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BUDGETING OPEN
DATA BROADBAND
PRIVACY EMERGENCY
SERVICES

INNOVATION
IN ACTION
VOL.2



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INNOVATION IN ACTION VOL.2

What do you get when advances in information technology are coupled with the creativity that comes from managing tight budgets in an era of increasing demands on government services? The answer is innovation.

Every day, there are new reports of state, county and municipal officials leading the way to more efficient and effective service delivery. This eBook captures five stories of how innovators are making groundbreaking advances in areas ranging from IT budgeting to emergency services to digital privacy.

MICHAEL GRASS

Senior Editor
GovExec State & Local

BUDGETING

THE THIRD WAY

A New Jersey county finds creative solutions to its fiscal challenges.

BY MICHAEL GRASS

Like other local leaders around the United States during the Great Recession, Burlington County, New Jersey, Administrator Paul Drayton Jr. and his colleagues confronted a downturn in property tax revenue that helps fund county services.

Between 2009 and 2014, Burlington County, which spans a large swath of New Jersey from the Delaware River nearly to Atlantic City, saw its property values decrease by \$6.4 billion—a 14 percent reduction. That translated to a \$50 million decrease in revenue for the county.

But instead of making sweeping and harmful cuts to offset the decline, Burlington officials say they're thriving after consolidating operations, maintaining programs, upgrading infrastructure and finding savings. Now they're delivering county services at the lowest cost per resident in the state.

For many government organizations, when it comes to dealing with revenue reductions, "it's either one way or the other," Drayton said in an interview with GovExec State & Local. "We were able to find what I'm referring to as a 'third way.' That's been very, very successful and something that we feel very proud of."

Since 2009, Burlington County decreased its combined tax levy by 12.7 percent (\$24.7 million) and cut overall spending by 17.2 percent (\$39.3 million). When it compares itself to other New Jersey counties, Burlington maintains the lowest cost per resident: \$339.

The state average is \$552 per resident, according to a recent county presentation. Cape May County in the state's southern tip is the highest at \$1,010 per resident.

"The things that we're doing in terms of shared services and consolidation are unique, they really, really are," Drayton said, adding that Burlington "can serve as a model" for other county governments.

"A lot of it has to do with strategic vision, but part of it is political willpower, and we've had the strength and support from our [county Board of] Freeholders to take what's

really a common-sense approach," said Drayton, who was appointed to his position in 2010.

Burlington decreased spending by 19.2 percent (\$43.7 million) from 2008 to 2013. During the same time period, New Jersey counties on average increased spending by \$15.3 million.

A GREAT RECESSION STRATEGY

While it might not be totally fair to compare Burlington County, with a population of roughly 450,000 people, to some of its more densely populated peers in North Jersey, the county's budget strategy playbook contains lessons for any local government official.

Like other local governments dealing with dismal Great Recession budgeting realities, Burlington County



The Burlington-Bristol Bridge connects Burlington County, N.J., with Pennsylvania

JIM D. VIA CC BY 2.0

had to institute a hiring freeze. It reduced the number of county workers primarily through retirements and attrition. The county has 650 fewer employees on the payroll than when the recession began.

“We’ve been able to do it strategically,” Drayton said, stressing the importance of a plan looking out three to five years. “We did not want to have to say to our employees at the worst possible time: ‘You’re going to have to look for a new job.’”

A combination of hiring freezes and attrition was a strategy Drayton and the county’s chief financial officer,

ton said. “There are examples like that throughout our county government where we’ve been able to embrace technology and wind up plugging that gap where we lost a third of our workforce.”

The county has installed 70 miles of fiber optic cable along major highways, which serves as the backbone for its traffic signal system, its CCTV camera network and the county’s operations. The result was improved Internet connectivity at a savings of \$100,000. Burlington also scrapped its old phone system for a VOIP system, saving \$200,000 annually.

WE DID NOT WANT TO HAVE TO SAY TO OUR EMPLOYEES AT THE WORST POSSIBLE TIME: ‘YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE TO LOOK FOR A NEW JOB.’

PAUL DRAYTON JR., BURLINGTON COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Marc Krassen, used previously when they worked together at the Delaware River Port Authority of Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

The two told GovExec State & Local that successfully managing budgeting challenges like the ones the recession created is not a short-term effort. It requires financial discipline over many years, strategic thinking and implementation of best practices.

