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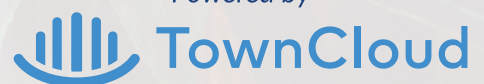
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BY KURT THURMAIER AND ERICA CEKA

NATTERING NABOBS OF NEGATIVISM ARE NO MATCH FOR PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

An active citizen engagement strategy can be a transformative tool that helps officials better align budgeting decisions with residents' preferences.

United States Vice President Spiro T. Agnew used "nattering nabobs of negativism" during the 1970 midterm congressional campaign to refer to politicians critical of Nixon administration policies. Speechwriter William Safire found "nabob," a Hindi word for governor, then added "nattering" as an offbeat adjective to make the phrase memorable.

Today, "nattering nabobs of negativism" captures the sentiment of many city and county managers—and their staffs—who are weary of the same half dozen or so residents who seem to criticize every action and decision of local government officials. It's demoralizing to be constantly under attack, whether justified or not.

Local government managers have long struggled with their proper role in ensuring democratic accountability and making sure local government is responsive to residents' preferences. In the council-manager model, the city or county manager is directly accountable to the governing body, and the governing body is accountable to the voters, mainly through regular elections.

But elections are poor signals about the preferences of electors for the specific mix and levels of services the government should deliver. Moreover, participants in elections do not usually include all eligible citizens, and local elections often have low voter turnout.

Voter turnout may be higher when it becomes a referendum on such a particular issue as whether to be a home-rule community or whether to raise taxes to fund a new county jail. But what do voters think about all of the other services a local government provides?

How many taxpayers agree that the taxes and fees they pay are reasonable for the services received? Local government budgets, unfortunately, often are prepared with uncertainties on how much residents are willing to pay in taxes and fees and for what levels of which services.

Twenty-five years of reviewing local government budgets for the Government Finance Officers Association budget presentation award suggests that resident input generally comes at the end of the budget process, when most decisions have already been made. It is the "nattering nabobs of negativism" who show up for public hearings.

Everybody knows what they are thinking, but what about the greater community? If elected officials are going to be responsive to the whole community and reflect their residents' preferences in the annual budget, they need to know what *all* of the residents are thinking.

Research suggests there are better and more accurate ways for staff and elected officials to discern what their residents think about the services being provided—or not

being provided—and their willingness to pay for them. An active citizen engagement strategy (see Figure 1) can be a transformative tool that helps elected officials go beyond merely satisfying legal requirements to increasing legitimacy of policy decisions, better aligning budgeting decisions with residents' preferences. Engagement goes beyond participation in citizen surveys; it involves interaction and opportunity for the public to offer advice and dialogues to gather resident recommendations regarding policies.[1]

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Some research suggests that public managers do not encourage dialogue and resident engagement in budgeting unless the managers believe the exercise has low costs and high benefits.[2] Engaging residents in the budget development process, however, can increase resident trust in government and support for public policies.[3]

The quality of resident participation in local government budgeting depends on the degree to which residents can engage in various opportunities (see Table 1). Each mechanism of participation, however, has its strengths and weaknesses. A consistent weakness of many formal mechanisms is that they fail to achieve genuine participation because they rarely collect input from a broad spectrum of the public.[4]

A 2009 study by Aimee Franklin and colleagues finds that the most commonly used mechanism of resident participation in the budget process is regular public hearings,[5] but public officials don't consider public hearings as providing any participatory value.[6] Judith Innes and David Booher note that citizen participation at public hearings usually is not effective because:

> "*Citizens want to be listened to and may express anger to get an audience riled up or make extreme statements. They often speak in term of war metaphors referring to 'battles' and 'coming out in force'. They cannot afford polite speech, which could be misinterpreted. They are engaged in one-way communication with no opportunity to clarify.*"[7]

Battered by the negativity, public officials become skeptical about public participation, and perceive public engagement as a means to satisfy legal requirements. Nabobs of negativism at a public hearing cannot "speak for the citizens" if there are alternative venues for the average person to speak, however.

The collective research on participatory budgeting suggests that public officials should design a two-track participation strategy with a portfolio of mechanisms. At the micro-level, people can be recruited to assist decisions on specific issues. At the macro-level, participants have a chance to make decisions that benefit the entire community.

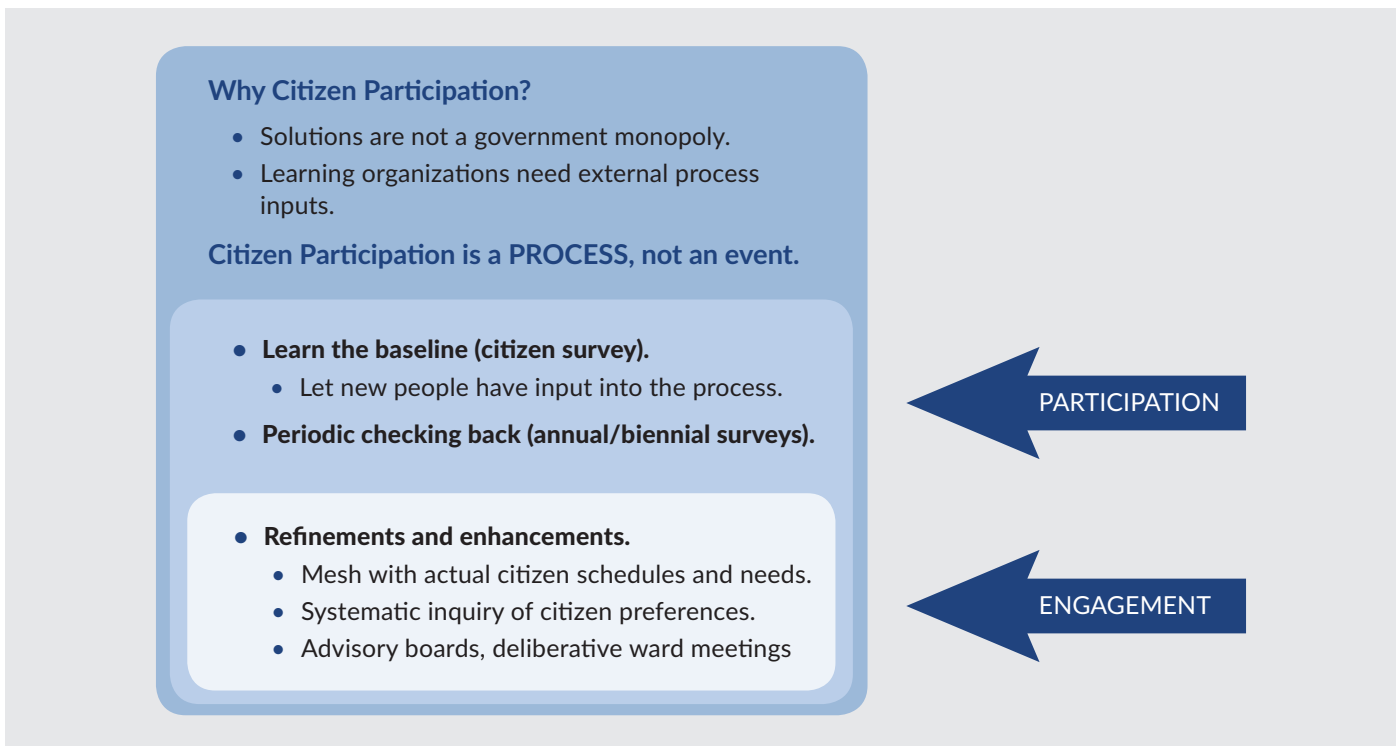**FIGURE 1 ǁ** An Active Citizen Engagement Strategy

