

Executive Summary

Government agencies must continually do more and more with less and less. In no other level of government does this become truer than local municipal management. As the money that is siphoned down from the federal to the state to the local government authority becomes relatively smaller and more mandates go unfunded, local governments find themselves stretching their relatively tiny pool of resources to deliver services to their citizens while still attempting to maintain a healthy fund balance. Illinois, possessing the most units of government in comparison to any other state in the country, finds its citizens entrapped in a series of taxes placed on them not only by municipal agency, but a variety of special assessment districts. No longer will the citizens stand for an ever increasing municipal budget at the expense of their hard work. Governments at the local level must learn to operate in an efficient manner and make decisions based upon empirical rather than subjective evidence. For municipal managers, a new era is upon us.

Oak Forest approached the University of Illinois at Chicago's Public Administration program to conduct a survey of management reporting techniques of municipalities in the area, and from that to create a list of best practices that can be utilized. The team began to contact municipalities from a list developed mutually between themselves and the city administrator. As information began to come in, it became apparent that the practices of those municipalities were not as beneficial as one would believe. Eventually contact was made with other locations through the IAMMA listserv which brought in some new techniques unprecedented in the existing management reports. Some of the best material was discovered in the academic literature and the International City/County Management Association which maintained various documents suitable to contributing to our final report.

A trend that we discovered while combing through these documents was the inconsistency not only from location to location, but department to department and month to month. As we discovered, a single all empowering format was not found because of the flexibility required by department heads to report pressing issues and trends which required attention. Each municipal agency department held a different focus for their departments. Additionally, very few demonstrated any type of linkage to a budget or strategic plan. Therefore, the team began with a seemingly blank piece of paper.

What we have tried to do for the City of Oak Forest is to provide examples of the best practices inherent in municipal management reporting. The one best format that we believed could be found from existing practices simply failed to come to the surface. We have learned that each department from each town had a varying focus to which the connection could be made to their monthly report. In creating these suggested reporting standards, we have attempted to provide the department heads with the greatest amount of flexibility. These standards represent the appropriate reporting measures that must be taken in order to increase accountability. Oak Forest performs an outstanding job of maintaining data, but each department must create their own performance standards from which they may measure progress of their programs.