funding, it should not be removed from consideration. The City of Tacoma has already demonstrated movement towards this funding system with the Mental Health Fund. The application for this funding category specifically required service providers to list the evidence-based programs and practices to be implemented. As a result of the close connection with the medical field, many of the programs funded already demonstrate many characteristics of evidence-based programs.

BEST PRACTICE

Several of the programs supported through the Mental Health Fund plan to implement 'motivational interviewing' and 'integrated treatment for co-occurring disorders'. Both of these practices are listed in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov>).

In addition, the creation of the MHCD Collaboration provides a system-wide approach to enhancing mental health and substance use disorder services. Another example is Graduate Tacoma. With support from the City of Tacoma and numerous community partners, Graduate Tacoma has developed both baseline indicators and strategic targets for the shared community goal of increasing both high school graduation rates and college degree or technical certification completion rates by 50 per cent. As exemplified successfully in the education field (with Graduate Tacoma) and the mental health and substance use disorder field (with the Mental Health and MHCD Collaboration), the City of Tacoma could consider implementing this funding model incrementally, in one service priority area at a time. Attempting to bring in an evidence-based funding model across all remaining funding priorities may require significant investment of human and financial resources.

Human service providers not directly linked to the medical field may not have the exposure to and experience with evidence-based program standards. Similarly, human service providers outside of the education field may not have participated in the fairly recent development of baseline indicators and strategic targets associated with education, academic achievement and workforce readiness. Aside from working with community partners in other priority service areas to develop baseline indicators and targets for strategic priorities, the City of Tacoma has the opportunity to help service providers understand the rigor associated with evidence-based programs. The City of Tacoma should provide professional development resources to human services providers wishing to improve their program effectiveness. Special emphasis should be placed on logic model and change theory, evidence-based programs, fidelity, quality data collection and evaluation, cultural competence, and client engagement (Williams, 55-56).

5. Funding Process

Having outlined a number of the “big picture” items important to consider in orienting the City’s funding framework going forward, it is important to also discuss specific

BEST PRACTICE

The following is a list of organizations that provide rating criteria and/or resources connecting programs that are evidence based:

- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
- SAMHSA’s National Registry of Effective Programs and Practices (NREPP)
- Blueprints for Violence Prevention
- Promising Practices
- What Works Clearinghouse
- Strengthening America’s Families
- Center for Mental Health Services (2000)
- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP)
- Office of the Surgeon General
- Social Work Policy Institute

elements of the City’s funding practices and processes that can be improved for the overall benefit of the human services system. A number of ideas on this dimension of the system are outlined below.

Recommendation 5.1 – Continue Stabilization Fund and Innovation, Planning and Capacity Building Fund

The foregoing section on the funding framework argued for the importance of data-driven decision-making when it comes to funding human service programs and services. This is, indeed, the required approach if the City of Tacoma is to make and demonstrate progress towards outcomes it had identified as important. However, one of the possible unintended outcomes of emphasizing proven programs is that it de-emphasizes innovation or “unproven” organizations with limited capacity to introduce a new approach or program. Data-driven or evidence-based decision-making should not come completely at the expense of supporting ideas or organizations that, while not fully proven, show promise. For this reason, it is important that the Stabilization Fund and Innovation, Planning and Capacity Fund should be continued.

Both of these funds demonstrate City of Tacoma’s appreciation of the challenging environment in which non-profit organizations find themselves, and of the importance of taking measured, “calculated risks” if innovation is to be brought to life.

KEY COMPONENT

The Stabilization Fund provides a safety net for organizations that are facing significant service reductions due to a budget deficit and addressing an emergent human services need.

The Innovation, Planning and Capacity Building Fund provides human services organizations short-term, project based support with one of the following:

- Innovation to support new methods or measures related to improving program services or outcomes;
- Planning to support initial project development work;
- Capacity Building for one-time support to build capacity in a program, agency or system which produces nearly immediate results in service enhancements or acquired skills.

The Capacity Building grants are particularly beneficial to new or small non-profits that are not well versed in the art of grant writing, are limited by staff skills or are too small to participate in the RFP process. During interviews with service provider some groups stated that they were not made aware of this opportunity to strengthen organizations (particularly smaller organizations that were currently unfunded but doing great work in the community), which could help them take steps towards being ready for the competitive process. A recommendation for enhancement to the process is to market this opportunity when applicable to applicants that respond to

the RFP and are found ineligible or not approved for funding. This recommendation links strongly to the set of improvements identified later in this report that are intended to help non-profit organizations navigate the application process within an environment of limited capacity (*see Recommendation 5.4 below*).

Recommendation 5.2 – Essential services (and evidence-based programs, pending Tacoma’s interest and capacity to move in this direction) could be removed from competitive process

Transparency in government matters in several aspects, from improving accountability to increasing efficiency and effectiveness in order to foster trust and build collaborative partnerships. And if transparency is viewed as one of the "must do's" of local government, it stands to reason that it is incumbent on the City of Tacoma to make its decision-making process as transparent as possible from beginning to end. From the lens of the “transparency imperative” of local government, it follows that an approach to funding that defaults to competitive granting (as opposed to sole sourcing) is inherently more desirable. However, it may be that in specific cases, removing services from the competitive process may be beneficial.