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES

For Drayton and his county colleagues, embracing technology and adapting operations has been an important part of what’s worked.

For instance, five years ago, the county’s old timekeeping system required about 40 clerks for data-entry and related information management. The new system only needs five timekeepers.

Drayton credits the county’s IT transformation as a major piece of its cost-savings strategy. Burlington has found hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings through IT upgrades that have eliminated obsolete technology and expanded its digital infrastructure.

“We really have embraced that philosophy of finding ways to use technology to do more with less,” Dray-

ton said. The county has also evaluated its facilities and office space, consolidated agencies and reduced personnel overtime. Burlington is saving \$5.2 million a year on corrections after consolidating jail facilities and rearranging work schedules—all while enhancing security, Drayton said.

He said the strategic budgetary and operations actions the county took during the Great Recession have made it an attractive place to live and do business.

Burlington County is an important hub for not just South Jersey but for the entire mid-Atlantic and East Coast. It’s a trucking and distribution center, sitting strategically in the Interstate 95 corridor along the New Jersey Turnpike and its connection to the Pennsylvania Turnpike, partway between Philadelphia and North Jersey’s densely populated counties near New York City.

County leaders are proud to point the various new warehouse projects, including a 580,000-square-foot warehouse expansion for Burlington Coat Factory, headquartered, naturally, in Burlington Township.

“We want this to be a place where businesses and individuals look to move to relocate to because it has an extremely well-run government and the cost of living in that county is lower than it is in any other county in southeastern Pennsylvania or southern New Jersey,” Drayton said. 

OPEN DATA

INVESTING IN ENGAGEMENT

Making data available to the public is about more than transparency.

BY MICHAEL GRASS

In October, Houston Mayor Annise Parker introduced a new open data policy in the nation's fourth-largest city. "First and foremost, this is about increasing transparency," she said in the city's announcement. "It is also about citizen engagement and increasing the pace of innovation in our city. We want to engage the talents of our strong science, technology, engineering and math community to help us solve the challenges of the 21st century."

Those sentiments are shared by plenty of state, county and city leaders around the country who want to unlock their data and transform how governments operate, engage with constituents and foster innovation and economic development.

According to an open data benchmarking study released by Seattle-based Socrata this fall, 80 percent of federal, state, county and city government respondents indicated they will invest the same or more in open data within the next six months.

In the case of Houston, part of Parker's open data investment was the creation of a new position, data enterprise officer, and an advisory board who will help the mayor implement new standards and policies for how the city manages and publishes its information.

The detailed study by Socrata, a privately held cloud software company that helps public-sector organizations with transparency, citizen services and data-driven decisionmaking, gives an eye-opening look at current open data attitudes within different layers of U.S. governments, examining everything from open data's impacts on job growth and economic development to the ability to create higher levels of engagement and trust in government.

"What this report does is confirm the fact that the open data movement has become a viral movement and has become something that's unstoppable," Bill Glenn, vice president for marketing at Socrata, told GovExec State & Local.

The study, conducted by EMC Research, contacted 58,000 people working at the federal, state, county and city levels, including some individuals who work outside government but work regularly with the public sector. Of the 1,273 people who finished the study, 961 completed follow-up interviews. Most of those 961 respondents work in government, with 306 from states, 181 from counties and 371 from cities.

Glenn said that historically, there have been questions within the public sector about the value of open data: "Does open data bring more than just transparency to government? What is the real value? What is the real impact that open data can have not only for governments internally but constituents externally?" The study provides some answers.

MAKING MORE INVESTMENTS

A large majority of respondents—80 percent—said they would be investing the same amount of resources or be making additional investments in open data initiatives.

More than 40 percent of government respondents said that their government has a policy to make as much data available as possible. Forty-eight percent said that they focus on the most important and useful data, while 11 percent said they do the legally mandated minimum.

Leadership on open data is important, according to Socrata's study. Seventy-two percent of respondents said that pursuing open-data initiatives needs the direction of government leaders.

For Abhi Nemani, the new chief data officer for the city of Los Angeles, to demonstrate strong open data leadership, you have to show everyone what's possible.

"It's critical to take the concept of open data out of the abstract and into the tangible," Nemani told GovExec State & Local. "That means building tools, visualizations, and programs that illustrate clearly how open data can improve both the operations of government and the quality of life of residents in the city."

