

Strategic Direction 2023: Progress on Economic Opportunity and Affordability Outcome



Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine if the City effectively developed and implemented Strategic Direction 2023 (SD23) to measure progress towards the Economic Opportunity and Affordability (EOA) outcome.

Background

The City began a multi-stage strategic planning process that resulted in adoption of Strategic Direction 2023 (SD23) on March 8, 2018. This strategic direction was intended to guide the City's efforts over the next five years and outlined key ways to advance equitable outcomes across Austin.

The SD23 plan contains some key elements of best practices for strategic planning, including a mission statement that is adopted from Imagine Austin, and challenge statements that are evidence-based reviews of critical issues facing the Austin community. The Economic Opportunity and Affordability (EOA) outcome is one of six outcomes named in the plan and defined as "having economic opportunities and resources that enable us to thrive in our community."

What We Found

Finding 1 - The City did not effectively create and use performance measures as tools for measuring progress towards the Economic Opportunity and Affordability outcome.

The Government Finance Officer's Association (GFOA) recommends that performance measures should be useful, relevant, and reliable. However, the City of Austin did not effectively develop measurable objectives and incorporate useful performance measures. There are several reasons why performance measures were not effective.



More than half of all EOA performance measures are "community indicators," which are broad community statistics and not ideally suited to serve as performance measures.

Nearly half of all EOA performance measures did not have an associated target and therefore do not provide vital information about the progress the City has made towards its established outcome.



Timeliness - 60% of measures displayed data from a period that was older than the most recently completed fiscal year or did not display which period the data covered.

Third-party Data - Some performance measures presented data that does not align with the US Census recommended guidance.

While SD23 mentions a commitment to measuring equity, less than a quarter of EOA performance measures can be segmented by key equity related characteristics to understand progress through an equity lens.



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What We Found, Continued

Exhibit 1: The Government Finance Officer's Association (GFOA) recommends organizations include 13 key elements in their strategic planning efforts.

1. Initiate the Strategic Planning Process
2. Prepare a Mission Statement
3. Assess Environmental Factors
4. Identify Critical Issues
5. Agree on a Small Number of Broad Goals
6. Develop Strategies to Achieve Broad Goals
7. Create an Action Plan
8. Develop Measurable Objectives
9. Incorporate Performance Measures
10. Obtain Approval of the Plan
11. Implement the Plan
12. Monitor Progress
13. Reassess the Strategic Plan

Green boxes represent best practice elements followed by the City
Orange boxes represent best practice elements that the City had issues executing and are discussed in Findings 1 & 2

Finding 2 - The City's delay in implementing SD23 and the lack of formal monitoring limited its ability to assess and report progress towards the Economic Opportunity and Affordability outcome.
The GFOA recommends that organizations should promptly implement key elements of a strategic plan (Steps 7 & 11 in Exhibit 1) and monitor the results of the related strategic efforts (Step 12 in Exhibit 1).

The SD23 strategic plan and performance measures were adopted on March 8, 2018. However, it wasn't until January 2021 that the Strategic Performance Dashboard was up and working



The City did not regularly perform formal monitoring of strategic plan progress

What We Recommend

1. Work to discontinue or retool the use of "Community Indicators" strategic performance measures
2. Redesign and maintain strategic performance measures so they have targets, can be updated, include equity concepts, and follow recommended guidance
3. Develop a plan to periodically provide updates on the progress of strategic plan outcomes to the public and City stakeholders.