Why Citizen Participation?
- Solutions are not a government monopoly.
- Learning organizations need external process inputs.

Citizen Participation is a PROCESS, not an event.

- **Learn the baseline (citizen survey).**
  - Let new people have input into the process.
- **Periodic checking back (annual/biennial surveys).**

- **Refinements and enhancements.**
  - Mesh with actual citizen schedules and needs.
  - Systematic inquiry of citizen preferences.
  - Advisory boards, deliberative ward meetings

PARTICIPATION

ENGAGEMENT

TABLE 1 ‖ Comparative Strengths of Participation Methods

METHOD	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Elections	Residents can express broad policy preferences.	Limited to residents; weak link to service levels and types.
Public hearings	Anyone can voice preferences.	Often held at end of deliberation process when unlikely to change outcome.
Advisory boards	Each focused on specific service or issue; draws on community expertise.	Participants may not be representative of residents.
Focus groups	Open-ended discussions regarding specific issues and concerns.	Participant selection may be biased; dominant voice may overshadow other views.
Deliberative meetings	Opportunities for residents to deliberate interactively with each other and government officials (e.g., community based strategic planning sessions).	Participants may not be representative of residents; linkage between broad conversations and specific service types and levels may be weak.
Town meetings	Participants can speak and listen to other views and interact with agency representatives.	Participants may not be representative of residents and may lack knowledge for effective input; may have low participation rates.
Citizen surveys	Random sample surveys can obtain preferences on specific service types and levels; sample should be representative of resident demographics, including minority populations.	Cost depends on sampling method. Requires staff with analytical capacity or consultant contract. Best result is measuring trends, implying commitment to periodic surveys (e.g., at least every two years).

Source: Adapted from Soojin, Kim and Hindy Lauer Schachter. "Citizen participation in the budget process and local government accountability: Case studies of organizational learning from the United States and South Korea." *Public Performance & Management Review* 36.3 (2013): 456–471.

The resident-government interaction at the macro-level includes surveys, budget simulations, budget committees, focus groups, and special budget meetings.[8]

Recruitment of lay and professional stakeholders can add more knowledge and expertise to governance processes because these residents have deep interest in public issues and are willing to participate along with others with similar views. *Public finance advisory boards*, such as used by the city of DeKalb, Illinois, draw on community expertise focused on budget and finance issues, but the participants may not be representative of residents.

In DeKalb, the six members appointed by the mayor include a controller of a private sector firm and former school board president; a mortgage and investment banker; a small business entrepreneur and former accountant; a former business school associate dean; a licensed professional counselor with active practice involved in social service issues; and a public finance professor.

Franklin et al find that *special budget meetings* for the purpose of explaining and discussing resident recommendations is the second most common participatory budgeting tool, followed by direct interaction with the public.[9]

Open public meetings can inform residents about particular budget and policy issues. Anyone can participate at these events to receive policy information and reports from public officials.[10]

Despite its openness, this method often lacks broad community representation. Research suggests such meetings usually are attended by those who are well-educated and wealthier, or who have a special interest in the issue; they do not often represent the average resident.[11]

Deliberative meetings provide a higher level of engagement, where people are able to gain firsthand information on government operations, communicate their level of satisfaction with the proposed budget, and directly influence policy making.[12] Kansas City, Missouri, is a model for using multiple avenues for participatory budgeting. It has long used deliberative meetings to help identify capital improvement plan (CIP) priorities at the district and neighborhood levels. Created in 1983, the Public Improvements Advisory Committee (http://kcmo.gov/piac) holds a series of public hearings every year beginning in early summer to "provide residents with an opportunity to express their opinions, concerns and project requests regarding the forthcoming capital budget."

The *participatory budgeting project*[13] relies on this methodology for deliberations on capital spending priorities in specific wards of Chicago, New York, and other cities. Stewart et al. analyze the efforts of Chicago's

49th Ward to institute participatory budgeting for capital projects and find that despite comprehensive methods used to increase participation of minority groups and poor residents, the average participants in the budget process of the ward are largely white, college-educated, middle-aged, and homeowners.[14]

The analysis also revealed a mismatch between resident program prioritization and the 49th Ward representative's vision on budgetary allocations. Participants tend to prioritize projects that are classified as low priority, including playgrounds, dog parks, and community gardens as well as sidewalk repair, bike racks and lanes, while the ward representative prioritized street resurfacing.[15]

THE ROLE OF CITIZEN SURVEYS

Esteban Dalehite defines resident surveys as "instruments for increasing citizen participation and equity, setting budget priorities, holding government accountable for results, achieving program effectiveness, and obtaining information on citizen experience, perceptions, and subjective evaluations of services received."[16]

Public officials can identify concerns and problems with service delivery and use this information to improve quality as well as trust in and image of the government.[17] Surveys can be an efficient and productive linkage mechanism between public officials and residents.[18]

