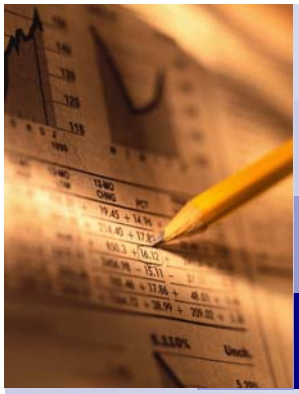

Volume 9, Issue 3 http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb

Fairfax County, Virginia Department of Management and Budget

Performance Measurement Matters

Fairfax County Benchmarks to Understand and Improve Performance

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Who said that?
"You can't compare me to my father. Our similarities are different." (Answer on page four)

What is Benchmarking?
It is the process of comparing performance in order to identify, learn and adapt outstanding practices and processes from another organization to help your organization improve its performance.

Suppose you worked for the Fairfax County Public Library (FCPL) and you knew from your performance data that your total annual circulation per capita is 10.6 or that your operating and maintenance expenditures per item circulated is $2.52. Furthermore, you know that 87.4 percent of users rated overall library services as excellent. You could compare that performance to what it was for the previous year, but unless you could compare it to others, you don't really have a context for what is high performance and what's not. Furthermore, you wouldn't know if there were other high performers out there from whom you could learn.

That's where benchmarking comes in. Fairfax County has a fairly robust program for comparing the performance of a number of programs and services in order to determine how the County compares to other large jurisdictions, as well as other Virginia cities and counties. Since 2000, Fairfax County has participated in the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) Center for Performance Measurement. This is a benchmarking program where performance statistics are compared in 15 different service areas (see sidebar below). Fairfax County completes data templates for all but Roads and Highways since that is predominantly a state function for counties in Virginia.

A wealth of data is available for those who want to see how their performance compares. The ICMA data can be accessed on the DMB Infoweb site at http://infoweb/DMB/. Click on "Performance Measurement" and then "ICMA Data." Several years worth of data are available in Excel format for agencies to sort and use as they choose. FY 2006 data were submitted in the fall of 2006; however, due to data cleaning by ICMA, those data are generally posted with a delay of approximately nine months. It is anticipated that they will be available by June 2007. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable amount of information available for those willing to look for it.

In areas not covered by the ICMA effort, e.g., the courts, as well as health-related and human services programs, Fairfax County's benchmarking effort uses other sources such as the State Supreme Court's State of the Judiciary Report or data on health and human service programs that the state collects. A total of 124 benchmarks are included in the FY 2008 Advertised Budget Plan released on February 26, 2007.

(continued on page two)

ICMA Service Areas Benchmarked

- Code Enforcement
- Facilities Management
- Fire/EMS
- Fleet Management
- Housing
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Library Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Police
- Purchasing
- Refuse Collection/ Recycling
- Roads and Highways

HELP WANTED – NEW PM TEAM MEMBERS

The Performance Measurement (PM) Team is a multi-agency team whose members meet monthly to discuss issues related to Fairfax County's PM effort, as well as plan activities and events that will further advance the principles of performance measurement, accountability and continuous improvement in the County. Each year at this time, the team solicits interest for new members. The team is comprised of 16 members, a few of which will be cycling off this year. There will be two openings for County staff interested in participating. The minimum commitment is one year, with the option to extend participation. In the past, members have commented that it typically takes a year to get up to speed and become a fully contributing member. For this reason, most stay on for a second year or more. The following are the requirements and benefits of participating on the PM Team:

Minimum Qualifications

- Team Player
- Commitment to making sure Fairfax County remains a high-performance organization
- Recommended for participation by the agency director

Time Commitment

- Preparation for and attendance at regular meetings (second Tuesday of each month, approximately two hours). **This is very important. If you cannot attend regularly and contribute to the team's work, please do not apply.**
- Attendance at PM Brownbag Lunches and other events
- Additional time as needed to perform team functions

Term of Service

One year (with ability to extend pending the mutual agreement of the team and agency director). Term begins May 1 and ends April 30 unless extended.

