

Biographical sketch

Janet Anderson is a professed urbanist. She was awarded a PhD in Policy Analysis from the University of Maryland in 1995, has been employed for fifteen years by the city of Detroit Budget Department as Manager of Policy Analysis, and has provided pro bono work for numerous local civic causes. A lifelong Detroiter, she volunteered for the city of Detroit Charter Revision Commission (1994-1996), authored “Island in the City: Belle Isle, Detroit’s Beautiful Island” (2001), and is an Adjunct Professor of Geography and Planning at Wayne State University. Contact her at the city of Detroit Budget Department, 1100 Coleman A Young Municipal Center (Detroit, MI 48226), at 313-224-3879, or at Jan@budget.ci.detroit.mi.us

Abstract

With ever more pressure on government to manage for results, budget development requires more clarity about your jurisdiction’s service responsibilities, the makeup of programs and operations involved in carrying them out, and the design of business processes within these operations. A policy analyst can bring a variety of important skill sets to a budget office: ability to design planning processes, identify which study tool to use for given problems, sort through statistical and other information, facilitate decision making and project management, and subject matter expertise. You may seek this training for your budget analyst positions, or create a policy analyst function in your office.

Note to Budget Professionals: Policy Analysts Support Policy and Operational Decision-making

Citizens continue to expect more public services with the same if not fewer resources, so public sector professionals everywhere are increasingly managing for results. This emphasis requires of the budget process more intensive service delivery analysis, and more versatility in sorting increasing, often competing, volumes of information from stakeholders. A policy analyst is trained in a variety of methods to gather, synthesize and communicate evidence, and provides a skill set that is very supportive of these growing requirements.

The managing for results movement brings a comprehensive perspective to policy and operations issues. This includes processes to clarify a jurisdiction’s overall service responsibilities, to constitute programs and operations involved in carrying out responsibilities, and to analyze and redesign business processes within these operations. All of these tasks affect, and are affected by, budgets. All are within the policy analyst’s skill set.

Activities that connect results management to budgets include: strategic planning, policy design, organizational assessments, program design and evaluation, business process improvement and reengineering, performance measurement, and reporting. Some jurisdictions house these analytical functions in independent agencies, most appear to accomplish them ad hoc – such as through consulting contracts, or in operating agency units – if at all.¹ For most of my fifteen years in the city of Detroit Budget Department, I have been responsible for integrating these activities into our resource planning processes. I do so with a Doctorate in Policy Analysis from the University of Maryland, specializing in urban affairs.

The city of Detroit Charter establishes separate budget and finance departments, and a “management audit” function in the Budget Department, to analyze and evaluate the operations

of all city agencies. Starting my career in the midst of one of the city's periodic fiscal crises – wondering what kind of changes could the city administration make to address and prevent downturns, and why the city service record could not be improved even when times were good – I took an education leave to study policy analysis so that I could perform this function.²

The Policy Analyst's Toolbox

A policy analyst in an old school bureaucracy like the city of Detroit government needs a lot of introduction. In retrospect, there have been five ways that my training in this field supported the city of Detroit's resource planning activities:

1. Setting up Planning Processes

A policy analyst is a voice for planning, with the ability to structure a process for those decisions that need to occur on a regular basis, with some standardization, or in coordination among numerous actors. These general steps need to be reflected in the process that is designed:

- Assessment of current conditions, assets and operating constraints
- Method of setting target benchmarks or measures of success, including roles for all actors
- Information-gathering projecting different asset or operational scenarios
- Formalized decision: clearly stated, with all its implications, and broadly communicated
- Feedback mechanisms to translate prior year decisions into improved decisions

Given the cyclical nature of Detroit's fiscal condition, the Budget Department has needed priority-setting mechanisms that strategic planning could best provide. Several years ago, I suggested an environmental scan tool that compiled constraints, opportunities and initiatives that policymakers would have to address to continue providing expected city services. Each city agency completed a matrix projecting demand for their services, staffing and equipment needs over a 5-year horizon, and the results detailed escalating overhead costs and changing service demands.