Most importantly, a randomly selected sample of citizens in a periodic citizen survey provides a representative view of what all of the residents think about services they receive (or don't) from the local government. Yet, research suggests that surveys are not an integral formal component of a policy development and are used on a limited basis.[19]

Patrick Bishop and Glyn Davis argue that such public consultation methods as citizen surveys can be considered participation only when gathered information actually influences policy choices.[20] Yet, studies show that public managers often do not use the information obtained from surveys except for their symbolic values of legitimacy.[21]

Janet Kelly notes that the recent trend toward performing citizen surveys does not move "beyond generic formulation of mostly input and output data."[22] Even if 43 percent of city and county departments use surveys to measure customer satisfaction, there is a little evidence that programs were changed based on the survey results.[23]

Gregg Van Ryzin and Stephen Immerwahr's framework (Figure 2) helps to organize resident satisfaction findings so that they directly relate to budgetary and managerial decision making.[24] By identifying the

FIGURE 2 ‖ Analysis of Citizen Survey Data

Management Options		IMPORTANCE	
		High	Low
PERFORMANCE	High	Sustain commitment to maintain performance level.	Consider reallocating resources to higher importance services.
	Low	Consider increasing resources, re-engineering process(es) to increase performance.	Low priority for management attention.

Source: Adapted from Gregg Van Ryzin and Stephen Immerwahr (2004), Derived Importance-Performance Analysis of Citizen Survey Data, *Public Performance & Management Review*, 27:4, 146.

perceived performance of various community services on the one hand, and the salience of the services to particular groups of residents on the other, staff can identify which services require what kind of attention by elected officials. Their article recommends a deeper level analysis to more precisely gauge the importance of a service to overall satisfaction with local government performance.[25]

Ames, Iowa, uses its annual citizen survey results in its capital budgeting planning, helping engineering staff and elected officials prioritize the capital improvement plan (CIP):[26]

In keeping with the priorities identified by our Citizen Satisfaction Survey, a great deal of emphasis is being placed on improving our transportation system in this planning document. Perhaps the most requested street project is the Grand Avenue Extension. Work on this $20,623,000 project is already underway. In order to advance this project in the CIP, other projects listed in the previous CIP were delayed in this document.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As local managers do all they can to ensure government is responsive to residents' needs and preferences, here are a few strategies to keep in mind:

- Start the budget process with a public listening session; bookend with a public hearing near the end of the process.

- Engage residents in neighborhood/ward deliberative meetings, especially for capital improvement plan priorities.
- Conduct regular citizen surveys for macro-level and representative feedback from residents.

Finally, staff and elected officials should encourage participants from neighborhood meetings, advisory boards, and focus groups to participate in the hearings to reinforce their groups' views. The nattering nabobs of negativism will have a chance to listen to what *they* have to say!

KURT THURMAIER, PH.D., is presidential engagement professor and chair, Department of Public Administration, School of Public and Global Affairs, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois. **kthur@niu.edu**

ERICA CEKA is a Ph.D. student, Department of Public Administration, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois. **erica.ceka@gmail.com**

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25. Stated importance for a survey question may fail to provide managers with a true picture of which attributes or services should be the focus of improvement efforts from a citizen satisfaction perspective. As a result, it may be preferable to use derived importance: a measure of the importance of a service or attribute as derived from a model, usually a regression-type model that relates the service to a criterion variable, typically overall customer or citizen satisfaction. The coefficient linking the service or attribute to the criterion or dependent variable becomes the measure of derived importance (See Allen and Rao, 2000; Chu, 2002; Neslin, 1981; Oliver, 1997).

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DAVID SWINDELL, JAMES SVARA, AND CARL STENBERG

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OPTIONS IN THE ERA OF
STATE PREEMPTION

Leaders must do more now to preserve the autonomy necessary for representing residents' needs

Local governments continue to grow in importance in solving public problems at a time of increased politicization in state and federal governments as well as expanded activism in many local governments. But states are rapidly placing new kinds of limits on local governments' ability to act. What can local government leaders do?

Local governments have historically faced such challenges as increasing demands for service, limited fiscal resources, and contending with economic forces beyond their control. Still, local governments remain a primary engine of innovative government services and enjoy high levels of resident trust.

In recent years, state legislatures have encroached on the ability of local governments to meet these challenges and have become increasingly intrusive in local affairs. Reports by the National League of Cities (NLC)[1] as well as the Local Government Research Collaborative,[2] a partnership of ICMA, the Alliance for Innovation, and the Center for Urban Innovation at Arizona State University, have found significant changes in state-local relations, including: 1) a sharp increase in the number of states involved with this movement, and 2) an increase in the overall number of limitations placed on local governments by their state legislatures.

What options do local managers and elected officials have as they try to tailor local public services to the needs and preferences of residents? This article provides an overview of this changing environment and highlights the array of actions available to local governments as they respond to state limitations.

DILLON'S GHOST

The U.S. Constitution lays out the general two-tiered structure of government in which powers are allocated between the national and the state governments. Yet, it is silent about the powers allocated to local governments. Simply put, there are none. It was not until 1903 that the U.S. Supreme Court formally established an earlier ruling by Iowa State Supreme Court Chief Justice John Dillon as the law of the land, saying:

> "Such [municipal] corporations are the creatures—mere political subdivisions—of the state, for the purpose of exercising a part of its powers. They may exert only such powers as are expressly granted to them, or such as may be necessarily implied from those granted. . . . They are, in every essential sense, only auxiliaries of the state for the purposes of local government. They may be created, or, having been created, their powers may be restricted or enlarged or altogether withdrawn at the will of the legislature."[3]

This ruling, known as "Dillon's Rule" or the "creature of the state" doctrine, remains the basic principle underlying state-local relationships today. The courts determine whether a local government could exercise a power. But this is not the end of the story.

While Dillon's Rule was emerging, western states were going a different direction. Residents and progressive reform groups began championing a competing doctrine by which local governments would have greater authority to act on their own behalf. This doctrine, referred to as "home rule" or "local autonomy," asserted that municipalities should have the freedom to implement ordinances and policies in line with local citizen preferences as long as not expressly prohibited by the state constitution or legislature.

