What Works Cities | Bloomberg Philanthropies

City Feature: New Orleans, LA

### Going beyond analytics toward a more sustainable practice

The Opportunity

New Orleans has had success leveraging its data to drive better results for residents on issues including the city's fight against blight. As Mayor Mitch Landrieu approached the latter half of his second term, his leadership team began exploring how to provide city employees with additional data-driven tools to improve services and ensure the sustainability of these efforts so that future generations of residents may benefit from better services.

Setting the Stage

Since 2010, when Mayor Landrieu took office, the City of New Orleans has been reforming its systems to take better advantage of data and evidence to improve the lives of residents. Starting with the city's most pressing need, an overwhelming number of blighted and abandoned properties, the Mayor set a target of reducing the number of these properties by 10,000, or one-fifth of the estimated total, within four years. The newly formed Office of Performance Analytics began monthly BlightStat meetings where the Mayor met with city departments to develop and discuss performance measures and targets, prepare the analyses and reports, and interact with residents. This process led the city to meet its goal in less time than was originally anticipated.

Since then, New Orleans has built upon the success of BlightStat to tackle other critical needs through its use of data and evidence, including "BotttomLineStat" to deal with revenue collection and cost containment efforts, "CustomerServiceStat" to focus on direct service delivery to residents including 311 calls and permitting, "QualityofLifeStat" focusing on the residents' perceived quality of life in the city, "NOLAforLifeStat" focusing on reducing the murder rate, "ResultsNOLA" to manage critical performance measures across every city department, and many more. New Orleans has even launched a cross-departmental data-science project called "Nolalytics" to solve specific challenges including targeted delivery of free smoke alarms and more efficient code enforcement abatement.
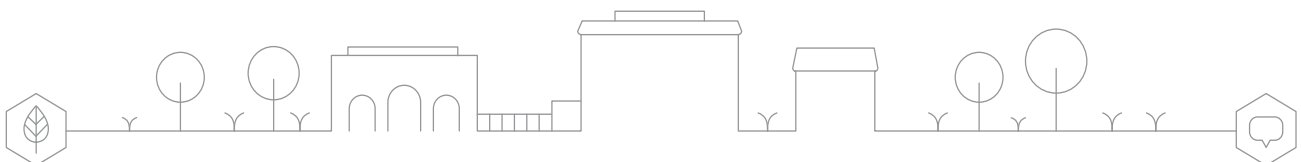
Our Work Together

With a strong commitment from Mayor Landrieu and enthusiasm from his team, What Works Cities (WWC) identified two main ways for New Orleans to partner with the experts at the Behavioral Insights Team, the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University (GovEx), Results for America, and the Sunlight Foundation.

First, New Orleans worked with GovEx and Sunlight to ensure the sustainability of their current successes in using open data by building upon its existing open data system, developing a formal, comprehensive open data policy and codifying their data-collection and liberation processes. With this help, the city drafted an internal open data policy and executive order aligned with national best practices. Supported by its existing governance committee, the city laid the critical groundwork for these efforts by identifying its key goals and also taking steps to engage stakeholders in the conversation around open data. With this open data framework, New Orleans set a leadership example for other cities nationwide, including those cities that are a part of the What Works Community of Cities.

At the same time, the city partnered with the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) to test opportunities to improve existing services using low-cost evaluation practices. Working closely with BIT, city staff from across departments identified and designed a number of specific evaluations. Although some of these tests are still ongoing, New Orleans has already been able to:

- Encourage 200 low-income residents to schedule a free doctor's appointment
- Prompt owners of properties that received a code violation complaint to voluntarily fix their properties before an inspection, thereby avoiding fines for property owners and generating savings for the city in enforcement
- Encourage residents to sign up as volunteers in recreation centers though a coordinated text-message campaign.

Through key coaching with BIT, the New Orleans Office of Performance and Accountability team has taken the lead in continuing this work, with the goal of conducting additional low-cost evaluation trials and promoting an evaluation framework for use throughout the city. For instance, the office is currently assessing how to increase the number of candidates for the police force by redesigning the email invitation that encourages candidates to take the written exam.

Key Accomplishments

By laying the groundwork for a sustainable culture of data, the low-cost evaluation and open data work helps the city incorporate data and evidence in all aspects of city decision-making. As a result, the City and WWC have:

- Developed a formal and comprehensive open data policy and prepared it for the mayor's signature.
- Prompted more than 200 low-income residents to schedule a doctor's appointment through text message campaigns.
- Sent a courtesy letter encouraging property owners who received a code violation complaint to voluntarily fix their properties before an inspection to avoid fines.
- Redesigned the written exam email invitation for police candidates to test the effect on attendance.
- Encouraged recreation center users to sign up as volunteers.

As Mayor Landrieu envisioned when he first took office, the City of New Orleans has set the bar for leveraging its data to deliver better services and better quality of life for the residents of their city.