For example, the most recent competitive granting process administered by the City of Tacoma resulted in essential services being defunded. To avoid this scenario in the future, Tacoma could look to Mecklenburg County, NC, where essential services were taken out of the competitive process.

BEST PRACTICE

In Mecklenburg County, North Carolina essential services were removed from the competitive process to avoid a scenario where essential services were defunded. This was done by the County taking an inventory of essential versus non-essential services provided by non-profit partners in the County. Essential services were identified as “must have services” with a limited amount of resources. The criteria for measuring essential versus non-essential services was directly related to sole source provision. If an organization was determined to be the only one of its kind providing services in Mecklenburg, the County removed that organization from the grant process. The sole source providers were partnered with the corresponding human service agency and received permanent support from the County.

As the City of Tacoma explores the degree to which it wishes to move to a more data-driven or evidence-based approach to its human services decision-making, as outlined in earlier recommendations, it may also want to consider making exceptions to competitive grant funding in a limited number of cases where a program has a true evidence-based methodology and is demonstrating meaningful progress towards key outcomes.

Recommendation 5.3 – Maximize Human Services Commission and Volunteer Capacity in Their Role in Funding Decisions

Staff and non-profits have expressed concern regarding the role and capacity of the Commission. Of particular concern this cycle was: the volunteers' preparation and understanding of the Human Services Strategic Plan, knowledge of priority areas, and rating criteria. Volunteers also expressed concerns regarding their preparation to evaluate and score proposals. It is essential for members of the body that evaluates the applications to have a clear understanding not only of human services, but of the critical needs, identified priorities and desired community outcomes for particular populations, not only for the integrity of process but to preserve community trust.

There are a few directions that the City could take with regard to this body; however, regardless of the path taken, there are at least two requirements: the development of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for prospective Commission members, volunteers or staff who read and score applications; and the demonstration of genuine understanding and/or experience in human services. Members should understand outcomes and the measures that lead to measurable change in the City, and have knowledge of the goals of Tacoma 2025 and the alignment of the Human Services Strategic Plan.

BEST PRACTICE

One example of a community with an effective scoring and review body is Fairfax County, Virginia. The Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) is comprised of Fairfax County residents appointed by the County Executive during each funding cycle of the Consolidated Community Funding Pool. SAC members cannot be an employee or member of an applicant agency, or County employees. All SAC members must be able to demonstrate knowledge of and/ or experience in human services in their application. Contracted staff conduct a 1-3 day training with the SAC to prepare them for the upcoming cycle. They are given a resource manual that details the clear guidelines on the questions, what information should be included in an ideal answer, and a glossary of terms. SAC members are required to defend all scores in writing. SAC scores are presented to the Funding Pool Advisory Committee who review and forward the recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. Once awards are announced (applicants are notified individually in writing), non-funded applicants can request an in-person or phone debrief. Each item is reviewed and explained and the goal is to help the organization understand where they fell short, so they can improve their approach in the following cycle. This is an example of a community led evaluation and review process.

The role of staff is no less important. If the Commission/Volunteer model is to be truly effective, a significant amount of time is required to plan and conduct orientations and training sessions that can adequately prepare members to understand the scoring criteria as well as program outcomes and strategies. Significant time would also need to be reserved in advance of the RFP process to

recruit, interview and appoint the right people. If external adjudication continues to be considered an essential part of decision-making around human services grants in the City of Tacoma, the approach taken by Fairfax County provides an example in which a high priority is placed on the capacity of the external adjudication body. The City of Tacoma may wish to consider the extent to which it creates the conditions outlined below.

By no means is external evaluation of grants the only viable approach to grant-making. The City of Vancouver, Canada implements a staff-led model (while preserving City Council's ultimate decision-making role) for some of its social service-related funding envelopes, as does Fulton County, Georgia. Fulton County's process, listed below, provides an alternative approach to consider, should the City of Tacoma at some point consider moving away from the Commission model.

BEST PRACTICE

In Fulton County, Georgia eligible applications are reviewed by Fulton County Department Division Managers. This phase is to incorporate input from staff familiar with human services programming and needs of the community. The application is then reviewed by the Human Services Coordinating Committee, which is made up of subject matter experts which help to minimize bias from a single reviewer. Next the funding allocation protocol is used to help guide funding recommendations based on grant budget, individual application request, and application score. The Fulton County Board of Commissioners receives the proposed funding package for review and final action. Applicants are notified individually via email. Non-funded applicants may request a debriefing session to review scores and feedback.

Recommendation 5.4 – Implement measures that help non-profits better navigate the application process and ensure fairness

During the interview sessions conducted in researching this report, several non-profits articulated their appreciation for the staff-led pre-proposal trainings, and even more so for the support and clarity delivered during one-on-one calls for technical assistance in the weeks leading up to the application deadline. It was very clear that the non-profit community has deep appreciation and respect for the work that the staff does for them on behalf of the City. This relationship between the non-profit community and the City is a strength, and is one the City should continue to foster.

