
Preserving Housing: A Best Practices Review

A CHECKLIST FOR MEASURING PERFORMANCE

This checklist contains performance measures that cities and local housing organizations may use to evaluate their housing preservation efforts. We used some of these measures as the basis for developing questions for our two surveys and to develop a model of best practices. The measures also enabled us to identify cities and housing organizations with best practices in preserving housing.

The next section discusses the importance of measuring performance in preserving housing. After that, we list some of the performance measures identified during the study. We present them in a checklist format for cities and housing organizations that want to assess their performance. Although we specifically discuss “cities” below, the information applies to other local housing organizations as well.

THE VALUE OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Performance measures help cities determine whether they are meeting their goals of preserving housing and how well they are accomplishing their objectives. Assessing performance entails collecting and analyzing data on impact, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of housing preservation activities.

Performance data enable cities to make informed decisions about modifying or enhancing their housing preservation strategies. For example, trend data on the percentage of housing units that are substandard, the number of housing units rehabilitated, the level of unmet housing rehabilitation needs, and program costs, for example, can help a city determine how well it is meeting its objective of improving its existing housing stock. Trend data can also help cities plan strategically for their community’s future housing needs.

Even though performance measurement seeks to improve cost-effectiveness in preserving housing, measuring performance has costs of its own. Resources are needed to measure performance, which requires local policymakers’ support. Each step in performance measurement—identifying goals and objectives, deciding on benchmarks to measure performance, recording the necessary data, and analyzing the data—requires an investment of resources in the form of personnel time as well as data-collection tools. Furthermore, performance measurement is not a one-time occurrence. Performance measurement is most helpful when it is conducted periodically, allowing comparisons over time.

Defining a Mission, Goals, Objectives, and Measures

To the extent a city has followed the best practices recommended in this report, it will have identified its mission in preserving housing and the goals and objectives of its housing programs during the process of thinking strategically about housing. Such a city can move directly to identifying measures and collecting data to assess its performance.

However, if cities already have housing programs in place and want to evaluate them, they should first identify their overall mission in preserving housing. The mission describes the fundamental purposes of housing preservation, such as ensuring all residents have access to adequate housing. The mission is the foundation upon which goals, objectives, and performance measures are based.

After defining the mission, cities or local housing organizations should set goals for preserving housing. Broad goal statements delineate what a city intends to achieve with its housing programs, such as maximizing the value of housing units as economic assets of the community. When developing housing preservation goals, cities may want to consider the four goals that are listed at the beginning of Chapter 2.

Identifying their housing preservation mission and goals will help cities create program objectives. Objectives are directly related to the mission and goals, but they are more specific. They establish the specific housing preservation activities a jurisdiction aims to accomplish and by when. For example, an objective might be to reduce the number of boarded-up housing units within two years.

Performance measures quantify the extent to which a city is meeting its objectives. There are four types of measures: outputs, outcomes, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. Output measures quantify the amount of services provided. For example, in connection with the objective to lower the number of boarded-up housing units, an output measure is the number of boarded-up housing units removed from a city's housing stock. Outcome measures quantify the results of the services. A measure of outcomes related to the boarded-up housing objective might be residents' improved perceptions of the cities' housing. Efficiency measures quantify the costs of providing services, and are based on dollars, personnel, or time. An efficiency measure of this housing objective is the number of boarded-up units either abolished or returned to service per dollar expended. Cost-effectiveness measures quantify the costs associated with achieving desirable results. A measure of cost-effectiveness is the dollars spent for the improvement in resident perceptions.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR PRESERVING HOUSING

To identify performance measures for evaluating housing preservation strategies, we read reports from cities throughout the United States and various housing

publications, and we interviewed several housing organizations in Minnesota. In the following checklist, we converted the performance measures to “yes or no” questions to make it easier for cities to conduct a self-assessment. The measures are presented in an order that corresponds with the best practices recommended in Chapter 2.

The following checklist is by no means exhaustive. Cities could track many other measures to evaluate their housing programs. Cities may choose to supplement the measures listed here with additional measures related to their own specific objectives. Even though each measure appears below only once, some measures may apply to more than one practice. For example, tracking the number of code violations voluntarily resolved as a percentage of all identified code violations applies to administering both local housing-related codes and the State Building Code.

Checklist of Performance Measures

Determine housing needs (p. 31 in Chapter 2)

The following performance measures pertain to the best practices for identifying housing needs: collecting and analyzing information in the context of long-range planning and strategic thinking.

