



Effective Management in Troubled Times

By John Becker

Members of the Florida
Benchmarking
Consortium have joined
forces to develop
common performance
measures for their
highest-priority local
government services.

“In order to improve something, you have to change it. In order to change something, you have to understand it. In order to understand something, you have to measure it.”¹

Local government leaders agonize over how to balance their budgets, wishing they had more — or perhaps better — data about the efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of the services they provide. Many finance officers, city council members, county board members, and citizens wonder how the service performance of their jurisdictions actually compares to that of other local governments. Well, collaborative leadership groups such as the Florida Benchmarking Consortium (FBC) can help provide the answers. The FBC and other statewide and regional benchmarking efforts help local government leaders, citizens, university leaders, and the various industries of local government to have more meaningful conversations about government’s most important priorities and where improvement efforts need to be focused. These groups collect and share data, using standardized performance measures that allow member local governments to benchmark the efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of their services as compared to those of other members.

THE FLORIDA MODEL

The FBC’s membership has grown quickly and steadily to include participation from 44 of Florida’s like-minded

local government leaders. About a third are counties, and the rest are cities, along with one fairly unique organization, the Keys Aqueduct Authority. Officials in these self-selected jurisdictions have joined forces to develop common performance measures for their highest-priority local government services. Each member chooses the extent to which it wants to be involved in the FBC, including its leadership contribution and the amount of performance data it will contribute.

Since it was founded in January 2005, the FBC has grown from a fairly simple collaboration-based, collective concept in the minds of a small number of local government managers to the largest active statewide or regional local government performance measurement and benchmarking-focused consortium in the United States. A steering committee made up of managers from member governments directs the group’s activities. Subcommittees have been established to oversee the following organizational issues: executive, business/financial, marketing, conferences, strategic planning, technical, performance, grants, training, and university liaison.

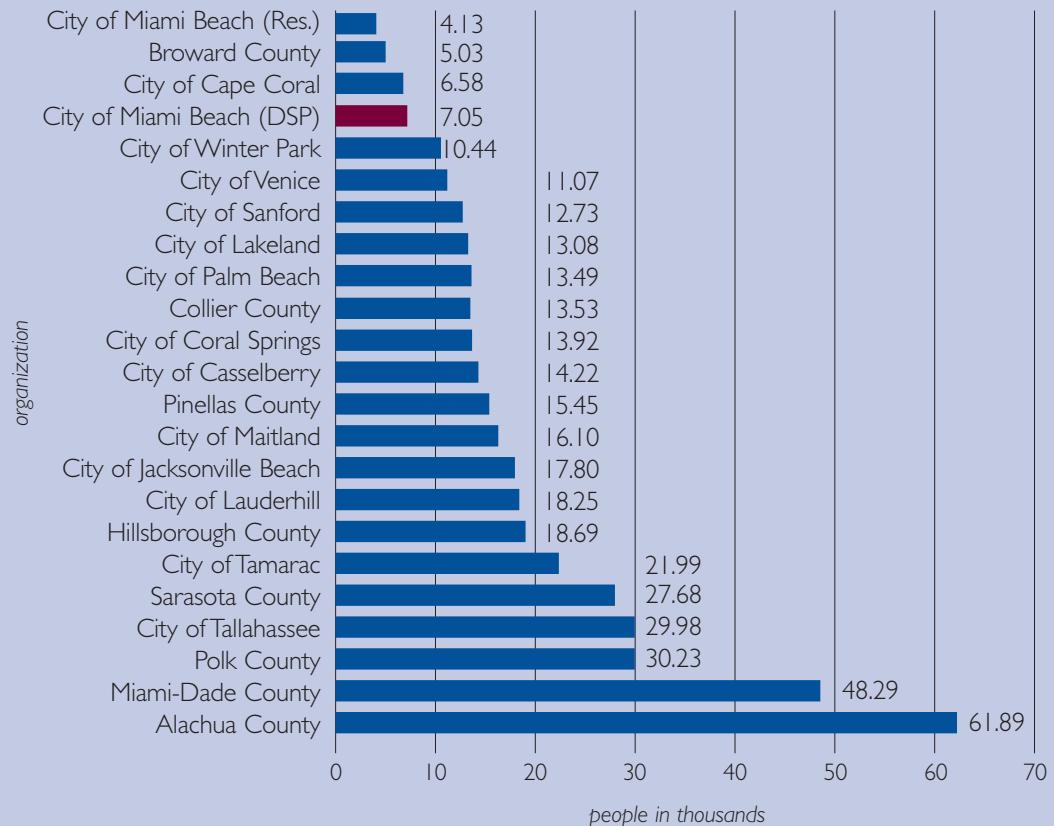
Early on, FBC leaders realized that support from a respected university system would be necessary for at least two reasons — the group would eventually need academic research power, and universities are where future local gov-