Recommendations to enhance the current funding process are: to take an inventory of all the questions that are asked during the technical assistance breakout sessions and to post them on the Human Service Division's website. This would be particularly helpful to applicants that want to determine which priority area is the best fit for their application. In addition to holding the pre-proposal conferences at various locations throughout the city to increase access, the City could consider using Skype as a means of creating convenience for organizations (and potentially saving the City money in the process). Recording and creating webinars that would allow non-profits the

opportunity to watch at a time that is convenient to them would also demonstrate the City's willingness to see the world from the perspective of the non-profits, whose time constraints are typically high.

The non-profit community identified shortcomings and concerns with the oral presentation segment of the funding process. Concerns were shared regarding the questions that were asked (and not asked) during the oral presentations that indicated a lack of understanding on behalf of the reviewers. Staff surveyed reported inconsistencies in the amount of time given to each group, as well as with regard to the process.

BEST PRACTICE

Allegheny County uses oral presentations and in some cases site visits in its decision making process. When proposers are asked to give an oral presentation, they are notified of the date, time and location, and are provided with an agenda or topics for discussion. Questions asked during oral presentations or site visits are for the purpose of clarifying the scope and content of the written proposal.

It is our recommendation that the oral interviews be reframed to model a process that brings more consistent value and is less stressful for both the evaluating body and the applicant. Applicants should be notified in writing of place, time and date of interview. In addition, applicants should be given the questions in advance in order to prepare their response. This would make best use of the time. For fairness, every group should be allotted the same amount of time based on the number of questions.

Fairness is also supported by a commitment to ensuring the widest available means to notify Tacoma stakeholders of grant opportunities. The Human Service Planning and Contracting 2015-2016 Application Process Survey indicated that the City of Tacoma utilizes many mechanisms to announce the RFP. While email was identified as the preferred mechanism, the City of Tacoma should continue to exhaust other avenues such as U.S. mail, public service announcements, press releases, local public access television, the City of Tacoma website, social media, and newspaper. By doing this, the City of Tacoma "casts a wide net" to ensure that opportunities for funding are made available to as many organizations as possible.

Recommendation 5.5 – Institute 'pre-application' process

Earlier in the report, a strong emphasis was placed on how a data-driven approach to human service funding would help the City of Tacoma better understand which services were required for purchase to achieve the outcomes of Tacoma 2025. With this insight in hand, the City may be in a position to improve its application system by introducing a pre-application process based on the identified needs.

Both Hennepin County and Allegheny County utilize Request for Interest and Request for Qualifications to help streamline their RFP process and gather information about potential organizations for future use. These tools not only help

organizations make better decisions, but can reduce the stress on both staff and applicants during the application process by narrowing the pool of applicants; this would eliminate the time and energy that a non-qualified applicant would put in to apply and would decrease the number of full applications that staff and volunteers would be required to adjudicate.

A Request for Information (RFI) is defined as a method of collating information from different suppliers prior to formally sourcing products or services. It is normally used where there are many potential organizations and not enough information is known about them. It is a structured process where a long list of potential suppliers can be reduced to a short list of those organizations that are willing and able to fulfill your requirements.

Why use an RFI?

- To compile details about potential organizations and their capabilities
- To advise potential organizations that you intend to source a product or service competitively
- To show that you are acting fairly and including all participants
- To gather information in a way that decides the next step

A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) refers to the pre-qualification stage of the procurement process. Only those organizations that successfully respond to the RFQ and meet the qualification criteria will be included in the subsequent Request for Proposals solicitation process.

Why use a RFQ?

When there is the potential for significant interest in a specific contract opportunity, the RFQ process can be used to pre-qualify proponents prior to the RFP stage. This can make the solicitation process more efficient as there will be fewer responses and all of them will be qualified. It is far easier, less time-consuming and fairer to proponents to evaluate several proposals from qualified proponents rather than dozens or hundreds of proposals from both qualified and unqualified proponents. (<http://www.artscapediy.org/Creative-Placemaking-Toolbox/How-Do-I-Select-and-Contract-Specialists-and-Servi/What-is-a-RFQ-and-How-Do-I-Use-One.aspx#sthash.1PkinbFr.dpuf>)

Conclusion

Like most parties involved in the complex business of supporting human services delivery in their communities, the City of Tacoma Human Services Division is highly dedicated to the people that it serves. This was evident in interviews and discussions that the L-ICMA Team undertook with members of this team and with individuals and organizations with connections to it. Such dedication is a tremendous source of strength, and one that the division can build upon by improving its practices and processes in a number of key areas so that funding decisions better align with the community vision and drive towards measurable outcomes. A more data-driven approach, led by a division that unwaveringly assumes the role of backbone support organization for the community – alongside the introduction of complementary steps in the application and adjudication processes – can ensure that progress is made. The vision set out in Tacoma 2025 – and the focus areas that support it – provide many opportunities where the Human Services Division can lead. The consideration and potential implementation of the recommendations contained in this report is a pathway to this leadership role, which, ultimately, can better enable the City’s realization of its vision.