But effective open data leadership also needs clear communication within governments about their objectives and policies.

In Los Angeles, Nemani observed that Mayor Eric Garcetti's "commitment to transparency and accountability for the city through open data led to increased engagement," adding that "traditionally the budgeting process in the city was not easy for citizens to engage with or understand where taxpayer dollars were going; this year, the city opened up this process, publishing the mayor's proposed budget before it went to the council for approval, enabling broader participation from the public."

Open data is no longer only being touted as just a way to be more transparent and support good-government principles: It's about jobs and economic development, too.

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ABHI NEMANI, CHIEF DATA OFFICER, CITY OF LOS ANGELES

In Prince George's County, Maryland, just outside the nation's capital, Chief Information Officer Vennard Wright told GovExec State & Local that with implementation of the county's open data policy, "we've answered questions about governance, privacy of data and update frequency in order to address any misconceptions that are commonly associated with sharing data openly."

BOOSTING CONSTITUENT TRUST, ENGAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Large majorities of respondents in Socrata's study said that open data can boost public trust in government (83 percent) and improve engagement with constituents (86 percent).

For Prince George's County, the open data movement is still relatively new. The county's portal, Data Prince George's, built in collaboration with Socrata, launched in September.

That's meant that the county has been actively promoting the new portal and finding ways to engage with residents around the information being made available through it, which includes "spearheading other efforts such as town halls and hackathons in order to gather feedback and to encourage new and creative ways to interact with Data Prince George's," Wright told GovExec State & Local.

Seventy-one percent of government respondents agreed that open data initiatives can spark economic development with a significant proportion, 39 percent, saying that open data has led "directly" to economic development in their community.

That's been incredibly important in Los Angeles, according to Nemani. "[W]e consider open data to be a platform for economic development. Los Angeles has a very strong technology and startup ecosystem, and it's essential to integrate our open data efforts with that growing community."

More and more, Glenn said, governments are going to be pressing that economic development message, in addition to the good-government message that often goes hand in hand with open data initiatives.

"If governments want to continue to invest more in their open data initiatives, they're going to be held accountable to being able to measure and make data-driven decisions or making more increased investment in their open data initiatives," Glenn said. "Being able to point back to direct economic development is a great way not only to build engagement with their constituents and build trust but certainly to also point to hard dollars or numbers as it relates to job creation or increased tax revenue." 

BROADBAND

DIGITAL LEARNING

Arkansas moves to connect all of its students to high-speed networks.

BY MICHAEL GRASS

A national nonprofit group that works to boost Internet connectivity in schools thinks Arkansas could be the first state in the country to meet national ConnectED goals to link every student to high-speed broadband.

And it's helping officials in the Natural State study how to do it in a cost-effective way.

In August, Arkansas Gov. Mike Beebe announced a partnership between his state's Department of Education and EducationSuperHighway, which has already performed an initial study of broadband spending and core functionalities of digital learning in the state's public schools.

"What we found was a state that's actually doing better than the national average in terms of its connectivity but also a state in which almost half of the school districts in the state do not have the connectivity required for 21st century digital learning," EducationSuperHighway CEO Evan Marwell during the announcement.

Marwell detailed how the Arkansas Public School Computer Network, once hailed as one of the most progressive state educational technological investments in the nation, no longer meets the state's needs and is not cost effective.

That network "represents 50 percent of the state's collective investment in Internet access for its schools. In 1992, this was a groundbreaking contract and one of the first state efforts in the nation to make K-12 broadband access a state priority. It was truly innovative back then . . . but it relies on outdated copper technology in a fiber world."

Federal dollars and the \$15 million spent on the state's copper-wire network could be used instead to install high-speed fiber connections for public schools.

Marwell's organization and Arkansas are now moving on to new stages of assessing how to improve Internet connectivity for all the state's public schools, which will include direct support to schools to examine the technical requirements of upgrading connections for individual school districts.

"We will help run a collaborative process with the Department of Education and the broadband service providers to develop the most cost-effective long-term solution for delivering affordable connectivity and technical support to the state's K-12 schools," Marwell said.

"Providing our schools with high-speed broadband connections is critical to preparing our students for the modern economy," the governor said in his announcement. "With the leadership of the Arkansas Department of Education, the General Assembly, our school districts and service providers, we can give our children the resources they need to compete and succeed." [@](#)

PROVIDING OUR SCHOOLS WITH HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND CONNECTIONS IS CRITICAL.