Exhibit I: Performance Data

The following graphs illustrate two of the performance measures for which the FCB collects data — code enforcement and human resources.*

Code Enforcement

Population per officer full-time equivalent (FTE), daily service population (DSP) per officer FTE (in thousands)



* From the Florida Benchmarking Consortium FY07 Local Government Services Report, published in October 2008.

ernment leaders are born. The University of North Carolina's pioneering work in benchmarking made it clear that the FBC needed a strategic business partner in one of Florida's leading universities, and the consortium has been lucky enough to work shoulder to shoulder with innovative and pioneering leaders from the University of Central Florida (UCF). The UCF Institute of Government has helped with internal consulting, networking, and administrative support. The UCF College of Health and Public Affairs has worked with the FBC in regards to developing teachers, teaching the basics of performance measure-

ment and benchmarking, researching reasonable next steps for organizational leadership, and helping select university student leaders to work with the FBC. And the UCF Center for Community Partnerships has helped the FBC build and expand its network of volunteer citizen leaders statewide.

Another key ingredient to the FBC model is that the consortium has strategically tried to offer its performance measurement and benchmarking services for the lowest price possible. Most other national, regional, and state-level organizations of this type charge from several to many thousands of dollars per year for local government

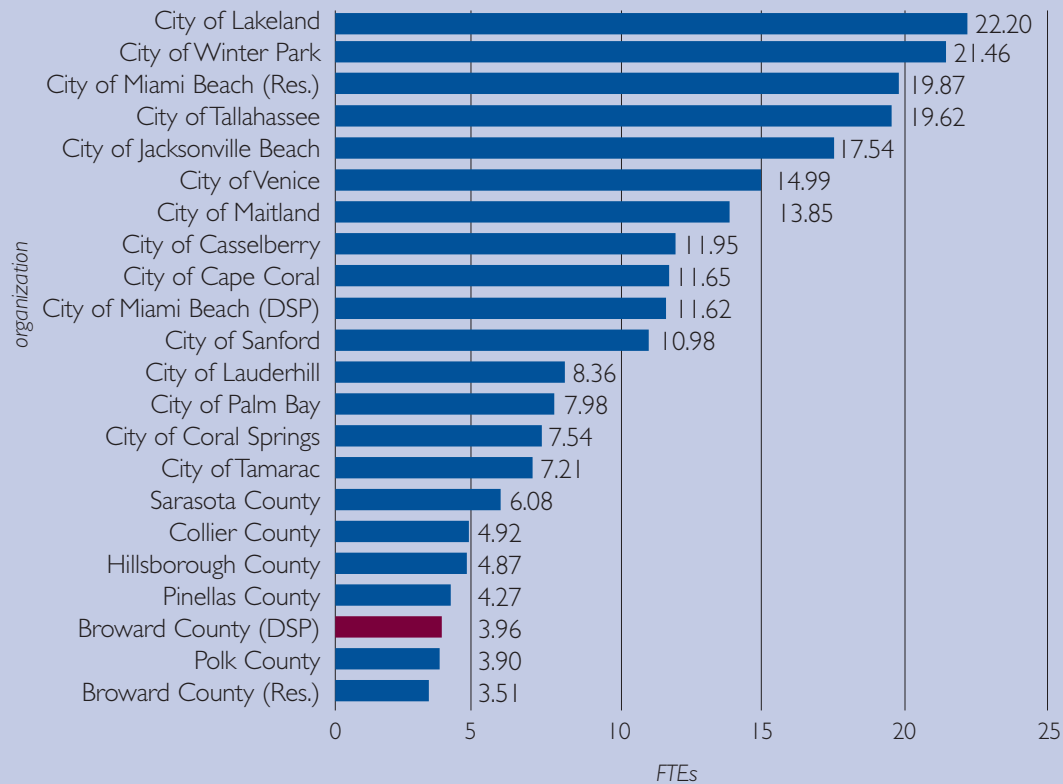
memberships. The FBC's annual membership fee is \$1,000 for any Florida local government.

