

City Feature: Jackson, MS

On the path to better data driven decisions



Setting the Stage

Mayor Tony Yarber and his team came into office in Jackson with some serious challenges. The previous five years saw the unexpected departure of two consecutive mayors and the accumulation of a \$1.4 billion infrastructure deficit. Yet the Mayor and his team had a clear vision for change and modernization.

The Prospect to Advance Change

Despite some individual successes, including a dramatic increase in responses to blighted properties, and the presence of high-level strategic priorities, Mayor Yarber and his senior leadership team noted that the city faced a set of more fundamental challenges. Jackson city leadership had an inconsistent understanding of the city's outcomes in key areas, and were unable to use the data they had to mark progress towards the city's goals of public safety, economic development, and infrastructure improvements. Although the Departments of Public Works and Police had begun to measure performance, the city did not have a comprehensive strategy to review its performance or measure its progress.

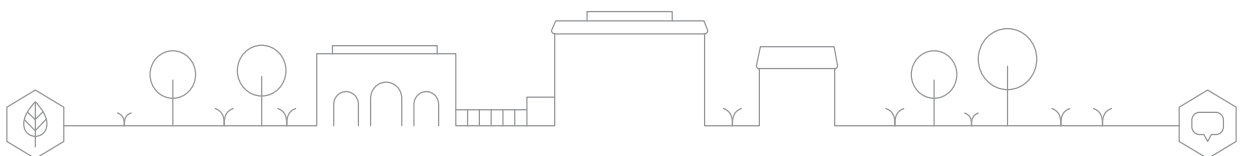
In addition, the mayor's team was acutely aware that city successes were not adequately communicated to residents. Public perception of the Jackson city government suffered as a result. The city had made progress on their three main goals, but they lacked visibility. Further, Mayor Yarber described how the lack of available data hindered his team's ability to make compelling arguments, both internally when deciding whether to support a project or externally when highlighting progress.

"How do we make sure the work we're doing is sustainable and really lasting? The only way is by measuring and collecting all kinds of data."

Mayor Tony T. Yarber

Our Work Together

With commitment from the Mayor and enthusiasm from his team, What Works Cities (WWC) identified two ways for



Jackson to partner with the experts at the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University (GovEx), Results for America, and the Sunlight Foundation.

First, the city focused on sharing the city's data with the public. City staff and leadership spoke to a lack of visibility around city government decision-making and recent successes. To address this gap, Jackson developed and passed a comprehensive open data policy, while also creating a process for releasing their data. This included proactively making data available to the public and linking open data to the city's performance dashboard, when available, to ensure data that is used for city decision-making is open and transparent.

Second, the city built out a citywide performance analytics program, "Jackstat," to help the city use data to improve decision-making and track progress toward its goals. The Jackson Police Department (JPD) reported that the city saved over \$525,792 (in FY 2015) by property owners voluntarily cleaning up their properties after receiving a letter from JPD. Since the beginning of FY 2016, which started Oct. 1, 2015, the city saved \$101,469. This is in addition to the more than 100 properties that were demolished after responsibility for this task was moved to JPD. This information was not previously shared with department leadership. The Mayor's administration and Finance Department will work to improve tracking of the cost-savings and determine the impact it will have on the budget.

Underlying both the open data and performance management work was an opportunity to begin dismantling departmental silos, reorienting the culture of government to data-driven decision-making, and incorporating data and evidence to all aspects of city decision-making.

Key Accomplishments

- Developed a data governance plan for Jackson, resulting in the establishment of an Open Data Governance Committee and the appointment of its members;
- Enacted an open data executive order, the first Open Data policy in Mississippi;
- Incorporated external stakeholders into the open data process by including community organizations and the press, hosting listening sessions, and conducting an open data community survey;
- Convened and engaged the new Governance Committee in key foundational decisions, including how to prioritize data sets for release to the public;
- Completed an initial inventory of datasets across various city departments;
- Launched cross-departmental performance analytics program, "Jackstat," to track progress on key citywide priorities.

The city of Jackson has made significant strides towards Mayor Yarber's vision of a more responsive and open government. While the city continues to strengthen its practices, Jackson city staff have now developed the foundational processes and systems to fuel a culture of continual self-improvement and innovation based on the use of data and evidence.

