



January 2006

Using Sound Business Practices to Improve Government Transparency and Performance

Overview

Many cities are changing their day-to-day activities by integrating rigorous performance measurement techniques into their management practices that simultaneously improve citizen satisfaction. This philosophy, typically referred to as "CitiStat," is transforming local government operations by holding those in charge of service delivery accountable for their department's performance results. The process increases government transparency and creates incentives for citizen feedback and involvement. Cities that use CitiStat report multiple benefits including cost savings, revenue increases, and improved public services.

Background

A CitiStat-driven government is one with an accountability and performance measurement system used to manage for results. This system is set in place as follows: 1) the Mayor sets strategic goals, objectives, and performance outcomes for city departments; 2) Departments work to develop outcome-based action plans within the Mayor's strategic framework; and 3) CitiStat becomes the overlay for monitoring progress.

As top-level staff regularly monitor trends and use rigorous follow-up techniques to improve service delivery, CitiStat streamlines department operations. Throughout the process, many issues facing city departments are addressed—employee absenteeism, work-related accidents, overtime, facility maintenance, response rates to citizen service requests, and finances. By promoting collective problem solving methods, CitiStat is also very effective in addressing cross-departmental issues.

CitiStat operates with the understanding that focusing on smaller details ensures that departments run more efficiently,

which in turn produces a higher employee work output. The higher the work output, the more likely the department is to produce outcomes that match Mayoral goals and objectives that reflect citizen needs. Essentially, CitiStat solidifies the link between departmental performance and the city's overall strategic plan.

How CitiStat Works

CitiStat may be tailored to meet the unique needs of any city, but there are common themes present among all CitiStat activities. Mayoral and other top-level support is essential for any CitiStat program. In fact, CitiStat programs are typically initiated by a new city mayor who views accountability and improvements in city services as being essential to citizen satisfaction. Also, without Mayoral support, employees may not feel as accountable and may be less inclined to comply with data collection requirements. Departments chosen to participate are usually directly involved with Mayoral priorities or are high profile in terms of citizen service delivery. Departments that commonly participate in CitiStat programs include: Police, Fire, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Environmental Services, and Health.

A city's information infrastructure drives the start-up process. In many cases, off-the-shelf information may need to be supplemented with new systems required to inform personnel of progress toward strategic goals. Although CitiStat is not a software program in itself (a spreadsheet program and GIS mapping software are usually sufficient for its operation) a city which collects data electronically will often be at an advantage over cities that use non-electronic means.

Departments are required to collect data on a wide variety of measures, ranging

Quick Facts

- CitiStat is a philosophy for effective local governance.
- Successful CitiStat programs enjoy top-down, continuous Mayoral support and involvement.
- CitiStat promotes interdepartmental cooperation and coordination.
- Examples of cities that have implemented CitiStat programs include Baltimore, Syracuse, San Francisco, Providence, Detroit, Miami, and Chattanooga.
- In its first four years of operation, Baltimore's CitiStat program reportedly produced over \$100 million in cost savings and increased revenue.
- In its first year of operation, SyraStat reportedly saved Syracuse, NY \$14 million.
- In 2004, Baltimore's CitiStat program was one of five to win an Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University.