Participation, like membership, increases steadily each year. Currently, more than 60 percent of the FBC's member organizations provide some amount of performance data. And more members are providing performance measurement data in each category of performance measurement every year.

The FBC has found that local government leaders appreciate being shown how to do this sort of performance measurement work through real-life

Human Resources

Government FTEs per 1,000 population, per 1,000 DSP



Government-specific notes:

City of Lakeland: FTE number includes personnel related to electric utility (with service area beyond the city), public safety, water/wastewater utility, civic center, airport, golf course, etc. The city's electric utility alone accounts for more than 30 percent of its FTEs, which is a significant factor in this measure.

examples, many times using trial and error learning, and by taking things one step at a time. Members tend to get more and more involved over time as they learn about how to proceed and begin to trust the process and become more comfortable with it. The result is better, more relevant, and therefore more meaningful information to use in decision making, for jurisdictions that are properly prepared to accept and, in time, embrace it.

WORKING TOGETHER

The small beach communities, rural counties, and urban areas that belong to the FBC come together each year to

Attracting Attention

Over its first few years, the FBC has attracted the attention of organizations both inside and outside Florida. For example, leaders at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation have been sufficiently impressed by the group's work that they are now providing the FBC with grant funding aimed at enhancing the group's activities throughout Florida. This support has been especially helpful in increasing citizen involvement with the performance measurement and benchmarking processes of local governments. It will also allow performance measurement results to be better communicated to all stakeholders via the Web, local newspapers, television reports, and in other meaningful ways.

The Michigan Municipal League is another group that is interested in the FBC's work. This relatively new statewide consortium of local government leaders has begun studying the operations of the FBC as it builds its own statewide performance measurement and benchmarking processes. The Michigan group is supported by like-minded leaders at Michigan State University and in local governments across the state.

agree on the performance measures jointly considered the most critical to everyone's success. All members must make sure they are measuring and collecting performance data in standard ways to ensure the reliability and integrity of the FBC's performance data. FBC members have to trust each other

The FBC's Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

Taking performance measurement to the next level

Mission

Local governments collaborating to achieve service improvement by measuring and comparing performance

Values

We openly share our knowledge, insights and experiences.

We enhance cooperation and grow positive relationships.

We ignite innovation, creativity and new ideas.

We provide useful tools to improve performance.

We facilitate easy access of idea exchange.

We promote fact-based decision making.

We offer quality resources at a good value.

We are sensitive to the differences between communities.

We benchmark performance measures that speak to citizen and community desires.

through the repeated cycles of effort and learning involved in data cleansing, fine-tuning performance measurement definitions, sharing data, and learning from each local government's best practices.

The Achilles' heel of performance measurement has long been that each jurisdiction does its own thing. Many Florida governments collect performance measurement data using their own definitions, employing their own metrics and timeframes, and consequently, the data collected by one government cannot reasonably be compared with the data collected by another. This makes legitimate benchmarking difficult. The FBC is working to make comparisons easier, leading to discussions about comparative results that are more meaningful than simply looking at one's own numbers or looking at other's numbers without understanding those other local government systems more intimately (both qualitatively and quantitatively).

