What Works Cities | Bloomberg Philanthropies

City Feature: Las Vegas, NV

Data and Evidence as a Call to Action

Setting the Stage

Mayor Carolyn Goodman and City Manager Elizabeth Fretwell have made "building community to make life better" the foundation on which all other priorities and goals are built. With this call to action, the City of Las Vegas embraces a model that uses data to identify challenges and determine where budgetary resources should be focused to improve outcomes. In past years, Las Vegas explicitly leveraged data to develop targeted, highly successful interventions, such as reducing traffic congestion and crashes, improving sustainability, and streamlining business licensing. To build on this progress, city leadership prioritized the need to iterate and deepen its systems to take better advantage of data and evidence to improve the lives of residents.

The Opportunity

Although Las Vegas had a history of performance management with its Performance Plus Program, City Manager Fretwell was ready to evaluate the city's practices to take better advantage of data and evidence to drive decision-making. In 2014, the Las Vegas City Council approved four key priority areas: economic diversification, education, homelessness, and transportation mobility. This laid the groundwork for integrating revitalized performance practices into the city's strategic priorities. At the beginning of the city's engagement with What Works Cities, leadership and staff were eager to establish opportunities for resident engagement around the use of city data. City Manager Fretwell's team, headed by Victoria Carreon and Jennifer Lances, began exploring how to provide the city with additional data-driven tools to improve services and how to ensure the sustainability of those efforts to benefit future generations.
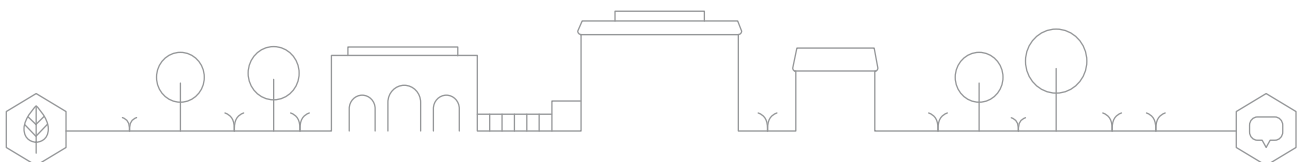
Our Work Together

With a strong commitment from senior leadership and enthusiasm from their team, What Works Cities (WWC) identified two main ways for Las Vegas to partner with the experts at the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University (GovEx), Results for America, and the Sunlight Foundation.

First, Las Vegas worked with Sunlight to ensure sustainability of its current successes in using open data by revising the city's existing open data policy based on best practices. This included creating a governance structure for determining when to release open data and requiring submission of an annual report on the progress of the open data initiative. Upon adoption of a resolution by the City Council, City Manager Fretwell set up the Open Data Steering Committee, composed of internal and external stakeholders. This group met to draft the revised policy. With an eye toward resident engagement, the Las Vegas team crowdsourced public input on the draft open data policy, after which, and with due consideration, City Manager Fretwell signed the updated open data policy. Through this open data framework, Las Vegas set a leadership example for other cities nationwide, including those cities that are a part of the What Works Community of Cities.

Second, working in partnership with GovEx, Las Vegas focused on streamlining its longstanding Performance Plus program to help the city achieve progress toward meaningful priorities. Under Performance Plus, departments developed key results measures and operational measures through strategic business plans. Performance Plus Executive Team (PPET) meetings were held twice a year to discuss progress toward those measures. Over time, the number of measures had ballooned to 600 and had become mostly focused on outputs. In addition, the measures had taken a backseat to other issues discussed during PPET meetings.

With guidance from the WWC team, the city determined that the priorities established during the Las Vegas strategic planning process (economic diversification, education, homelessness, and transportation mobility) would become a foundation for the new performance management system. The departments spearheading those priorities served as pilots for the new system. The Fire and Rescue Department was also included because of its critical role in ensuring public safety. The departments responsible for each priority convened stakeholders involved in the initial strategic planning process. Notably, Fire and Rescue created a new community stakeholder group and received recommendations for participants from City Council members.

For each priority, stakeholding groups developed a "bold" key performance indicator (KPI) that focused on achieving policy outcomes, along with supporting measures. These KPIs and supporting measures were then used to inform and develop departmental action steps and timelines, which ultimately fed into the larger strategic planning document for the city. These efforts provided the backbone for the new performance management system, called Results Vegas, which will meet monthly on citywide priorities.

The city also revised the template for its strategic business plans so that it aligns with Results Vegas and integrated performance management into the budgeting process. A new Results Vegas website is also being designed, which will allow the public to track the city's progress towards its goals.

Key Accomplishments

Las Vegas's open data and performance management work has laid the groundwork for a sustainable culture of incorporating data and evidence in all aspects of decision-making. Together, the city and WWC have
- demonstrated the city's public commitment to the use of data and evidence;
- updated the city's open data policy, which now incorporates best practices, includes a plan for data governance, and requires an annual report;
- included internal stakeholders in the open data policy review process and built buy-in by educating agencies on how
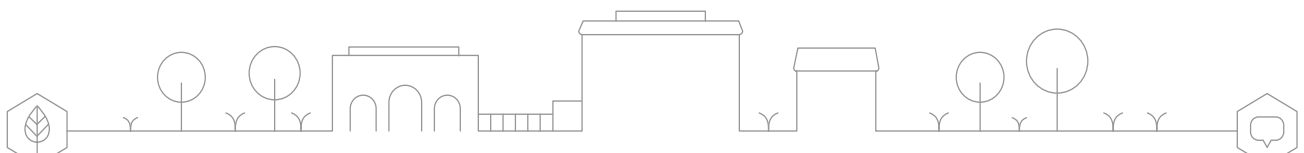
open data affects their work;

- obtained community input on the open data policy through crowdsourcing;
- supported the development of Results Vegas as the city's revamped performance management program; chose departments to participate in the pilot phase of Results Vegas based on their level of responsibility for strategic priorities (these departments will serve as models for other departments);
- involved stakeholders in setting goals for Results Vegas;
- held an initial performance management meeting in March 2016 to present the goals developed by Phase I departments; and
- developed a schedule for monthly performance management meetings and incorporated performance management into existing budget meetings.