So even with an established U.S. Supreme Court position on the issue, the balance between state control and local autonomy has continued to evolve over the past 115 years, with states clustered in "expressly permitted" and "expressly forbidden" categories. Still, the differences were not always clear-cut. A common practice in Dillon's Rule states, for instance, has been to make exceptions through targeted legislation granting powers to a specific government in response to a request from the local legislative delegation.

DILLON TODAY AND THE ATTACK ON LOCAL AUTONOMY

Several arguments support both philosophical approaches to local autonomy. The most common argument for greater state control, for instance, is premised on economic development grounds: statewide policy, particularly in terms of regulatory authority, creates a more standardized business environment. Furthermore, as was common in the civil rights era of the late 1960s and 1970s, state governments have intruded on local authority to ensure adherence to state and federal civil rights guidelines.

Proponents of local authority argue that the spate of recent actions by states to take away local control is in response to special interests (e.g., conservative groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council) and industry groups that are exercising influence with legislatures to circumvent local preferences. Telecommunications companies involved in the rollout of 5G cellular infrastructures, for example, have successfully convinced several legislatures to intervene on their behalf over local governments.

Champions of local autonomy argue that local governments need flexibility to experiment with alternative and innovative solutions to service delivery and processes. Local control is a better vehicle for expressing resident preferences. As noted by a recent survey by ALG Research, residents agree that local governments are better able to reflect their community's values than state government (regardless of party affiliation).[4]

RECENT RESEARCH RESULTS

Increased legislative actions affecting local authority have garnered attention from both academic and practitioner researchers. Dr. Lori Riverstone-Newell's work identified a steady increase in preemption-specific bills across the country from 2011 to 2016.[5] NLC's 2017 report and 2018 update identified numerous limitations across many policy areas.

A total of 41 states, for example, had preempted local authority over ride-sharing services, 28 had preempted local minimum wage actions, 23 had preempted paid leave policy, and another 20 had restricted municipal broadband authority. Rather than waiting for the courts to resolve a challenge to a local power under the traditional Dillon's Rule approach, states are increasingly restricting local control in advance.

We conducted a review of state actions affecting local government authority, beginning with a pilot review of eight states from 2001 to mid-2017. This review examined all local-related bills enacted into law regardless of the policy focus. We expanded the search to cover all states, but narrowed the focus to only those laws addressing minimum wage policy and telecommunication issues.

We identified 167 laws passed during this period aimed at local government. The vast majority represented a limitation on local governments (72.5 percent) and another sizeable portion imposed additional requirements on local governments (17.4 percent). Only 10.1 percent expanded local autonomy in any way. More striking is the nearly consistent increase in such legislative activity over this period.

While much of the attention given to the increase in local control limitations has focused on conservative Republican state legislators trying to undermine predominately liberal Democratic central city governments, our data suggest something different. Rather, there appears to be a greater likelihood of state intervention when one party (Republican *or* Democratic) controls both legislative chambers and the governor's office in a political "trifecta."

Currently, Republicans have far more trifectas than Democrats so there is more intrusion in local affairs by Republican trifectas. Democratic trifectas also are engaged in these activities, including the state of New York preempting the ability of New York City from imposing a tax on plastic bags. Therefore, this rise in state interference does not appear to be as simple as party politics as much as it is an outcome of political party power in each state.

IT ISN'T JUST ABOUT PREEMPTION

Current conversations about state interference and limitations of local autonomy focus on preemption. Yet preemption is only one form of interference with local discretion. In our research, we identify three categories of state actions: permissions, restrictions, and requirements.

FIGURE 1 ‖ State Actions on Local Governments by Year: 2001 to 2016
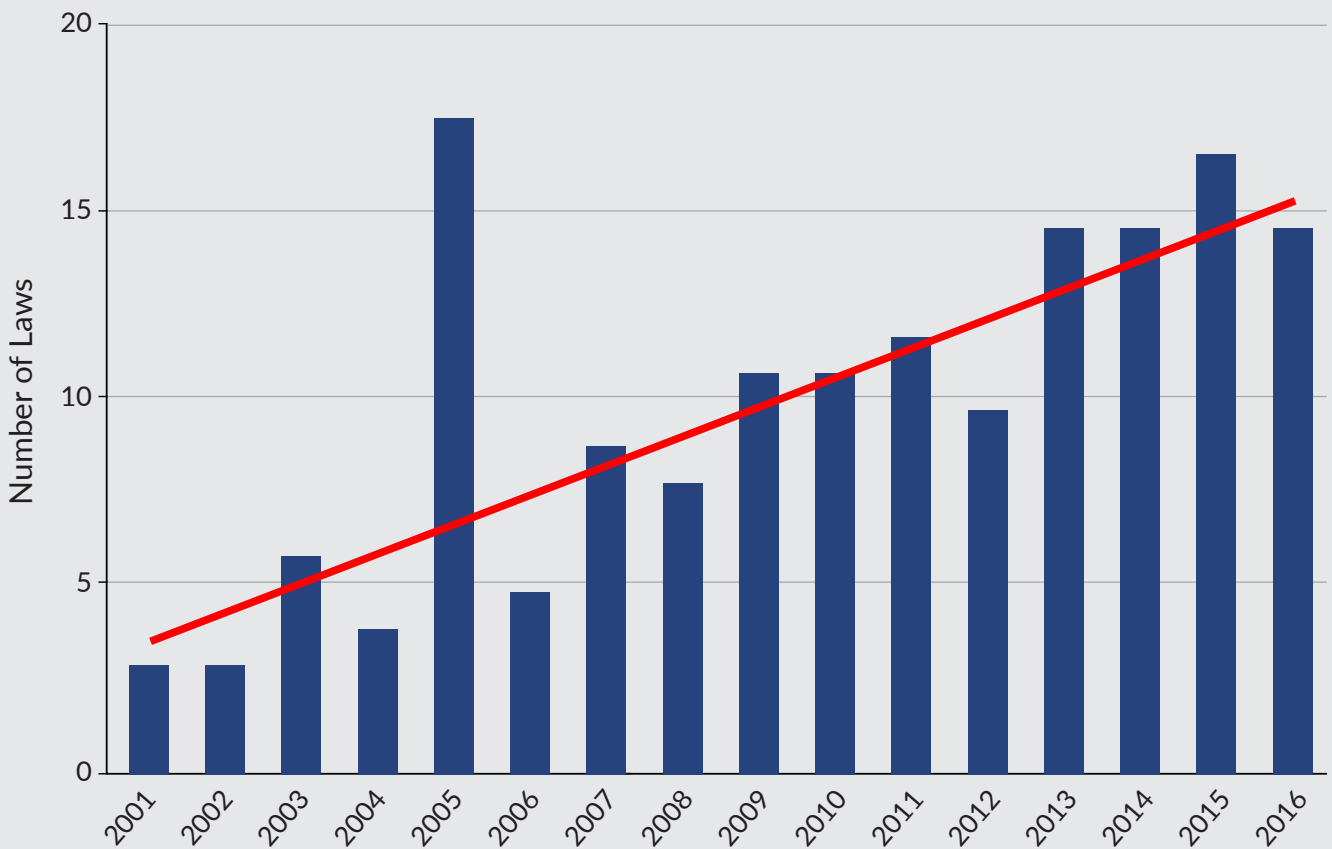
Note: n=162 (excluding the five cases from early 2017)