Accountability in City Government: CitiStat

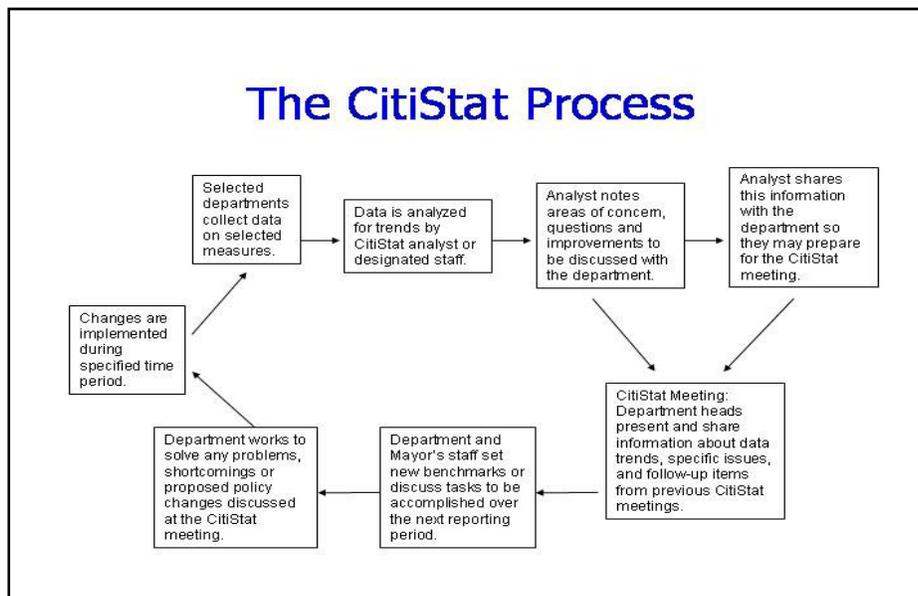
from personnel data to calls for service. This information is sent to CitiStat program analysts, or designated staff, who review the data for trends. They transform the raw city departmental data into maps, charts, and graphs that present the data with Mayoral priorities in mind. CitiStat analysts may choose to share the analysis with the reporting department upfront; some cities have found it advantageous to share information with departments earlier to ensure they are prepared to answer the Mayor's questions and resolve any problems.

At a CitiStat meeting, department heads typically brief the Mayor about any changes in service delivery and progress toward agreed-upon performance targets. A question and answer session designed to promote problem solving usually follows. New performance targets may be established and tasks assigned to ensure that progress occurs. The process is repeated at subsequent meetings, creating a feedback loop where service effectiveness and personnel issues are regularly monitored and fine-tuned.

Encouraging Collaboration

Cities report that using the CitiStat model promotes collaboration among departments. For example, in San Francisco, the fire department tracks the origin of 911 calls. After receiving an overabundance of calls for non-emergency services from public phones, fire department representatives were sent to these areas to investigate. Many of the callers turned out to be homeless. The city eventually worked with its Department of Health and Human Services to reach out to these individuals and the 911 calls decreased.

CitiStat can also uncover good policy and procedure ideas that can be shared interdepartmentally. Providence's ProvStat revealed that its Parks and Recreation Department had a problem with employee tardiness. Because ProvStat involves multiple departments, staff were aware that the Department of Public Works has a strict policy that addresses this issue, so the same policy



was implemented in Parks and Recreation. Shortly after the change, tardiness within the Parks and Recreation Department decreased and productivity increased.

311 Call Centers

Since citizen concerns are the basis of effective performance measurement, several cities that use the CitiStat model also have a 311 call center. Similar to 911, citizens can call 311 to report non-emergency events, such as a missed garbage pick-up or a pothole that needs to be filled. These centers consolidate citizens' complaints, as opposed to contacting each department separately. For instance, when Houston implemented its 311 center in 2001, the city was able to consolidate 700 phone numbers from 19 different city departments.

When used in conjunction with CitiStat, data from the 311 call center is an efficient way to measure departmental performance and citizen satisfaction. Measures such as average time to complete a request, frequent service request types, geographic origin of calls, and total number of requests are easily collected via the center and provide feedback about how the city is serving its citizenry. Hence, 311 call centers not only assist

with data collection, but highlight problem areas so that resources can be effectively deployed. At least 36 jurisdictions in the country currently use a 311 system or are in the process of implementing one.

CitiStat's Effectiveness to Date

Since CitiStat is relatively new to government, its effects have yet to be formally evaluated. However, cities using CitiStat report significant savings and more effective operations through their implementation. For instance, Syracuse reported saving \$14 million in its SyraStat program's first year of operation.

By reducing city use of overtime, absenteeism, and operational costs, Baltimore has produced over \$100 million in costs savings and revenue since its 2000 inception. Baltimore's CitiStat program has received much acclaim and recognition, winning one of five Innovations in American Government awards from Harvard University. With increasingly positive feedback, CitiStat is rapidly becoming the best practice for the efficient and effective management of government.

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14501 Cervantes Ave., Darnestown, MD 20874

(301) 977-3600

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