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Other Resources that Influenced Work

Funding for Results: A Review of Government Outcomes-Based Agreements (Published by the Beeck Center for Social Impact & Innovation at Georgetown University, November 2014)

Outcome--Based Evaluation: Faith-Based Social Service Organizations and Stewardship (Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D., Claudia Horn, Calvin W Edwards, Karen M Woods and Collette Caprara, March 29, 2007)

Approaches to Performance Based Contracting for Social Services (Lawrence L. Martin)
Performance-Based Contracting for Services: A Survey of NIGP Members (Lawrence L. Martin, Clifford McCue, Mamoon Allaf and Tina Borger)

An Outcomes-Based Funding Model for the University of Maine System (Developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems)

Tools for Outcome-Based Evaluation of HOPWA-funded Programs (Prepared by Clegg and Associates, Inc., Seattle, Washington, June 2001)

Designing Outcomes-Oriented Performance Measures for Social Services, Presentation at Measuring and Improving Social Service Programs in Government Conference, Sacramento, California (Margaret A. O'Brien-Strain and Ursula M. Bischoff, February 2001)

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Allegheny County, Pennsylvania- <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/index.aspx>

Documents and Data provided by the City of Tacoma:

2015-2019 Human Services Strategic Plan

Tacoma 2025: Shared Vision, Shared Future

The Equity and Empowerment Initiative Plan
Funding Process Task and Timeline
Human Services Funding Application
Human Services Commission Application Rating Tools
Mental Health & Chemical Dependency (MHCD) Coordinated System of Care
Community Services/MHCD Application Process: Staff Survey
Community Services/MHCD Application Process: Human Services Commission Survey
Community Services/MHCD Application Process Survey Results Analysis
Mandated Outcomes List
Community Services/MHSUD Outcomes Based Evaluation Policies - July 2014
Community Service/MHSUD Standard Agreements
2015-2016 Funded Programs
Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development - Five-Year Strategic Plan and Annual Action Plan (March 2015 drafts)
Various applications submitted by non-profit organizations (funded and non-funded)
Tacoma Data

Appendix

Open Data Model Guidelines

Guidelines for Open Data Policies

Compiled by the Sunlight Foundation
Version 3 | March 2014

Introduction

The Sunlight Foundation created this living set of open data guidelines to address: what data should be public, how to make data public, and how to implement policy. The provisions are not ranked in order of priority and do not address every question one should consider when preparing a policy, but are a guide to answer the question of what an open data policy can and should do in striving to create a government data ecosystem where open data is the default. Setting the default to open means that the government and parties acting on its behalf will make public information available proactively and that they'll put that information within reach of the public (online), without barriers for its reuse and consumption. Setting the default to open is about living up to the potential of our information, about looking at comprehensive information management and making determinations that fall in the public interest.

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31. Mandate future review for potential changes to this policy

What Data Should Be Public

1. Proactively release government information online

Most government information disclosure laws and systems currently in place, including right-to-know, freedom of information and public records laws, are vehicles for reactive disclosure. Reactive disclosure means that a question has to be asked before an answer is given and that public information must be requested before it is disclosed. *Proactive* disclosure is the opposite. Proactive disclosure is the release of public information before an individual requests it. In the 21st century that means proactively putting new information online, [where people are looking for it](#)¹.

Open data laws provide an opportunity not just to update and improve access to information that is already open and/or public but also to specify that new data sets and records be collected and published. Similarly, policies should be specific about what “new” data can mean: in some instances, this provision can be used to require that that new data be created, collected and released for the first time.

2. Reference and build on existing public accountability and access policies

Open data policies should be informed by existing provisions ensuring access to government information. Strong open data policies build upon the principles embodied by existing laws and policies that defend and establish public access, often defining standards for information quality, disclosure and publishing. Examples of accountability policies include open meetings acts, open records acts, ethics standards, campaign finance regulation and lobbying disclosure laws, to name a few. Building on precedent from these policies and others can help strengthen new open data requirements and inform where policy updates or revisions are necessary that an open data policy can address.

¹ <http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/04/27/government-online/>

Building on existing accountability and access policies can also help define the term "data" as it is used in an open data policy. Data, as it's defined in open data policies, can be seen as the next iteration of public records. Existing laws defining the scope of public records could be used as the touchstone for defining data to be released proactively online. Public records exemptions, however, should not be used to limit the scope of the definition of data. Open data policies that define data using the definition of public records should be able to adapt to changing definitions of public records. For that purpose, definition by reference would be stronger than definition by the copying of language, which would force updates in more than one place.

Another benefit of using existing access policies as a foundation for open data is that it can help ensure *legal* rights to information. Policies that already outline standards for access to information often create a legal right to that information, and this could be used to ensure the legal right to open data by extension.

3. Build on the values, goals and mission of the community and government

An open data policy can be pursued with the intent of realizing many different varieties of public good, including greater government transparency, honesty, accountability, efficiency, civic engagement and economic growth. An explicit statement of goals, values or intention can help clarify the outcomes that a government hopes an open data policy will help achieve. A statement of mission highlights both the general importance of open data and the specific importance of releasing information for that government's particular political context. In addition, the process of developing this statement may serve the democratic goal of increasing public participation by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders to explore the value of open data from their own perspectives.