There are several specific activities within each category, including preemption.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the wide range of tools state governments use to control local activities. Of the 15 states that passed minimum wage legislation from 2001 to 2017, for example, 13 limited local governments' ability to regulate the minimum wage, one placed a requirement on localities, and one passed expanded local authority. Republican trifectas enacted 77 percent of the minimum wage legislation.

Scholars, practitioners, think tanks, and the media have written extensively in recent years highlighting cases in each of these situations. But most of the attention has fallen on restrictive actions. North Carolina initiated its "bathroom bill" (H.B. 2) as a nullification of an ordinance passed by the city of Charlotte. In the legislative language, the state preempted *all* state agencies, including all local jurisdictions and the university system, from passing future workplace legislation deviating from state law.

Penalties are also receiving attention due to some cities' desires to declare themselves "sanctuary cities" and offering a place of safety to immigrants, refugees, and others threatened by deportation. Texas Governor Greg Abbott, for example, signed a law in 2017 to preempt Texas cities from declaring themselves as sanctuary cities, which included language that penalizes police officials who fail to cooperate with federal immigration officials with removal from office, fines, and prison time.

WHAT'S A CITY TO DO?

Given the encroachment of state governments into the actions of local jurisdictions, local officials face the decision of how best to respond. They can simply do nothing and give in to the state's desires, regardless of how well or poorly the state's actions align with the preferences of a local community. But they have a range of other options.

FIGURE 2 ‖ Types of State Actions: Permit Local Actions

TYPE OF CONTROL	TYPE OF STATE-LOCAL LEGAL RELATIONSHIP	
	Dillon's Rule States	**Home Rule States**
Broad or specific authorization	Express powers granted to city in charters or in state law	Broad authorization to all or to designated municipalities plus specific authorization in laws
Limited or targeted authorization	Local bill to grant power to a specific city *(if local legislation is allowed)* or group of cities	Use classification to permit some cities to act

FIGURE 3 ‖ Types of State Actions: Restrict Local Actions

TYPE OF CONTROL	TYPE OF STATE-LOCAL LEGAL RELATIONSHIP	
	Dillon's Rule States	**Home Rule States**
Omission	Fail or refuse to grant express power	Fail to include in general authorization
Targeted restriction	Intervention in single jurisdiction *(if local legislation allowed)*	Use classification to prevent some cities from acting
Nullification	Nullify local policy/program/ practice that is not expressly granted or fairly implied	Nullify local policy/ program/practice in conflict with state laws
Prohibition	Forbid local action that is not consistent with state law	Forbid local action that is not consistent with state law
Penalize	Sanctions imposed for specified actions	Sanctions imposed for specified actions
Preempt the authority of local government to act in specified areas	Preemption	Preemption

FIGURE 4 ‖ Types of State Actions: Requirements for Local Action

TYPE OF CONTROL	TYPE OF STATE-LOCAL LEGAL RELATIONSHIP	
	Dillon's Rule States	**Home Rule States**
Requirements	Set standards that all governments must meet	Set standards that all governments must meet
Mandates	Require all governments to act (e.g., unfunded mandate) or comply with requirements	Require all governments to act (e.g., unfunded mandate) or comply with requirements

The NLC report recommends that local officials "choose their preemption battles wisely." This requires communication with state officials to determine the extent to which there is an opportunity to shape legislation moving forward. Local officials should address the preemption narrative to better frame debate.

In our work, we highlight six additional options. Some of these vary depending on the type of state-local legal arrangement.

These options come with costs and different likelihoods of success. Defying the state legislature is a risky proposition and ties to the importance of the NLC

FIGURE 5 ‖ Actions Local Governments Can Take in Response

TYPE OF CONTROL	TYPE OF STATE-LOCAL LEGAL RELATIONSHIP	
	Dillon's Rule States	**Home Rule States**
Defiance	Resist preemptions and limitations	
Use legal powers and test the limits	Locally initiated legal action within granted powers	Locally initiated legal action within broad powers; take advantage of home rule option if available
Referendum	Change state policies	
"Workaround"	Find method that complies with or circumvents restrictions	Find method that is consistent with state law
Request additional powers	Seek specific authorization from legislature for all local governments or request targeted local bill to permit action	Seek broad legislative authorization for all cities concerning previously ungranted power
Advocacy and voluntary efforts	Raising awareness by local government(s) and through partnerships with nongovernmental organizations to promote preferred policy outcome	

recommendation to choose a preemption battle wisely. Local officials need to understand how likely and in what ways the state will push back.

A local government can also use its own legal powers to test the limits of state control in a particular policy or service area by making a proactive case that it has the authority to act. Being the first government in a state to enter a new policy area does not necessarily mean that it is not permitted. The city of Seattle, Washington, recently passed a municipal income tax, a first in the state, which is under review by the state supreme court to determine if Washington cities have the right to levy such a tax.

Still, challenges can be costly if unsuccessful. In North Carolina since 2011, a judge may award attorneys' fees and court costs to challengers that prevail in suits against local governments if the judge finds that the local government "acted outside the scope of its legal authority."[6]

A more challenging path is to pursue a statewide popular referendum designed to overturn or circumscribe a state intervention. There are three significant challenges to this approach. First, only 26 states have access to this form of direct action. Second, an individual city is rarely equipped to coordinate a statewide campaign on an issue. This means the city will have to partner with others and build a coalition of supporters in other jurisdictions or organizations, which is not a common practice for local officials. Finally, even if a referendum were to succeed, a state legislature can pass new laws to circumvent the intent of the referendum.