GOV. MIKE BEEBE

PRIVACY

DATA DISCRETION

Seattle moves to assess digital privacy concerns with its data.

BY MICHAEL GRASS

As more and more cities make more and more of their accumulated data available and accessible to the public, what are some of the implications for privacy? Coming off an announcement by Seattle Mayor Ed Murray to launch a new digital privacy initiative, members of the Seattle City Council gathered at City Hall in November to discuss the new effort and ask questions of a panel of representatives from the mayor's office and various city agencies.

"As we continue to make innovative technology investments, we need to implement practices that support public trust in the security and privacy of personal information," Murray said in the city's announcement.

The city is at the beginning of a multi-month timeline to assess the interplay of privacy and data. There are plenty of open questions and concerns from local lawmakers.

"As a policymaker, I don't even know how data is being used," Councilmember Mike O'Brien told his colleagues during the briefing. And if city officials are unclear on how city information is being used and accessed, the public at large certainly doesn't have a good understanding, he said.

Seattle officials want to change that. They noted that their city will be the first major U.S. city to conduct such an assessment of digital privacy concerns.

"This is a great opportunity" for Seattle, Councilmember Sally Clark told her colleagues. But councilmembers admitted they're entering uncharted waters.

"It's exciting to be a leader on this but we have to figure all this out," O'Brien said.

The city is seeking wisdom and expertise from an advisory committee of academics and privacy "thought leaders" from the local community to create privacy principles, statements and a tool kit that will include a "data collection planning checklist, lightweight impact assessment, and standards to drive awareness and privacy statement compliance across departments," according to the city's digital privacy initiative overview.

Under the current timeline, the city's interdepartmental team will finalize a privacy policy by March and the privacy toolkit by June, after which it will forward those to the council for approval and implementation.

The city has partnered with the University of Washington on its digital privacy initiative.



Jan Whittington, the associate director of the university's Center for Information Assurance and Cybersecurity, was awarded a grant to "examine the relationships that exist between open data, privacy and digital equity and what harm municipal data could lead to with consumers or the marketplace," according to the city's announcement.

Digital privacy is an issue that impacts many city departments and agencies, including the police and fire departments, transportation, city utilities and information technology, among others.

Mike Wagers, the chief operating officer of the Seattle Police Department, told councilmembers that police departments across the nation "are struggling with this issue."

Seattle's chief technology officer, Michael Mattmiller, told councilmembers that one of the goals of the digital privacy initiative is to "develop a holistic framework" for how data is published and released, especially when new technologies or IT platforms are introduced.

The city has already published 300 datasets through its portal data.seattle.gov.

Councilmember Bruce Harrell asked the panel of city representatives whether the digital privacy initiative would stymie those ongoing open data efforts: "Are we stopping the opening of datasets by doing this?"

Mattmiller said the city wants to continue to be proactive with its open data efforts while balancing privacy concerns. And the digital privacy initiative aims to figure out where the balance lies.

"There will be disagreement in the community wherever we draw that line," O'Brien told his colleagues.

Councilmember Kshama Sawant, citing concerns over the National Security Agency's controversial surveillance program, wondered whether the city's digital privacy initiative would lay out guidelines for the data and information it might share with that federal agency.

"Let's face it," she said, the NSA is "absolutely uncontrollable." Harrell, half-jokingly, said: "If they are watching: I like you, but I'm afraid of you."

Mattmiller, who was previously a senior strategist for enterprise cloud privacy at Microsoft, noted that the city has to meet "certain obligations under federal law" when dealing with federal agencies.

There's a lot of work to be done and a lot of questions to answer, but councilmembers said they're confident in their efforts.

"The city has never approached it in this kind of methodical and transparent manner across all city departments and engaging with privacy leaders in Seattle," Harrell said in the city's announcement. 

**THE CITY HAS
NEVER
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THODICAL AND
TRANSPARENT
MANNER.**

BRUCE HARRELL,
SEATTLE CITY COUNCILMEMBER

EMERGENCY SERVICES

REVIVAL AND SURVIVAL

A North Carolina county examines a new approach to cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

BY MICHAEL GRASS

When Jeffrey Hammerstein started as a paramedic in the 1980s, the likelihood of cardiac-arrest patients surviving was extremely low, not just in Wake County, North Carolina, where he still works, but anywhere in the nation.