4. Create a public, comprehensive list of all information holdings

For an open data policy to have a strong foundation, you first need to know what data you have—and so does the public. Governments should conduct an inventory of existing data early in the process of open data policy development in order for the government and other stakeholders to be aware of the full potential dimensions of data release. While defining total information holdings may be a complex undertaking, governments should conduct as comprehensive a review of existing data information as possible, with the inclusion of information holdings that may benefit from becoming structured data themselves.

The inventory should itself be made public. Publicly accounting for agency information helps ensure that information is managed to benefit the public interest, allows for common understanding of what data the government holds, and can create efficiencies among government departments. It empowers policymakers and administrators to determine whether information is being appropriately managed, and empowers the public oversight of those determinations. An individual or group should be charged with oversight of the inventory to

ensure its ongoing maintenance and accuracy. To make the listing of data as useful as possible, such a list should also encompass data that may be viewed as sensitive or unlikely to be released (along with any other helpful context.) In addition to setting the stage for meaningful public discussions around dataset release, an inventory process can provide a roadmap for creating ambitious timelines (see [Provision 27](#)) and identify whether new data may need to be collected.

5. Specify methods of determining the prioritization of data release

While open data policies ideally enable the online release of all public government information, the release of data may end up being a staggered process for practical reasons, such as insufficient funding or staffing. Governments should be clear about the range of potential methods that could be used in determining the priority-order of data release.

A variety of goals, actors and events can contribute to the determination of data set prioritization. Because of the traditional relevance of ethics concerns to open government policy, data which provides oversight of high-frequency areas for governmental ethics concerns serves the specific goal of achieving accountable government. Publishing data which is used in the process of creating public laws or rules, data related to specific legislative or executive policy initiatives, or data which is created incidental to a new policy or regulation serves the goals of civic engagement and transparency. The goal of satisfying public demand can be achieved both through a review of the existing volume of requests for government data and through a new solicitation of public comment. (Although direct public participation is important, it should not serve as the sole method of data set prioritization, because this mode of participation can inadvertently serve to reinforce the specific preferences of people who are already comfortable engaging the government.) Finally, given practical concerns, the cost of releasing individual data sets is likely to be used as an aspect of determining priority for release. While cost may be a factor in determining the priority of data release, it should be balanced against other prioritization methods in order to produce a truly useful collection of public data.

6. Stipulate that provisions apply to contractors or quasi-governmental agencies

Information that is gathered from the public using public funds should remain publicly-accessible, regardless of government decisions to delegate its management. The government often uses third party entities or contractors to handle, research or generate government information. Nonetheless, government decisions to employ outside contractors should not result in the public losing access to its own information. The scope of public information should be defined to include information managed by vendors of government services. Similarly, open data policy provisions should explicitly apply to quasi-governmental agencies and other similar actors, such as multi-state agencies, government-sponsored entities and publicly-funded universities. Where information is collected from or on behalf of the public using the government's legislative, regulatory or spending power, the public should retain presumptive access to that information.

To ensure that the public retains access to its data, provisions should be added whenever possible to the existing procurement, contracting or planning processes requiring government contractors release government relevant information openly.

7. Appropriately safeguard sensitive information

A well-crafted open data policy is complementary to pre-existing legislation and directives about access to public information (see [Provision 2](#) for more details), which means that it can integrate pre-existing public access law exemptions for information that is sensitive for privacy, security or other reasons. In addition, the nature of online access for bulk information can produce its own privacy, security and liability concerns. Individual-level data requires special scrutiny if it refers to private individuals who are not serving as government vendors. However, information that may provoke concern if released at the individual-level can often be released in aggregate and thereby provide some degree of public information and value. Any exemptions must be carefully crafted to exclude only the most necessary categories of information. Valid privacy and security concerns should be addressed through provisions that recognize the public interest in determining whether information will be disclosed or not. For example, rather than saying “information relating to X topic is exempt from disclosure,” provisions should require that “information relating to X topic is exempt from disclosure *if the potential for harm outweighs the public interest in disclosure.*” Public interest here does not mean public attention, but instead refers to interests like democratic accountability, justice and effective oversight.

Any exemptions to data release should be crafted in a way that does not cut out access to information for researchers. Information that might be too sensitive for release to the public online can often be used by academic or nonprofit researchers who have agreed to protect sensitive information and not release it, except in aggregate form or in other ways that limit the potential for harm. This kind of release, with the research and insights it empowers, would benefit the interests of accountability, justice and oversight. Balance testing should still be used to ensure privileged information-sharing is not given priority over full public release when the public interest outweighs the potential for harm.

How to Make Data Public

8. Mandate data formats for maximal technical access.

For maximal access, data must be released in formats that lend themselves to easy and efficient reuse via technology. (See the [Open Data Handbook²](#), [The Power of Information³](#), [8](#)

² Open Data Handbook File Formats Overview,
<http://opendatahandbook.org/en/appendices/file-formats.html>

³ The Power of Information, Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg,
<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/advice/poi/power-of-information-review.pdf>

[Open Government Data Principles](#)⁴, the [10 Open Government Data Principles](#)⁵ and [Open Government Data](#)⁶). This means releasing information in open formats (or “open standards”), in machine-readable formats, that are structured (or [machine-processable](#)⁷) appropriately. Plainly, “open formats” refer to a rolling set of “open standards,” often defined by standards organizations, that store information in a way that can be accessed by proprietary or non-proprietary software means. These formats exist across an array of data types; a common example cited is CSV in lieu of XLS for spreadsheets (the former being accessible via a wider variety of software mechanisms than the latter). “Machine-readability” simply refers to a format that a computer can understand. One step beyond machine-readable data is structured data (or machine-processable data), a format intended to ease machine searching and sorting processes. While formats such as HTML and PDF are easily opened for most computer users, these formats are difficult to convert the information to new uses. Providing data in structured formats, such as JSON and XML, add significant ease to access and allow more advanced analysis, especially with large amounts of information.

