

# Open Data & Policy-Making: Influencing the Policy Process

*Where are the opportunities for citizens to use public data to influence policy? What can elected officials do to invite and support more data-driven dialogue? How can City staff better support both Council and citizens in the process?*

## Key takeaways:

- **We need to identify performance metrics to be used to evaluate effectiveness... BEFORE policy implementation**
  - Are we defining goals and desired outcomes well in advance?
  - Identifying metrics can help us refine and improve policies
  - Performance metrics and standards should be used to show the effectiveness of policies, especially anything involving money, and hold people and organizations accountable.
- **There is a big need to focus on improved communications from the City of Asheville and tracking communication metrics**
  - Need to track participation and public input of public meetings to measure how many people attend along with demographics
  - Need to focus outreach to allow citizens to opt-in to communications regarding specific topics of interest; don't force people to have to search for information
- **Better access to online information for people that might not have easy access**
  - Pursue public wifi at the ART bus station and/or on buses

## Session notes:

### Policy

Currently, problems and their possible solutions lead to data processes. This occurs mostly through anecdotes that can then lead to data related to the anecdotes.

Problems can lead to new opportunities for data collection to fill in knowledge gaps.

The process of identifying new opportunities for data collection can reveal different viewpoints and issues on a subject.

Communities, more specifically neighborhoods, and their advocates can be curators of their data to influence policy by building hubs for data repositories.

Just tracking the amount and quality of data over time can show problems.

**Performance metrics and standards should be used to show the effectiveness of policies, especially anything involving money, and hold people and organizations accountable.** These should include metrics on data collection and quality.

Best practices can possibly be derived from case studies.

- How do we get policy and community to interact?
- Economic justice workgroup, NAACP, State of Black Asheville: Data Driven orgs
- Data needed regarding minority contractors
- Signs of poverty to measure: business ownership, home ownership
- City departments don't often keep data
- Talk about policy vs people
- Racial --- de-escalation
  - Data is not tracked
- Transit
  - Were not capturing data before
  - Better now; transit company becoming more cooperative
  - Need to use data to make better decisions
  - Can we use data to measure effectiveness of policies; e.g. was there any benefit to providing free transit on Election Day?; was there increased ridership?; did it make any difference at all?
  - Analysis of Sunday service?
- Economically disadvantaged folks don't necessarily have the means to access data
- Should community groups be holding data?
- Availability of APD (Police) data has gone down substantially
- Minority business office had not been capturing data about performance
- Performance are not being identified for use of community funds
- How can we use open data to evaluate effectiveness of policies?
  - Budget is an obvious area
  - Metrics from APD tied to budget requests

**What questions because of lack of data can we not answer?**

- **Communications metrics**
  - how many people attend community meetings
  - what are the demographics of those in attendance
  - We need to be able to track community/city meetings in terms of input and participation in public meetings

- Need younger voices in the conversation; more diversity with race, neighborhood, economic status
- Current poverty data; looking at census block information; data from Asheville Housing Authority on economic status
- Fear is driving the fact that data is not being captured. It is hard to criticize performance if we don't measure it. If data is not released, it is hard for citizens to ask questions/critique.
- What is the measurement for success?; What quality control exists?
  - Reading scores - policy link
  - Define what is success
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
  - Goal: closing achievement gap
  - CDBG allocations require a lot of work by City Council
  - How do you know you are doing a good job?
- Homeward Bound - potential example of organization that is using performance metrics
- Consider the way that data is being captured and extend outreach
  - Not online surveys; identify ways to connect to non-technical people
  - Use virtual 3D simulations to assess new development regarding the skyline
    - Model complete streets
  - **Increase access by providing Wifi access at the ART downtown bus station**
  - **Consider providing Wifi access on buses**
- Easier way to search resolutions/regulations
  - Include links, as appropriate to other laws
- City should be better about getting out useful information rather than fluff
- Make sure the city is uploading minutes from all boards/commissions
- Meeting agendas for all boards/commissions should come out earlier
- Crime stats/dashboard reporting
- Crime data vs Housing Authority: are there housing authority police incident records that are not captured in APD incident/crime data?
- **Identify performance metrics to be used to evaluate effectiveness... BEFORE implementation**
  - **Are we defining goals and desired outcomes well in advance?**
  - **Identifying metrics can help us refine and improve policies**
- Veracity of the facts
  - Is staff giving the full picture?
  - Are different viewpoints allowed/encouraged?

- Do people with different perspectives have the same opportunities to present data?
- How to make sure that Council get all sides of the story?
  - Citizens have raised questions about staff reports not always being a complete picture; it can be difficult for City Council to confirm or deny whether they are a complete picture
- There is definitely a need for better communication channels.
  - Consider more info on water bills (but easy to create too much static)
  - Explore opt-in list serves and/or notifications based on interest topics
  - There may be hesitancy from staff to provide info because it may create conflict
  - It is important to understand how the community wants to get information
  - **Explore notifications and listservs based on interest topics with opt-in capabilities.**