	Yes	No
A. Has the city assessed the overall number, age, condition, and appearance of housing units?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Has the city identified the substandard housing units in its jurisdiction, by owner-occupied and rental units if appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Has the city determined the percentage of the housing stock that is boarded up or abandoned?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Does the city monitor the percentage of condemned (for health and safety reasons) housing units in its jurisdiction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Has the city analyzed the neighborhoods in its jurisdiction to learn what is encouraging or discouraging private investment in existing housing (including data on the history, property conditions and values, housing needs, housing policies and programs, and real estate market)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Has the city assessed whether local ordinances and policies are hindering private investment in housing preservation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Has the city identified its housing needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Has the city set priorities among its identified housing needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
I. Has the city assessed residents' satisfaction with the residential property conditions in the community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J. Does the city have a comprehensive strategic plan with a housing component that (1) specifies the role housing preservation will play in achieving broader housing objectives and (2) identifies the impact of other community factors on housing preservation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K. Do local leaders view housing as one piece of a larger picture on community development?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
L. Has the city considered how changes in its demographic makeup will affect its housing needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Determine appropriate responses (p. 37 in Chapter 2)

The following performance measures gauge a city's progress in setting housing objectives, evaluating their feasibility, and selecting appropriate responses for meeting housing needs. They also apply to nurturing local leaders' support and planning for public infrastructure investments.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
A. Have local leaders set housing goals for the city, including goals for preserving housing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Have staff identified a wide range of possible strategies to meet the city's housing goals and considered the appropriateness of those responses given local circumstances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Has the city weighed the need for direct public interventions against that for indirect incentives to encourage private sector activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Has the city estimated the ongoing costs of the different strategies and assessed its ability to implement them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Has the city set implementation plans for the housing strategies it adopts?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Does the city make strategic and ongoing investments in community infrastructure (e.g., streets, sewers, sidewalks)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Has the city considered the political feasibility of its potential responses and engaged local leaders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Administer housing-related codes (p. 43 in Chapter 2)

These questions will help cities with local housing-related codes measure how well they facilitate voluntary compliance with their local code requirements and

ensure consistent enforcement. They also address having a variety of enforcement options and targeting enforcement resources.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
A. Does the city track the number and types of constituent complaints regarding property maintenance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Are the requirements of, and standards in, local housing-related codes easily accessible to property owners who are subject to the codes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Does the city track the number of housing units inspected for code violations as a percentage of all housing units (and track rental units separately as needed)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Has the city created a range of enforcement strategies for code enforcement, including incentives for early compliance and increasingly severe sanctions for continued noncompliance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Is an acceptable percentage of code violations resolved through voluntary compliance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Has the city established targets for the amount of time that should pass between when a complaint is filed and when an inspection is conducted? Does the city monitor the degree to which it meets the target?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Has the city established timeframes within which violations should be resolved, and does it monitor the degree to which the timeframes are met?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Does the city have written policies and procedures to guide staff in areas such as the standard to which properties should be inspected, what type of enforcement action to pursue, and when to escalate enforcement action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I. Does the city target its housing inspection programs if it has insufficient resources to inspect all housing units?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J. Does the city measure the efficiency of its enforcement activities, such as by monitoring the number of hours spent per inspection and the number of inspections per total staff (including administrative staff people), distinguishing among types of inspections as appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K. Does the city measure the outcomes of its enforcement activities, such as by monitoring the percentage of inspections resulting in identified code violations and the percentage with violations that are brought into compliance with code requirements, distinguishing among types of inspections and violations as appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| L. Does the city measure the cost-effectiveness of its enforcement activities, such as by monitoring the number of agency person-hours spent on code violations brought into substantial compliance or the median number of reinspections conducted before compliance is achieved, distinguishing among types of violations as appropriate? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| M. Has the incidence of homeowner property insurance claims due to fire or water hazards declined? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Administer the State Building Code to support housing preservation
(p. 52 in Chapter 2)**

For cities that have adopted the State Building Code, the measures below help to evaluate the extent to which they appropriately administer the code. The measures involve whether the building official publicizes code requirements, has streamlined the permit process, offers technical assistance, and considers compliance alternatives that meet the intent of the building code. Consistency in applying the code is also addressed.

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Does the city have handouts that clarify building code requirements for different types of work on existing buildings? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Does the building official offer information to make contractors aware of requirements of the building code and acceptable compliance alternatives for work on existing buildings? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Does the building official offer preplan reviews for interested clients and log the number of plan reviews performed? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Does the building official have checklists to perform plan reviews and inspections consistently? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. Does the building official consider compliance alternatives that meet the intent of the code when needed for work on existing buildings? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| F. Does the building official periodically review staff work to monitor consistent application of building code requirements and use of compliance alternatives that meet the code's intent? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| G. Has the building official established timeframes within which to complete plan reviews and issue building permits? Does the official monitor the building office's success in meeting the timeframes? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
H. Has the building official established simplified and expedited permit application processes for routine work on existing buildings (e.g., projects that do not require plan reviews)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I. When the building official or building inspectors review each others' work, is a high proportion of plan reviews and inspections found to be thorough and consistent in applying code requirements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J. Does the building official measure the outcomes of providing information and technical assistance by, for example, keeping track of the volume of questions the building office receives or the number of building-code violation notices it issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K. Is a large percentage of code violations corrected through voluntary compliance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
L. Are follow-up inspections completed on a timely basis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Provide access to financial assistance (p. 61 in Chapter 2)