9. Provide comprehensive and appropriate formats for varied uses

In addition to releasing information in formats that allow for the maximal amount of technical reuse, appropriate methods of distribution should be considered, to maximize the degree of access, use and quality of published information. For example, if a government report is most effectively distributed via a PDF format, but contains data elements that would be most digestible via a structured format, both the report and accompanying structured dataset should be released with relative referential metadata (see [Provision 13](#)). Similarly, options for bulk download should also recognize the strength of allowing for access to information in various formats. This degree of access and interaction allows citizens and government alike to get the most out of the data.

10. Remove restrictions for accessing information

To provide truly open access, there must be the right to reuse government information (explored in [Provision 11](#)) and no technical restrictions such as registration requirements, access fees and usage limitations, among others. Whether these technical restrictions have been specifically put in place (i.e., access fees) or are the accidental result of the choice of data format or software (i.e., usage limits or copyright restrictions), it is appropriate for an open data policy to address and remove these barriers to access. The aim should be to be to provide broad, non-discriminatory, free access to data so that any person can access information at any time without having to identify him/herself or provide any justification for doing so. Both open data policies and the Terms of Use (or Terms of Service) associated with government data should

⁴ 8 Open Government Data Principles, <http://opengovdata.org/>

⁵ Ten Principles for Opening Up Government Information, Sunlight Foundation, <http://sunlightfoundation.com/policy/documents/ten-open-data-principles/>

⁶ Open Government Data, Josh Tauberer, <http://opengovdata.io/>

⁷ Id.

maximize the accessibility and use cases for data. While a disclaimer of warranties can be added to limit government liability, this mandate should pose no further restrictions, such as by limiting who or for what purposes the data be used.

11. Mandate data be explicitly license-free

If information is to be truly public, and maximally re-usable, there should be no license-related barrier to the re-use of public information. To be completely “open,” public government information should be released completely into the worldwide public domain and clearly labeled as such. Opening data into the public domain removes barriers to information access, helps disseminate knowledge, aids in data preservation, promotes civic engagement and entrepreneurial activity and extends the longevity of the technological investments used to open information in the first place.

An open data policy must be explicit about this because copyright law varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Moreover, while the [U.S. Copyright Act](#)⁸ explicitly does not include federal government works, it is silent on U.S. state and local government works. This, coupled with the additional complexities of copyright law (and ownership of various types of government data), mean special attention should be applied to all government data and the ease of its legal re-use. If the government data in question is not explicitly in the worldwide public domain, it should be given an [explicit public domain dedication](#)⁹ [such as the [Creative Commons CC0](#)¹⁰ statement or a [Open Data Commons Public Domain Dedication and License \(PDDL\)](#)¹¹—both of which combine a waiver and a license].

12. Charge data-creating agencies with recommending an appropriate citation form

While failure to provide attribution for government data should never be actionable, users of government data should be encouraged to note the origin of data sources by accurately citing those sources. The practice of citing government data can be encouraged by having direct data managers develop model citations for their data sets. These model citations should both list key elements of the source’s identity that would be required to effectively identify an individual data source and identify the unit of government which created or maintains the data. Where data users are actually transforming government data in some way, encouraging the proper citation of government data will allow end users to distinguish between problems with government data quality and intermediary data quality by providing a clear route back to the original source of the

⁸ U.S. Copyright Act, <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#105>

⁹ Open Government Data: Best-Practices Language for Making Data “License-Free,” <http://theunitedstates.io/licensing/>

¹⁰ CC0 1.0 Universal (CC0 1.0) Public Domain Dedication, <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>

¹¹ Open Data Commons Public Domain Dedication and License (PDDL), <http://opendatacommons.org/licenses/pddl/>

data.

13. Require publishing metadata

Providing a common and fully described core metadata scheme (as well as other documentation) can be useful for the public and government alike. A strong metadata scheme takes its lead from common international meta attributes (such as [DCAT](#)), and allows data publishers to classify contextual fields or elements within their datasets. Commonly defined fields for such notations not only provide helpful context about the data's creation, quality and uses, but also help automate discovery mechanisms at the granular level, serving both government interoperability and the public discovery process.

14. Require publishing data creation processes

Providing quality data and insight into the operations of the government via government information requires an understanding of how the data was created. A summary of the processes that were used to create a specific data set provides valuable context that might not be discernable via metadata alone and should accompany the data set's release.

Documentation of the workflow helps the public and government alike discern qualities about the dataset otherwise unavailable, such as (but not limited to): the sourcing, reliability, rarity and usability of the data. Additionally, documenting data creation processes can identify redundancy and areas for workflow and data creation improvements.

