

The City of Forest Park

Presentation to the City Council

City-wide Operational and Performance Audit

April 19, 2021



Presentation Description

This Presentation presents a high-level overview of the detailed Operational and Performance Audit report. The detailed report should be read in its entirety to better understand the context for the identified observations and recommendations.

The following sections are provided in this Presentation:

- Overview and Background
- Scope and Approach
- Employee Survey Results
- Overview of Operational and Performance Audit Observations and Recommendations
- Conclusion
- Strategic Roadmap and Next Steps



Overview and Background

The City has experienced significant turnover in recent years with its elected positions, the City Manager position, and numerous department heads. The average tenure of current department heads serving in their current role is approximately 9 months. As there is now a paradigm of newer personnel in City leadership positions bringing new ideas and methods to the City, there is a constant struggle with making and implementing positive change and not just operating in the same manner as the City has historically operated for decades. Many of the City's non-executive positions are filled with employees who have created lengthy careers for themselves at the City.

As part of the direction of new/newer City leadership, the City sought to conduct an Operational and Performance Audit of the City's operations, performance, and culture. We commend City leadership for taking the proactive initiative to have an objective assessment performed, which has identified strengths and opportunities for improvement throughout the City. We also would like to recognize the numerous City employees throughout all departments and across all position levels who gave their time conducting interviews, providing requested information, and participating in an anonymous operations and culture survey.

Overview and Background

The Operational and Performance Audit is the first step in a long transformation journey that provides an overview of the City's current state related to operations, performance, and culture. Our final report identifies numerous recommendations and provides a Roadmap that should be leveraged to help the City reach its goal of "operational excellence". Implementing positive change is never easy, but by leveraging the City's greatest asset – its employees, and by clearly articulating and communicating the rationale and benefits of the desired change, we are confident that the City can successfully transform its operations and continue to provide quality services to the citizens and stakeholders of Forest Park.

"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." – Socrates

Scope and Approach

The scope of the Operational and Performance Audit was to:

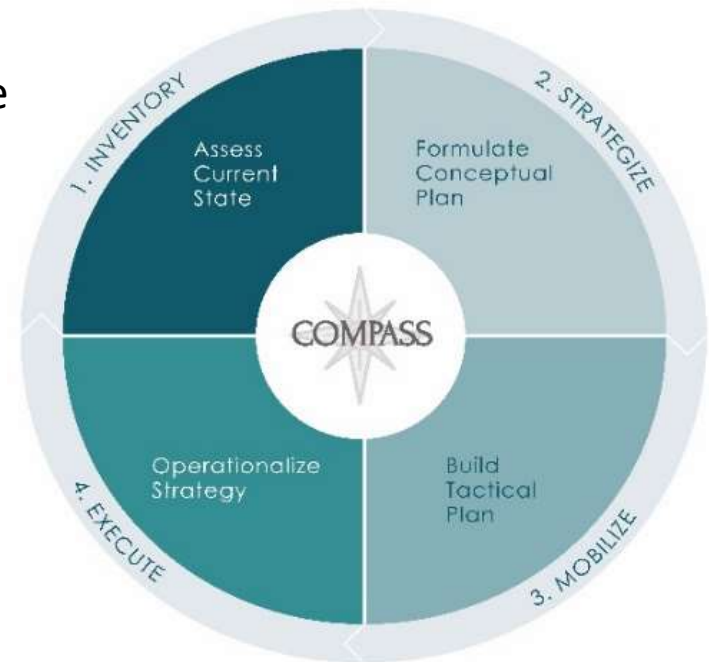
- Understand and document the City's current state for City departments and boards which includes the City's:
 - Operating environment
 - Operating model
 - Organizational structures
 - Key workflow and business processes
 - Identification of “what is working well”, “what needs improvement”, and “areas for potential risk concern”
- Compare City operations to leading practices
- Identify areas that are performing well to replicate throughout the City and areas for improvement
- Develop meaningful recommendations to improve/enhance City operations
- Develop a Strategic Roadmap for implementation of recommendations

Scope and Approach

Audit goals included the following:

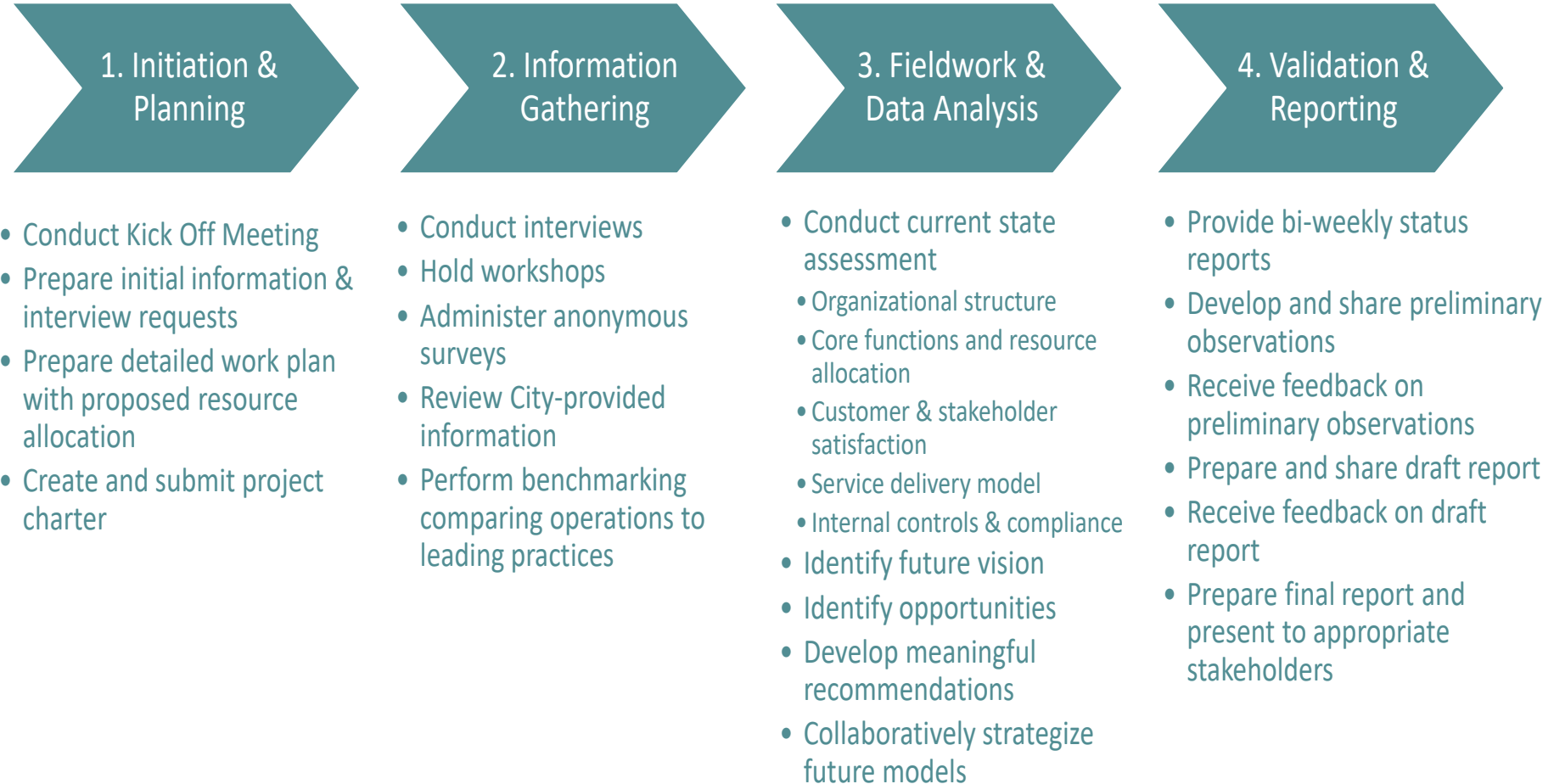
- Enhance City operations and service delivery models to optimize efficiency and effectiveness
- Assess the City's recent centralization and optimization of the procurement function
- Reduce risk and maintain compliance
- Strengthen internal controls, policies and proce
- Increase transparency and accountability
- Enhance customer service

Our approach for the Operational and Performance Audit was based on Mauldin & Jenkins' proprietary transformation methodology – COMPASS.