Standard guidelines for cardiopulmonary resuscitation suggested that paramedics only perform the procedure for about 25 minutes, a guideline that is followed by emergency medical technicians across the nation today.

But there was anecdotal evidence of a patient's pulse returning when chest compressions were continued for a longer period of time when the patient showed some minimal signs of cardiac activity. Hammerstein, currently the district chief of community outreach for the county's emergency management services, noticed that phenomenon locally.

"All of a sudden at the 45-minute level we'd have a pulse back," Hammerstein said in a recent interview in which he

recounted the timeline of how the county began analyzing local EMS data with results that eventually could help change the way paramedics across the nation respond to cardiac-arrest patients.

"The first half of my career, with a cardiac arrest, nobody survived, with very rare exceptions," he said. "Then that really started to change in the 2000s, when we changed the way we did resuscitation."

Wake County paramedics, who respond to about 500 cardiac-arrest calls annually, began performing CPR for longer periods of time. "We started to get pulses back on those cases," he said. "That's where it started to translate where we got more people who were surviving."

But was there a firm connection between the length of time chest compressions were performed and survival rates?

Through a comprehensive data-analytics project, Wake County Emergency Medical Services, with the help of SAS Advanced Analytics Lab for State and Local Government, collected data from county cardiac-arrest responses from 2005 to 2012 and looked at patient outcomes.

They found that if Wake County paramedics had continued under the 25-minute guideline from 2005 to 2012, 100 people, who ultimately left the hospital, would have died.

As a result, Wake County changed its CPR recommendations to encourage paramedics to continue the procedure beyond the 25-minute mark if the patient has not already flatlined. In patients where there are some minimal signs of cardiac activity, paramedics may continue CPR for up to an hour without worrying about the additional risk that patients will end up in a vegetative state.

"Through the '80s and into the '90s, we looked at cardiac-arrest patients as not survivable. Now we don't look at that [person] as a dead person," Hammerstein said. "We haven't written them off."



Wake County's cardiac-arrest findings were presented in January to the National Association of EMS Physicians, which named the county EMS's paper as the "Best EMS Professional Research Presentation."

The national EMS community has taken notice but they're waiting to see the full version in manuscript form, said Wake County EMS Deputy Medical Director Jefferson Williams.

WE'RE BIG ENOUGH TO MEASURE BUT SMALL ENOUGH TO CHANGE.

JEFFERSON WILLIAMS, WAKE COUNTY EMS DEPUTY MEDICAL DIRECTOR

While data-collection and analysis is important in the emergency medicine field, Wake County is very proactive, Williams said. "We're fortunate with our resources in Wake County. We make sure [the data are] clean and appropriately entered," he said.

But to get a full grasp on the cardiac-arrest data, the county needed the expertise of SAS, based in Cary, just outside Raleigh.

"To do something like this it takes a lot of time to get it into an analytical form," Williams said. He added that Wake County, home to the state capital, was an ideal place to tackle a project like this because of its size.

"We're big enough to measure but small enough to change," he said. "In other communities that are very large, implementing change in practice can take a lot of time."

In the near term, Wake County will be working to put its cardiac-arrest findings in manuscript form so peer EMS organizations can study them more closely. "By practicing evidence-based medicine, guided by data, many Wake County residents are alive today who wouldn't have been," said Dr. Brent Myers, the director of Wake County EMS. "Our recognition at the annual meeting gives us hope that our approach will be replicated by other EMS groups around the country, and save more lives.

But it will take more time and additional study to see if the discoveries in Wake County, which now has a 16 percent survival rate for cardiac-arrest patients—roughly double the national average—will change the way the rest of the nation approaches emergency medical response.

"The 30,000 foot view is that we still have a long way to go here," Williams said. [▶](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Grass, who joined *Government Executive* in June 2014 as Senior Editor for State & Local, is the founding co-editor of DCist.com and worked as a copy editor at *Roll Call*, local and online editor at *The Washington Post's Express* newspaper, deputy managing editor at *The New York Observer's Politicker.com*, deputy managing editor at *Washington City Paper* and the D.C., Maryland and Virginia local editor for *The Huffington Post*. He also managed a non-profit network of state-based policy news sites in Colorado, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and New Mexico.