15. Mandate the use of unique identifiers

Unique identifiers are reference numbers used to identify unique individuals, entities or locations. The use of unique identifiers within and across data sets improves the quality and accuracy of data analysis. Without unique identifiers, some analyses can become difficult or impossible, since similar names may or may not refer to the same entities. Importantly, identifiers should be non-proprietary and public.

Several approaches could be taken to the development and dissemination of unique identifiers. For example, managers of individual data sets could be charged with developing the unique identifiers for the entities they most reference. Alternatively, a lead actor may oversee the development of a comprehensive identifier development schema. See also this list of [extensive resources](#)¹² about the need for unique identifiers for corporate entities.

16. Require code sharing or publishing open source

In addition to data, the code used to create government websites, portals, tools and other online resources can provide benefits as valuable open data itself. Governments should employ open

¹² Six Degrees of Corporations, Sunlight Foundation, <http://sunlightfoundation.com/sixdegrees/resources/>

source solutions whenever possible to enable sharing and make the most out of these benefits.

17. Require digitization and distribution of archival materials

Open data policies can address not only information currently or soon to be available in an electronic format, but also undigitized archival material. Examples include everything from old budgets or meeting minutes to photos and maps.

Questions about what archival material should be digitized and what timelines are realistic for digitizing archival material can be informed by the same kind of prioritization process used for general data release (see [Provision 5](#)). Public participation and feedback from impacted government stakeholders will be key to making the digitization of archival material an effective process.

18. Create a central location devoted to data publication and policy

Data portals and similar websites can facilitate the distribution of open data by providing an easy-to-access, searchable hub for multiple data sets. At their best, these portals or hubs promote interaction with and reuse of open data and provide documentation for the use of information (see [Provision 13](#)). Portals can be generalized or specific (e.g., a spending or ethics portal), and can vary in terms of their sophistication. For specific portals, they should link to related portals when appropriate. Users looking at a portal for city campaign finance data, for example, could benefit from seeing a direct link to that city's portal for lobbying information. Portals and other related websites also provide governments with the opportunity to go into detail about issues and policies related to its commitment to openness and transparency. To facilitate their findability these websites should permit indexing and searching by third parties such as search engines.

There are several helpful features that should be included in general or specific portals. A list of what data is contained there is one necessary feature that makes it easy for users to quickly see what kinds of information are available on the data portal. If appropriate, this could be done through a link to a data inventory. Another beneficial feature to include in data portals is a view of analytics on data downloads. This will help users and government data providers understand what datasets are of the highest interest.

19. Publish bulk data

Bulk access provides a simple but effective means of publishing data sets in full by enabling the public to download all of the information stored in a database at once. This is a step beyond simply making select data sets or search results available for download or export and is critical for supporting the maximal reuse and analysis of data. Whether offered as a feature of a data portal—or even as a simple “click to download” button on a government agency webpage describing or displaying information—bulk access to information is often one of the simplest and

most direct steps a government entity can take to share public information.

20. Create public APIs for accessing information

Although bulk data (see [Provision 19](#)) [provides the most basic access to searching and retrieving](#)¹³ government data, government bodies can also develop APIs, or Application Programming Interfaces, that allow third parties to automatically search, retrieve or submit information directly from databases online (see [Open Government Data](#)). Navigating requirements for bulk data and APIs should be done in consultation with people with technical expertise as well as with likely users of the information.

21. Optimize methods of data collection

To optimize data quality and timeliness, disclosure regulations should take advantage of online data-collection methods. Electronic filing, also known as "e-filing," is one method of optimizing the quality and timeliness of data collection. To avoid the inefficiencies created by paper-based filing systems, governments should require online, electronic filing so long as filers can be reasonably expected to have access to the necessary technology. Electronic filing requirements save money, make real-time disclosure possible and allow structured data to be created at the same moment information is being filed, whereas paper filings only make reuse and analysis more difficult. Electronic filing provisions should include detailed language about what constitutes a "complete" filing and what to do if the online e-filing service is down.

22. Mandate ongoing data publication and updates

The ideal of online data is "real time" access: data should be made available as close as possible to the time that it is collected. It is not enough to mandate the one-time release of a data set because it becomes incomplete as soon as additional data is created but not published. In order to ensure that the information published is as accurate and useful as possible, specific requirements should be put in place to make sure government data is released as close as possible to the time that it is gathered and collected.

While sometimes challenging, this kind of rapid publishing becomes less of a burden when combined with others measures for digitizing data collection and publishing, such as electronic filing (see [Provision 21](#)), central data locations (see [Provision 18](#)) and APIs (see [Provision 20](#)).

23. Create permanent, lasting access to data

Once released, digitized government data should remain permanently available, "findable" at a stable online location or through archives in perpetuity. Although portals and websites can be

¹³ Government: Do You Really Need an API?, Eric Mill, Sunlight Foundation, <http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2012/03/21/government-do-you-really-need-an-api/>

vehicles for accessing this data over the long term (see [Provision 18](#)), it is critical that the data's permanent release and accessibility is defined so as to apply to the data itself, not just the means of access.