A more likely pathway to success is the "workaround." Generally, this option comports with the letter of the law, but it still tries to achieve the desires of the local jurisdiction.

As more states have considered "bathroom bills" similar to North Carolina's, some localities have already implemented various workarounds to the gender issues, replacing group bathrooms with individual bathrooms available to everyone equally.

Local governments have the option to ask their state legislators to introduce legislation on their behalf. This grant of power can be targeted at a single jurisdiction, but more likely would empower action by all cities or counties that joined in the request. This was a common tactic for cities and counties in Dillon's Rule states on issues related to access to such new revenue tools as a county option income tax, certain economic development tools, or other specific powers not normally available to local governments. It typically depended on a willingness of the legislature to adopt a special act supported by the local legislative delegation as a "legislative courtesy." Polarization in legislatures makes such grants unlikely if the party majority in the local delegation is different than the legislative majority. Seeking a local bill today requires negotiation with state officials and signals the local government's interest in entering an area where they do not have clear authority.

Perhaps the option with the greatest general likelihood of success is working with other jurisdictions or organizations to promote local government goals at the statehouse. This closely aligns with NLC's recommendation to address the preemption narrative. Local governments should work with their statewide partners at their state league of municipalities, state association of counties, state chapter of ICMA, or the equivalents of these entities.

These organizations can be useful partners in many ways. For instance, many serve as a watchdog on legislative actions. Further, they can lobby on behalf of local government interests broadly. They can help coordinate a coherent message on pending legislation to state officials on behalf of local governments, sharing lessons from other states.

In this role, they can collaborate on drafting legislation and developing compromise language when necessary to blunt the worst effects of state actions on local governments. They can also help coordinate appeals to local residents and stakeholder groups to help legislators understand the implications of their actions on communities.

The current environment is in flux regarding the balance between state control and local autonomy. States are increasingly interfering in local actions and placing more limits on what local jurisdictions can do, regardless of the preferences of local residents. These actions take many forms, but local officials are not completely unable to respond.

The tools we have identified highlight several options available to local governments and their allies to engage in this challenge to local autonomy. There is evidence to suggest that state legislative activity is not going to slow any time soon. Local government leaders, therefore, must do more *now* if they want to preserve the autonomy necessary for representing the desires of their residents.

DAVID SWINDELL is associate professor and director, Center for Urban Innovation, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Arizona
david.swindell@asu.edu

JAMES SVARA, formerly a faculty member at Arizona State University, is visiting scholar, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, residing in Durham, North Carolina.
James.Svara@sog.unc.edu

CARL STENBERG is professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
stenberg@sog.unc.edu

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BY JENNIFER ROBINSON

Essential Tool for Government:
DATA ANALYTICS

A data analytics platform generates insights across an organization that fosters collaboration and increase productivity.

Have you considered using analytics during the past year? How about the past 10 years? Were you considering the use of analytics decades ago?

Forty years ago, companies in the private sector, along with government agencies in the public sector, began exploring their data with the help of analytics software. Using a variety of mathematics, statistics, predictive modeling. and machine-learning techniques, these organizations investigated this data to identify patterns and trends.

Over time, these analytic explorations revealed insights that allowed organizations to tackle seemingly insurmountable challenges and save surprising amounts of money. What is most amazing is that these insights were found in a resource that many organizations have in abundance: data.

The abundant data collected by local governments is an extremely valuable asset. Understanding data can help a local government improve the services it provides, save money, make more accurate projections, and even save lives. In addition to being an asset, data is quickly becoming a commodity. Companies are selling data collected from internet inquiries, grocery and online shopping, and the movement of cellphones as people drive and walk around communities. This commoditization of data will likely affect the operations of local governments in the future.

The value of data combined with the quickening pace in which data is being generated, collected, and stored is driving local governments to get serious about managing and using their data. As budgets get leaner and residents'

expectations rise, we literally cannot afford to waste the opportunity to realize new efficiencies gleaned from the information that data provides. Governments that embrace the data movement now will be well positioned to benefit from the digital technology evolution that is expected to transform communications, transportation, citizen engagement, and economic development over the next decade.

As our world digitizes, local governments need to think about how their data can be used to improve their communities and consider how the commoditization of data will affect their operations. At this point in time, managers should be asking:

- What goals and policies should my elected body and staff have regarding the collection, organization, storage, use, and security of our data?
- What challenges could we tackle if we were more informed?
- How can my organization leverage the data that we have?
- How can we collect additional data to improve operations and decision making?
- How can I best position my organization for the commoditization of data?

To answer these questions, it is helpful for managers and their staff members to understand the role data plays in technology solutions, the purpose of a data strategy, the viable approach to using data, and the new analytic technologies that are making data more usable and accessible.

BACKBONE OF THE SMART COMMUNITY

Smart communities are those that use information technology to improve the lives of their citizens. The smart solutions are about collecting data, communicating data, and crunching data. It is clear that data is the backbone of the smart community. Managing and analyzing data allows managers to leverage the information that departments collect without being overwhelmed by its enormity and speed.

Forty years ago, most organizations were not thinking of their data as an asset; however, they were beginning to collect it, churn it, and store it. Ten years ago, people were becoming aware that they have a lot of data stored. So much data, in fact, that it seems overwhelming to put it into use. You have probably heard the term "big data." Most organizations have big data, and data is getting bigger by the day as systems collect and use data from automated devices and the Internet. Thanks to compute power and connectivity, nearly everyone and everything generates an incredible amount of data.

The difficulty of making sense out of this big data is further exacerbated by the typically siloed environment found in local governments. Because local governments provide a wide variety of services and infrastructure, they have many departments that operate independently from one another. With unique purposes and functions, departments have specific software and technologies that help them accomplish their operational missions.

As a result, each department collects and stores data. In most cases, that data is not shared with other departments. In fact, several departments might be collecting similar data within their respective technology systems. And, the advent of new smart city solutions perpetuates this siloed environment as sensors, meters, and the Internet generate more data at faster intervals.