Scope and Approach

We developed a workplan for the Audit which consisted of the following four phases:



Scope and Approach

As part of the Operational and Performance Audit, we performed the following key tasks to aid us in formulating our observations and recommendations:

- Requested and reviewed significant amounts of data and information such as:
 - Organization charts
 - Governing documents
 - Policies and procedures
 - Financial information
 - Contracts
 - Performance data
 - Other relevant information
- Conducted more than 70 interviews with all department heads, and key management and front-line delivery personnel
- Conducted an anonymous operational/culture survey open to all City employees (hardcopies of the survey were also provided to those departments without direct access to computers for all employees)
- Attended multiple City Board meetings
- Delivered bi-weekly status reports throughout the engagement and met with the Mayor on a weekly basis to provide updates

Employee Survey Results

As part of the City-wide Operational and Performance Audit, a survey was conducted to provide a mechanism to receive open and honest feedback from City employees related to City operations, service delivery, organization, and culture. The survey was anonymous and individual responses have been kept confidential by Mauldin & Jenkins. The survey was conducted electronically allowing only single responses from unique email addresses. In addition, hardcopies of the survey were provided to departments where employee access to a computer is limited.

83 responses were received (66 electronic and 17 hardcopy), representing an approximate response rate of 33%. Generally, a response rate of more than 20% is considered a positive response rate.

Employee Survey Results

The feedback from the survey demonstrated many common perceptions, both positive and negative. Even if the common perceptions were to be determined to be untrue, it is important to note that employees who have negative perceptions about their job or work environment typically are not motivated, high performers, and negatively impact the overall culture of the organization. It is also important to understand why certain employees maintain certain negative perceptions so that common understandings can be achieved, and if necessary, behaviors altered.

From the results of the survey and conducting more than 70 interviews, a general commonality to the average City of Forest Park employee is that “they are afraid to fail”. They are afraid of losing their jobs due to political influence, taking a risk to try something new, or being responsible for a failed action or activity.

In order for the City to create a high-performing culture with more positive morale, employees must feel secure in their job (based on reasonable expectations and standards); believe that their voice matters; and that there is a sense of reward/recognition for innovation, “thinking outside the box”, and willingness to not just perform business as usual because “this is the way we have always done it”.

Employee Survey Results

This commonality is derived from the perception that there is insufficient communication, transparency, and accountability which led to perceptions of inconsistent treatment of employees, favoritism, not having a voice, not understanding organizational/departmental objectives and goals, and not understanding how decisions are made.

“Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly”. – Robert F. Kennedy

Overview of Operational and Performance Audit Observations and Recommendations

As described in the detailed final report, we have identified many strengths and leading practices, as well as numerous observations and corresponding recommendations for improvement. More than 100 recommendations are provided in the detailed report which focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of City operations, work environment, and customer service. Common themes that the recommendations are designed to enhance include:

- Business processes and workflow
- Organizational structures
- Inter-City working relationships
- Policies and procedures
- Technology
- Governance
- Performance measurement (for City operations and employees)
- Accountability
- Communications
- Transparency
- Training/Cross-training

Conclusion

We commend the leadership of the City of Forest Park for commencing this Operational and Performance Audit as this process has been in-depth and brought to light the positive accomplishments of the City, and the opportunities for improvement needed to achieve operational excellence.

The City is operating efficiently in many ways, but also has many opportunities to improve. The City has experienced significant recent (within the past three years) turnover in key positions such as elected officials, the City Manager, and numerous department heads. Recent turnover in leadership represents a pivotal point for the City, as leadership can continue down the same path as prior leaders and “do business as usual”, or can leverage this report and its recommendations to make substantial positive change for the City of Forest Park, its employees, its citizens, and its stakeholders.

As provided in the detailed Operational and Performance Audit report, the City now has an understanding of its current state, and a roadmap to continuously improve into the future. Now the real challenge is here – implementing the report’s recommendations and systematically enhancing the City’s operations, employee culture, and work environment.

With dedicated attention and resources, the City can implement the report’s recommendations effectively enhancing operations, customer service, and enabling the City of Forest Park to be “an employer of choice”.

Strategic Roadmap and Next Steps

Our detailed final report provides more than 100 recommendations. The recommendations are categorized by applicable owner (enterprise-wide or single department/organization), are assigned a prioritization level for implementation, and include a typical timeframe for implementation. The detailed report should be read in its entirety to better understand the context for the identified observations and recommendations.

The City should dedicate resources and engage external specialists where needed to assist with implementation. The City should also create a Program Management Office to oversee the transformation with periodic (at least monthly) progress reports being presented to the Mayor, City Manager, and City Council.

“Tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there “is” such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action”. – Martin Luther

King Jr.