Provisions relating to permanence can also be expanded to relate to updates, changes or other alterations to the data. For best use by the public, these changes should be documented to include appropriate version-tracking and archiving over time. These provisions should build on the strengths of existing records management laws and procedures (see [Provision 2](#)).

How to Implement Policy

24. Create or appoint oversight authority

Some questions may defy easy treatment in the process of creating an open data policy, so it's appropriate to define a single authority empowered to resolve conflicts and ensure compliance with new open data measures. Some policies direct a pre-existing officer (e.g., a chief data or information officer, or an open data ombudsman) or a specific department to oversee execution and compliance, although new positions and authorities can also be created. It's important to emphasize that creating oversight does not necessarily require hiring new staff. Responsibility can be distributed among departmental coordinators who meet regularly, for example, to reduce the burden of oversight. This can also help with cross-departmental coordination and buy-in to the open data efforts.

Specifying an authority, review board or similar body is an important step to making sure that an open data policy can be executed and provides a resource to address unforeseen hurdles in implementation. Oversight bodies should conduct their work independently and publicly, and can be bolstered by creating new regulations or guidance for implementation (see [Provision 25](#)).

25. Create guidance or other binding regulations for implementation

Open data policies should be practically aspirational, meaning that they should define a vision for why the policy is being implemented, but also be able to provide actionable steps for the government and oversight authorities to follow to see the policy through to implementation. Creating regulations or guidance can ensure a strong, reliable policy and usually mean the difference between policy passed for show versus policy passed for substance. Regulations help make the work of oversight and implementation authorities possible. Open data policies can also direct guidance to be created from a basic framework described in the policy. So, rather than spelling out the entirety of data standards in the original policy document, governments can include direction in their policies that guidance be created to help agencies comply with online public access to non-proprietary, machine-readable data published in open formats.

26. Incorporate public perspectives into policy implementation

Just as public preferences should be incorporated into the development of an open data policy and in the prioritization of data sets for initial release, the public should be involved in the ongoing assessment and review of the policy's implementation. Governments should create meaningful opportunities for public feedback about data quality, quantity, selection, and format, as well as the user-friendliness of the point of access. In addition, this feedback should be formally considered and addressed when the policy undergoes review (see [Provision 31](#)).

27. Set appropriately ambitious timelines for implementation

Setting clear deadlines can demonstrate the strength of a commitment and will help translate commitments into results. Deadlines can also help identify failures clearly, opening the door to public oversight. Relevant actors should be given enough time to prepare for the changes brought on by the new open data policy, but not so much time that the policy becomes inoperable. The timeline should be firm, provide motivation for action and have actionable goals and benchmarks that can be used as a metric for compliance. These goals or checkpoints can include qualitative and quantitative measurements.

28. Create processes to ensure data quality

Data quality will not be ensured through data release alone: efforts need to be made to keep the data up-to-date, accurate and accessible. Data release should be approached as an iterative and ongoing process. As soon as sensitive information and security concerns are met, data should be released and regularly updated as it improves and grows. Data with serious accuracy and quality concerns should be adequately documented to avoid creating confusion or misinformation. Similarly, public data reporting streams that are separate from what is used within government should be avoided whenever possible, as redundant or parallel data streams can create opportunities for data quality to suffer. Each update should include clear and complete metadata (including a conspicuous contact person), group datasets where appropriate, and address concerns noted via a prominent feedback mechanism.

29. Ensure sufficient funding for implementation

Like any other initiative, implementing an open data policy should be done with an eye on long-term sustainability. One way to do this is to consider funding sources for the implementation of the policy as well as its future maintenance. Sufficient funding can mean the difference between successful and unsuccessful policies. Funding should be considered for—but not limited to—the potential of the following: new staff (administrative, technical and legal), new software (to house, extract and input data), training and server maintenance. While each jurisdiction's ability to fund will vary, significant consideration should go into identifying the resources reserved to assist and support an open data ecosystem.

30. Create or explore potential partnership

Partnerships can be useful in a variety of important efforts related to data release, such as: increasing the availability of open data, identifying constituent priorities for data release (see [Provision 5](#)), and connecting government information to that held by nonprofits, think tanks, academic institutions and nearby governments. Such partnerships can [aid civic participation](#)¹⁴, help identify the gaps in service delivery, among other benefits. Public-private partnerships can be via contract, informal cooperation, or an exchange for rights or privileges. In addition to using commonly used formats, reaching out to nearby governments to explore ways to share data, experience, and workloads can assist in achieving open data outcomes.

31. Mandate future review for potential changes to this policy

Just as publishing open data is an ongoing process that requires attention to its quality and upkeep (see [Provision 28](#)), so too does the policy that establishes it. In order to keep up with current best practices and feedback from existing policy oversight, open data policies should mandate future review of the policy itself as well as of any guidance created by the policy or other implementation processes.

Open data policies should acknowledge that the context in which they operate is rapidly changing over time and will likely need sustained attention to remain relevant. There is a wide array of topics a review could, and should, cover. One key focus of review is understanding the audience for open data. Attention should be given to capturing details such as who is using government data, which data is being used, what the data is being used for and more.

¹⁴ The Power of Information, Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg,
<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/advice/poi/power-of-information-review.pdf>