While this looks like a big problem, it is one that can be solved.

ENTERPRISE-WIDE USE OF ANALYTICS: THINK BIG, START SMALL

The solution is to have a data analytics platform for the entire organization, sometimes referred to as an enterprise-wide use of data and analytics. A data analytics platform is a software foundation engineered to generate insights from data across an organization. This platform supports every phase of the analytics life cycle—from the integration of data to the discovery of new information. By ingesting all types of data, organizing it and analyzing it, a data analytics platform produces on-demand insights. These insights allow a variety of stakeholders throughout an organization and community to have the right information at the right time to make the right decisions.

The ultimate goal of having a data analytics platform is to have all departments contributing their data, combining datasets to help an organization make informed decisions and take informed action. This data sharing becomes a bridge between departments that fosters collaboration and increases productivity.

To successfully implement a data analytics platform, an organization should consider taking these steps:

1. Create a shared vision.

Because every department owns data and everyone—decision makers, staff, stakeholders, and residents—have something to gain from the use of data, it is helpful to have an open conversation about leveraging the organization's data. What are the opportunities? What are the challenges?

In this conversation, you will likely hear concerns about the responsible and secure use of data. It is important to establish goals and priorities for data sharing. This is an exercise in thinking big. What do you and your colleagues envision for your community?

2. Create a strategic plan for data management.

The strategic plan includes these details on how data will be:

- Identified: Understanding the meaning of the data, regardless of its structure, origin, or location.
- Governed: Establishing and communicating information policies and mechanisms to ensure effective data usage. Governance rules will ensure that future data is collected and used in a way that maintains consistency and accuracy.
- Integrated: Moving and combining data residing in multiple locations and providing a unified view of the data.
- Stored: Establishing a structure and location that supports access and processing across the enterprise.
- Provisioned: Enabling data to be packaged and made available while respecting all rules and guidelines about access.

3. Identify a business problem that can be addressed with analytics.

The reason that we clean, integrate, and store data is to be able to use it. To this point, you have been thinking big. Now, it is time to start small. Select a problem or issue that has a discrete set of data that can be used to solve or address it. The data sets that you select become the cornerstone of your integrated data base. If you have a scalable data analytics platform, you will be able to expand it as the quantity and use of data grows.

4. Integrate, clean, store and provision your data according to your strategic plan.

Cleaning data means that your data elements—people, places, dates, events, and things—are identified consistently,

regardless of the software or means of collecting the data. The data rules put in place as part of your strategic plan now govern the data-cleansing process.

5. Analyze your data and/or open it up for analysis.

Once your data is integrated and cleaned, it is ready for analysis. Analysis can be performed in different ways, depending on the problem to be solved and the audience for the information. Because the data is in a shared platform, different departments can use the data in different ways.

A medium-sized community, for example, has 70,000 automated meters that collect and communicate to the public works department each user's water consumption information every hour. That's 1,680,000 data points in a day, and some 613 million data points a year. This is big data, and it is generated at a fast pace.

With hourly consumption information, the public works department can proactively alert a customer when his or her meter is reporting anomalous water usage. That could be a hose bib that was left on or a hot water heater that has burst. This timely information saves money and, at times, prevents the customer from experiencing major water damage.

The water data may be of interest to several other departments as well. The sustainability department can use this granular data to identify opportunities for conservation measures and to understand resident compliance with current conservation efforts. The utilities director can use this information to plan for future water plant expansions.

Surprisingly, even the police department can glean valuable information from water consumption data. Aggregated water use indicates whether more people visit the city on a holiday weekend or leave for vacation. This information can be used to appropriately deploy officers, either to visit the parks and gathering places or to drive through and check on neighborhoods full of empty houses.

The results of the departments' informed decision making and informed actions is valuable for your elected officials. You might not think elected officials care about 613 million data points; however, they do care about the outcomes from using those data points. This data can be used to make a local government more responsive to its residents, better stewards with finite resources, more strategic and fiscally conservative, and more proactive.

Figure 1 shows the breadth of analytics that can be accomplished with accrued data. Moving from left to right, the analytics become more sophisticated. With a flexible analytics platform, staff members can perform analytics from simple reporting and queries to intricate optimization models. Plus, findings are available for a variety of audiences with reports and visualizations customized for users.

FIGURE 1 ‖ Enterprise-wide Use of Data and Analytics Provides Information to Address a Variety of Issues for a Variety of Stakeholders

Information across the Decision-Making Spectrum
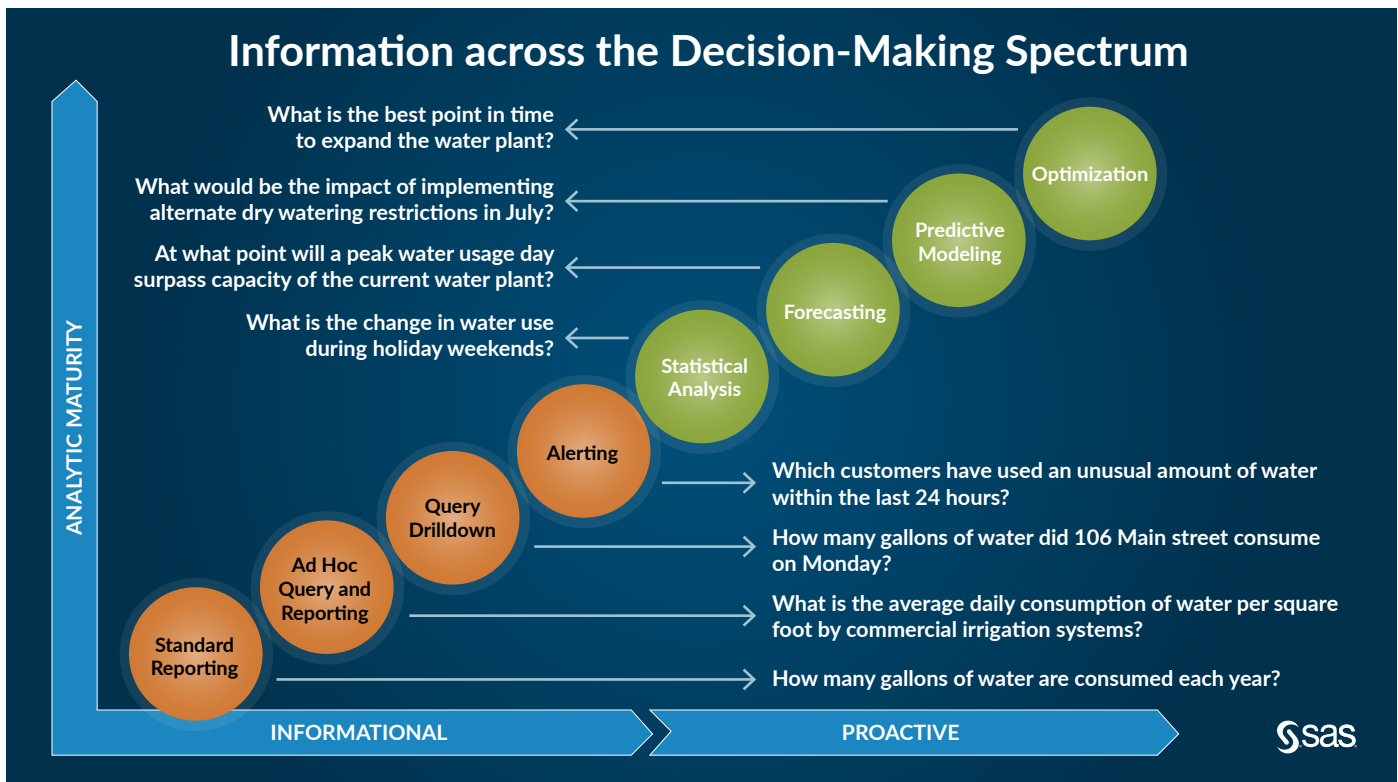
SOFTWARE ADVANCEMENTS