These measures gauge a city's ability to provide access to financial assistance for rehabilitation by forming partnerships with other agencies, developing its own capacity to administer financing programs, managing rehabilitation risks, and identifying prospective clients.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
A. Has the city assessed whether it has the capacity to award financial assistance for housing preservation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Has the city explored partnerships with other organizations that have housing expertise?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Does the city maintain a database containing the number of applications reviewed and processed (for each finance program)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Does the city provide application assistance (e.g., answering inquiries, providing preliminary inspection) to potentially qualified applicants within a reasonable number of working days?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Is a high percentage of units rehabilitated within a reasonable time between application for assistance and completion of the work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Is the city satisfied with the level of private funding or in-kind services that is leveraged by public dollars, distinguishing between owner-occupied and other types of units as appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
G. Does the city monitor the percentage of scheduled loan repayments made on time and loan default rates? Are these measures at acceptable levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Does the city have a system for determining client eligibility for the various housing financial assistance programs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I. Does the city have in place a system to monitor project plans to ensure compliance with program requirements (e.g. correcting health and safety hazards)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J. Does the city conduct on-site monitoring following rehab work (to determine whether work was satisfactorily completed and conduct follow-up activities)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K. Does the city control the risks of rehab projects such as through initial inspections to identify needed work and payments to contractors after work is completed satisfactorily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
L. Does the city measure its programs' outputs, such as tracking the number of clients served and the size and number of grants and loans, distinguishing among types of housing and assistance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
M. Does the city measure program efficiency, such as the average number of hours spent per reviewed application?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
N. Does the city measure outcomes of financing programs, such as percentage of targeted housing units receiving full rehabilitation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
O. Does the city measure the cost-effectiveness of its programs, such as by monitoring the amount of public dollars and total dollars spent per rehabbed unit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P. Do staff collect and analyze housing information to determine whether there is a need for the financial assistance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q. Is customer satisfaction with staff competence and courtesy at a high level?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
R. Is the city able to identify potential clients for the housing assistance programs? Has it established a means to communicate with them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Offer access to information (p. 67 in Chapter 2)

The measures below help evaluate how cities provide housing preservation information and expertise.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
A. Have city staff explored partnerships with planners, funders, nonprofits, social service agencies, and/or coalitions with nearby jurisdictions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Have staff identified how housing information needs differ for different constituents (or prospective clients)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Is housing-related information available in a variety of ways, such as hard copies of written materials, on-line postings, in-person consultations at housing fairs, or cable television?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Does the city measure the outputs of its housing information programs, such as the number of people to whom the city distributed written housing preservation information, the number of people receiving a visit from a rehab specialist, the number of technical assistance seminars or workshops conducted, or the number of people successfully completing seminars or workshops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Does the city track the efficiency of its information activities, such as measuring public dollars and total dollars spent per person completing housing-information workshops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Does the city measure the outcomes of its information activities such as the percentage of housing preservation projects undertaken by people receiving housing information?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Does a large percentage of clients rate highly the housing information they received?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Does a high percentage of clients rate highly the knowledge and ability of program staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I. Do clients rate the length of time they participated in an initiative as appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Offer access to direct housing preservation services (p. 72 in Chapter 2)

These measures relate to a city's decision to ensure that housing repair and rehabilitation services are available to its residents.

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Is a high percentage of rehabilitated units sold or rented within a reasonable time from their purchase? Do the new owners or renters of rehabilitated units maintain them? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Do staff document program inputs, such as the number of hours spent (including administrative time) by program? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Do staff monitor program outputs, such as tracking the number of projects completed (e.g., repairs, septic tanks pumped, fences erected) or the number of housing units it has purchased, rehabilitated, and sold or rented within the jurisdiction? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Do staff track the efficiency of their services, such as the number of clients served per staff person or the number of rehabbed units per staff person? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. Do staff track the outcomes of repair or rehabilitation projects, such as increasing the percentage of deficient housing units receiving comprehensive weatherization? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Evaluate housing strategies (p. 74 in Chapter 2)

The measures a city uses to evaluate its housing strategies will relate directly to the goals the city has set. The following measures relate to the goals identified in Chapter 2.

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. In cities with local housing-related codes, is an increasing percentage of housing in the city compliant with local code requirements? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Does the city measure how well its housing strategies meet its housing goals? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Can the city detect changes in individual property values as determined by assessors' estimated market values of improvements? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Are elected leaders and staff receiving fewer complaints about the city's housing or has a survey shown improved resident satisfaction with the condition of the city's housing? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. Are government housing programs creating "spin-off investment" or additional residential investments? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
F. Has the city improved the diversity of its housing stock, allowing it to retain households that might have otherwise moved and attract new households to the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Is the city's residential property tax base sound?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Has the percentage of the city's housing stock that is boarded up or abandoned declined?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I. Does the city have a low incidence of substandard housing units, owner-occupied and other, in its jurisdiction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J. Has the overall appearance of housing in a city's jurisdiction improved?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K. Are clients surveyed to determine their overall satisfaction with the city's housing programs or services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
L. Are the measures suggested in earlier sections showing satisfactory progress toward meeting the city's housing goals and objectives for existing housing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>