Benefits

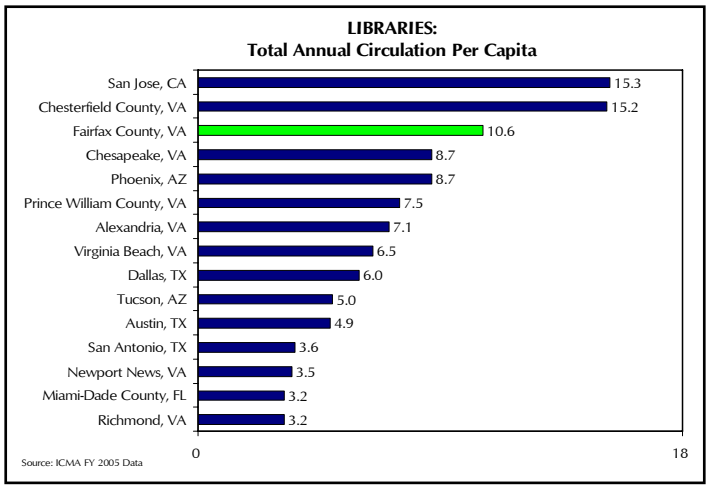
- Association with other professionals committed to measuring and improving performance
- Enhanced understanding of the County's PM program to share with their own agency
- Opportunity to influence the future direction of the effort

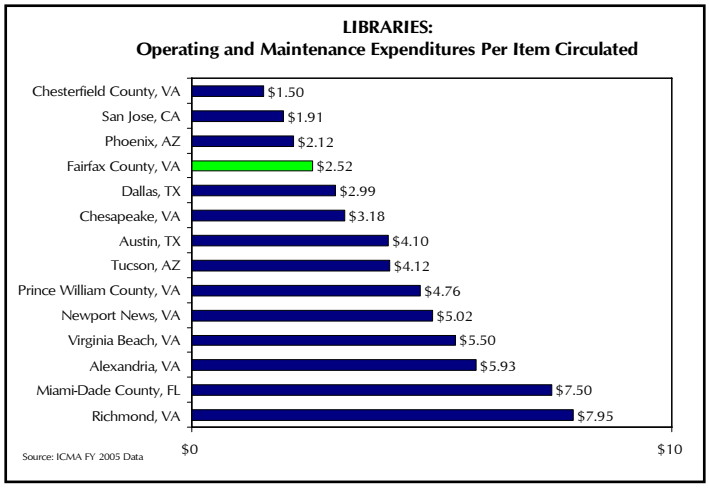
If this sounds like something you'd like to become involved with, please send a brief synopsis of your skills and how your participation will benefit you, your agency and the County. Include this information in a memo from your agency director indicating his/her approval. Forward

Fairfax County Benchmarks to Understand and Improve Performance (continued from page 1)

this to Barbara Emerson, Department of Management and Budget by **Friday, March 30, 2007**. Applicants will be notified shortly thereafter.

But back to the Fairfax County Public Library (FCPL). There are a number of excellent benchmarks that show how Fairfax County compares to other large jurisdictions (population of 500,000 or more), as well as other Virginia localities. The County publishes data for whichever jurisdictions provided data for a particular benchmark if they fall into those categories. We can tell from the following that FCPL's total annual circulation per capita compares favorably, as does its operating and maintenance expenditures per item circulated.



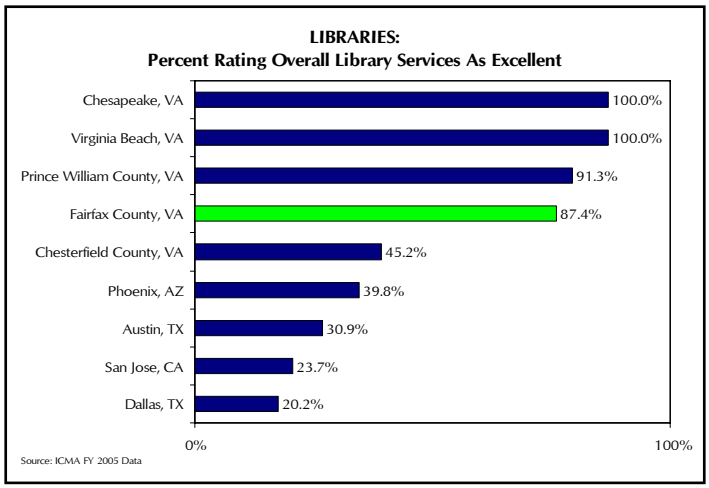


Check out this Web site:

http://www.VAperforms.virginia.gov

This Web site shows how Virginia is doing in a number of areas that affect the quality of life for those living in the Commonwealth.

