



The Research Bureau

Benchmarking Performance Comes of Age in the Public Sector

For many years, private-sector companies have benchmarked their performance over time and in comparison with other companies in their industry, and set targets to improve performance within certain time frames. Now the public sector is beginning to think in these terms as well. Rather than merely keeping track of the resources (money and personnel) invested in a project, public managers are seeking reliable ways of measuring what the public got for the investment.

The Research Bureau has been engaged in government performance measurement in Worcester since 2001, working with Worcester's public officials to develop performance measures and collect data. We have published annual reports analyzing the data and tracking trends in the areas of public safety, public education, economic development, and municipal and neighborhood services. (Reports are available online at www.wrrb.org.)

As a result of this experience, The Research Bureau has recently been invited to work on two additional projects related to government performance measurement.

- **New England States Performance Measurement Project** – The New England States Government Finance Officers Association (NESGFOA) has contracted with us to implement and manage the New England States Performance Measurement Project, a 3-year pilot program. We will be working with several communities (including Holden and Grafton in this region) in each of the six New England states to expand the adoption of performance-measurement practices at the local level by regularly collecting and reporting timely data, so as to assist policymakers, managers, and citizens in determining whether a particular service is efficient and effective. The project aims to improve service delivery and make government more responsive to its citizens as well as a forum in which the identification and implementation of effective practices is fostered. The regional nature of the project will allow municipal leaders to network and will provide them with an opportunity to assess what is working well in other communities and identify innovations could enhance service delivery in their own community.
- **Middle Cities Project** – Also as a result of The Research Bureau's government performance measurement project in Worcester, the Pioneer Institute has contracted with us to work with eight older industrial cities in Massachusetts to develop performance measures for improving local governance, so as to help revitalize them, attract new businesses, and retain older ones. The cities include Worcester,

Springfield, Lowell, Fitchburg, New Bedford, and Brockton. The Research Bureau will work with citizen advisory committees in each of the eight cities to develop measures for each of four service areas which the cities will benchmark: public education, fiscal management, economic development, and public safety. The CEO's of the cities involved and the service area professionals will meet on a regular basis to assess data and learn what works so as to share best practices and make operational changes accordingly.

We hope that the business community will be pleased by the results of these efforts, which are designed to assist public-sector managers in their efforts to provide better services for your tax dollars.

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