If data is of such great value, why haven't more local governments begun using it? Historically, data management and analysis have required specialized skills that have been too expensive for city and county budgets. This is changing now due to several factors.

Most significantly, advancements in technology have made data analysis easier to perform, even for those without a technology background. As a result, staff members across the organization have a greater ability to understand and use data. These technologies allow people to find efficiencies and tackle issues that would not have been possible even a few years ago:

Entity resolution. Cleaning data and setting up rules for collecting and storing data is easier now with the advent of entity resolution software. This software is used to reconcile multiple records for a single person, event, or object both within and across many different data sets.

Departments, for example, might have several records about the same person, and the records may be under various derivatives of a name like John Porter, Jack Porter, Jon Porte, and J Porter. Entity resolution software sifts through the information pertaining to these records to determine whether the various records are for the same person.

This holistic compilation of data records provides an understanding of each person's interaction across a government organization. This is particularly important to achieve a single view of each resident; to enhance insights for a law enforcement agency that uses many different systems; or to tackle such complex social issues as child protection, homelessness, recidivism, and opiate abuse.

Link analysis. Link analysis automates what we have seen so many times on television crime shows when the officer draws lines across his white board from one event to another event and the people related to the events.

Link analysis software is incredibly robust. It can link the people, places, objects, and events from millions of records to give on-demand information to officers, social workers, or investigators. Not only does this shed light on previously indiscernible connections, but each link search also saves countless man-hours.

Event stream processing. Event stream processing allows data to be analyzed at or near the point of collection. Sensors and meters collect data at quick intervals. Processing technology evaluates the data, discerns what information is necessary to store, and produces actionable information. This technology empowers staff members to have real-time information necessary for optimizing automated water meter systems, building management systems, and traffic control systems.

Asset performance analytics. Asset performance analytics will transform how government and the private sector manage their assets. By installing sensors on the components of mechanical devices, using event stream processing to gather and analyze incoming data, and applying asset performance analytics, asset managers will be able to identify, repair, and replace aging and faulty mechanical components before the asset fails.

This improves response times, reduces downtime of the asset, and saves money. If an organization manages buildings (especially in remote locations), provides utilities, or runs a transit system, asset performance analytics will help maximize capital investment, maintenance crews, and operating budget.

Text analytics. Perhaps one of the most challenging and untapped data resources available to government is unstructured data. Unstructured data is the prose that is written—in a staff report, in a citizen survey, in employee records, and on the Internet. Text analytic software can identify the use of key words and the sentiment of the situation in which the word is used.

That insight and sentiment can prompt informed decision making and actions. Governments are using this technology to rapidly respond to input from residents, understand emerging trends, and gather information for criminal investigations. When combined with link analysis software, text analytics provides a wealth of readily available information for law enforcement.

Spatial analysis. Analytics can bring deep understanding to geographic data and maps. Mapping technology is moving beyond information about "how much?" "how often?" and "where?" to proactive analysis that answers the questions of "why?" and "what if?" Spatial analysis helps utilities, public works, law enforcement, parks, planning, permitting, and transportation departments understand location-specific information.

Visualization. For decades, few local governments used analytics because analytic software was so complex that an organization needed a data scientist or a programmer to run the analyses. Now, many analyses can be performed by analytic software that does the data scientist's work and provides an easy-to-use environment for data exploration.

Not sure what algorithm to use? No problem. Not sure what type of chart best displays the findings? No problem. If staff members can drag and click a mouse and know an organization's business, they can do analytics. Once the data is selected that a person would like to analyze, the analytic software runs through thousands of algorithms and selects the one(s) that are best suited for the data.

As local governments are being asked or mandated to share data with residents, analytic software also provides a means for transparency. Rather than, or in addition to,

putting tables of data out for consumption by tech-savvy people, a manager might choose to put data visualizations on the organization's website. Using analytic software, an interactive webpage can be developed that offers the opportunity to analyze data around key topics of interest. This is particularly important because it puts the role of data exploration into the hands of practitioners, decision makers, and residents.

There is much that can be accomplished with analytics software. With the exponential increase of data, enterprise-wide data sharing and analytics are essential for smart cities. By using analytics, a local government will be able to maximize its data, run more effectively and efficiently, and be more responsive in meeting the public's needs.

What is the first step? Think big. What do you as a management professional envision for the next 40 years? Plan strategically to have an organized, cohesive analytic platform that will advance your organization over the next 10 years. And then, get started this year.

JENNIFER ROBINSON is director, Local Government Solutions, SAS, Cary, North Carolina. **Jennifer.Robinson@sas.com**

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