Fairfax County Benchmarks to Understand and Improve Performance (continued from page 2)



As shown above, customer satisfaction also ranks favorably compared to other large jurisdictions, as well as those in Virginia that responded to this template question. FCPL will also want to track their performance on these measures over time to determine if they are improving, maintaining their level of performance or getting worse in any areas.

Comparative performance data are used by program managers, agency directors and senior management. There are several uses including the following:

- Demonstrate program success. This is especially useful to communicate to elected officials and the public.
- Explain and justify resource requests. Since budget resources are scarce, having actual performance data to justify needs is much more effective than just pleading for more funding without concrete data.
- Identify program strengths and weaknesses. It is difficult to improve if you don't know what your weaknesses and strengths are.
- Set performance goals for employees, work groups and agencies. People respond when they are given a specific target to work toward.
- Make internal and external service delivery comparisons in order to improve operations. Often it takes seeing how someone else is performing a similar function to give an idea of how you can improve your own operations. That is not to say that different organizations should adopt other successful processes wholesale. To be more successful, they should be adapted to the particular jurisdiction or organization. There are always environmental differences such as the workforce, local ordinances, demographics, climate, etc. that must be taken into account if best practices are to be adapted successfully in your organization.

Others are interested in Fairfax County's Benchmarking Initiative

The County's benchmarking efforts will be one of the topics at the Performance Institute's **City/County Performance Summit** to be held March 12-13, 2007 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Other jurisdictions want to learn how they can begin similar programs in order to determine how their performance compares to others so that they can identify areas for improvement, as well as who the high performers are in those areas.

Good performance measures help tell an agency's story and good comparative data help agencies frame their story by raising questions that agencies can answer in the context of their performance. The public especially wants to know that it is getting its money's worth . In general, the public does not expect its local government to always be the top performer in all categories. Savvy citizens know that level of performance comes with a price. In the past, there has even been criticism directed at providing "Cadillac" service when what the public wants to pay for is a Chevrolet. In many cases, they are happy if their locality is solidly in the middle. In other cases, such as public safety, citizens rest easier knowing their jurisdiction is a high performer. It also depends on local priorities and preferences. What may be important to one jurisdiction, e.g., longer library hours, is not a priority for another which may prefer to put its funding into human services or transportation.

For an agency just starting a comparative performance data initiative, the first step would be to determine if any benchmarking effort already exists that provides data in the agency's service area(s). If there is, the agency can look into participating in that effort. County agencies already provide data for a number of purposes including the federal and state governments, depending on the service. If no such effort already exists, the agency should evaluate its own needs regarding the type of data that would be useful and then identify who would be the best benchmarking partners. There is no standard list of benchmarking partners to use in every case. The important thing to remember is why you are undertaking such an effort — to learn from the high performers. Therefore, look for those identified in professional journals as having innovative, cost-effective programs. Sometimes it helps to look at those who received special recognition such as Triple AAA bond ratings or other validation of a well-managed jurisdiction. Opportu-

Food for Thought—PM Brownbag Lunch

For the past few years, County Executive Tony Griffin has been the speaker at the Performance Measurement Team's May Brownbag Lunch. These events are informal gatherings where staff may ask the County Executive questions related to the County's performance measurement and strategic planning initiatives, generally known as "managing for results." This year's lunch will be held May 1, 2007 at noon in Room 232 of the Government Center. If you are interested in attending, just bring your lunch and your interest in performance measurement. No reservations are needed. Any questions regarding this event may be directed to the PM Team Coordinator, Barbara Emerson at 703-324-3009, TTY 711 or Barbara.Emerson@fairfaxcounty.gov. In addition, any requests for special accommodations should be directed to her as well.

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Who said that?
he quote on page one is from Dale Berra, son of Yogi Berra, proving once again that the apple does not fall far from the tree

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PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT TEAM

Feel free to contact any member listed below if you have any questions/comments about the County's Performance Measurement Program. Note: This list will change slightly effective May 1, 2007.

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Norman Chmielewski	Department of Administration for Human Services	324-5978	NCHMIE
Kristen Cigler	Department of Community & Recreation Services	324-5306	KCIGLE
Tom Crow	Health Department	246-8470	TCROW0
Marie Custode	Department of Systems Management for Human Services	324-4540	KCUSTO
Lorraine Jackson	Department of Public Works & Environmental Services	324-1835	LJACK1
Mila Jao	Department of Finance	324-3150	MJAO00
John Kapinos	Police Department	246-4278	JKAPIN
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Allison Lowry	Department of Family Services	324-3528	ALOWRY
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