SERVICE AREAS

The FBC has developed efficiency, effectiveness, and quality measures with common definitions, understandable metrics, and data collection timeframes across 12 areas of local government work. Each year, the FBC collects and publishes this information so member local governments can use it for their own benchmarking purposes.

In 2005, the FBC developed performance measures for eight local government services:

- code enforcement
- stormwater and drainage maintenance
- policing

- fire rescue
- road repair
- planning and growth management
- parks and recreation
- human resources

Four new service areas were added for the fiscal year 2007 data collection process:

- purchasing
- fleet management
- information technology
- water and wastewater

During recent citizen focus group forums, the FBC's citizen volunteers have discussed their concerns about traffic flow in their communities. As a result, the FBC's public works and engineering professionals talked about the subject and a new performance measurement category is now being developed: traffic engineering.

Each of the FBC's performance measurement service areas is led by a proven, well-respected local government professional from one of the FBC's member local government organizations. They know their fields better than budget analysts, assistant city managers, university professors, or organizational development experts can. These leaders make all the difference in the FBC's ability to determine the most important measures and the most sensible way to analyze the performance data received, and to rigorously cleanse the data each year. Examples of the types of performance measurement data the FBC generates are listed in Exhibit 1.

CONCLUSIONS

There is lots of talk about performance, including "managing with data,"

“data-driven decision making,” “benchmarking performance,” and “mining best practices.” Even though performance measurement and benchmarking practices have been around for some time, these tools remain under-developed and under-used. The time is ripe to work together, jointly learning how to employ these tools in ways that will benefit our organizations and the communities that we serve. The FBC’s leaders are always proud to share both the organization’s trials and its successes with anyone who is working to improve the services of local governments. When managing during troubled times, local government leaders need to work together — we need all the help we can get. ■

Note

1. Lawrence Martin, professor of public affairs at the University of Central Florida, “Best

Practices in Performance Benchmarking,” address to the Florida Public Personnel Association in St. Petersburg, Florida, July 29, 2008.

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Florida Benchmarking Consortium Members

- Alachua County
- Broward County
- City of Cape Coral
- City of Casselberry
- City of Clearwater
- Collier County
- City of Coral Gables
- City of Coral Springs
- Town of Davie
- City of Deltona
- City of DeLand
- City of Doral
- Escambia County
- City of Gainesville
- Hillsborough County
- City of Jacksonville Beach
- Town of Jupiter
- Keys Aqueduct Authority
- City of Lakeland
- City of Lauderhill
- Leon County
- City of Maitland
- Marion County
- Martin County
- Miami-Dade County
- City of Miami Beach
- City of Orlando
- Orange County
- Osceola County
- City of Oviedo
- City of Palm Bay
- Pinellas County
- City of Pinellas Park
- Polk County
- City of Port Orange
- City of Sanford
- Sarasota County
- Seminole County
- City of Tallahassee
- City of Tamarac
- City of Titusville
- City of Venice
- Volusia County
- City of Winter Park

Benchmarking Organizations

The field of benchmarking local government services has been developing momentum. Below is a partial listing of local government performance benchmarking organizations, along with the year established and Web address.

International City/County Management Association Center for Performance Management (1994), <http://www.icma.org/performance>

North Carolina Benchmarking Project (1995), <http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/perfmeas/>

South Carolina Municipal Benchmarking Project (1996), <http://www.ipspr.sc.edu/grs/SCMBP/SCMBP.asp>

Florida Benchmarking Consortium (2005), <http://www.flbenchmark.org/>

Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (2005), <http://www.ombi.ca/index.asp>

State of Arizona (2005), <http://www.pima.gov/cip/azstudy.htm>

International Regions Benchmarking Consortium (2005), <http://www.internationalregions.org/>

Utah Benchmarking Project (2006), <http://www.ulct.org/ulct/research/utahbenchmarking.jsp>

Michigan Local Government Benchmarking Consortium (2008), <http://web5.msue.msu.edu/slg/benchmarking/tabid/180/Default.aspx>

New England States Performance Management Project (2008), <http://www.nesgfoa.org/index.php?q=node/24>

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