Not surprisingly, the Budget Department began to project its current structural budget problem around this time, in which General Fund expenditures were 25% greater than some \$1.2 billion in projected revenues starting in fiscal year 2002-03. With a planning orientation, my response was to devise numerous components of the baseline assessment, and to develop a method for criteria-setting for services.

In addition to standard baseline financial information – trends in expenditures by function and type, revenue histories and models – I benchmarked unusual city of Detroit services (Exhibit 3). In the 2005 budget year, even after cutbacks, this matrix showed some \$135 million in operating costs for functions typically paid for regionally rather than through a municipal general fund (ex: public transportation, convention center, tourist facilities). There were \$89 million more in activities atypical to local governments (ex: ombudsman, consumer and human rights advocacy).

To develop a method of criteria-setting important to any planning process, I reviewed the reports of special city fiscal committees dating back to 1957, fiscal initiatives of peer cities, and benchmarking studies.³ I sorted all of the proposed budget reforms into categories: regional approaches; nonprofit partnerships; privatization; contracting out or outsourcing of activities; organizational consolidation; service reduction or consolidation. It took several rounds of

discussion, including a special committee of major business and institutional leaders, but these categories are becoming the criteria guiding the city's restructuring efforts. For example, the city recently completed operating agreements with the nonprofit societies supporting its Historical Museum and Zoological Institute, consistent with national trends in the cultural services area.

When the Budget Department tried to implement a new Charter requirement of public meetings at the start of the annual budget process, it did so in the spirit of the requirement to measure citizen opinions. I proposed that we integrate the meetings into a larger citizen survey process to plan out budget priorities. The citizen survey asks (1) to rank overall city functions (2) to allocate in each of the six major departments \$10 among their respective services (3) to allocate a budget across the city's departments and (4) to provide substantive comments about services "in your neighborhood."

As an open meeting, the sample will not be based on the kind of random representative participation that permits conclusive findings about the citizenry as a whole. So I stratified the sample to make possible some insight into different constituent group opinions. The meetings involve electronic tabulation of citizen responses. Staff also administer the survey in high school classes, make an on-line form available on the city website, and send a prepaid return mailer to 3800 known community organizations citywide. This survey process occurs every fall from September 1 through November 1 (before agency budget requests are due).⁴

Other examples of planning processes include: agency fleet planning to support creation of an internal service fund; agency risk management assessments to support risk management controls. The perspective of the policy analyst caused clarity of decision-making roles, reporting requirements and hearing processes.

2. Knowing Which Study Tool to Use for Given Problems

The key to getting answers is asking the right question. This is the heart of any research methodology, and the overriding challenge of all political personnel.

Struggling with an immense illegal dumping problem, the city of Detroit rolled out an initiative decriminalizing quality of life violations so that violators could be assessed costs rather than receive suspended sentences by an overburdened criminal system. The theory is that civil proceedings would be a harsher deterrent than criminal court, and illegal dumping was the first area adjudicated by a newly-created "Blight Court" in 2004. With municipal control of the court, 100% of fines revenues could be appropriated. The numbers caught everyone's attention, executive and legislative, and the program was expanded to include inadequate property maintenance and zoning abuses even before processes were fully rolled out.

In order to inform decisions about expanding this initiative, a program evaluation was in order, so that the efficacy of the underlying theory could be tested. Would this type of ticket impact violator behavior more than criminal charges, or would violators be more likely to escape penalty either because they had no money or assets to attach, or because their address of record couldn't be found? An evaluation measures impacts of program inputs and outputs, rather than simply observing efforts, so focus groups of citizens and violators, and windshield surveys of target neighborhood areas, would augment courtroom observation and audits of inspectors' case

processing.

Without understanding the profile of violators – the reasons that different types of offenses are committed, what they need to stop committing them – it wasn't clear what types of offenses could be better controlled. Or frankly, what cost-benefit experience they will ultimately produce. As a high profile initiative, implementing agencies to date have been very reluctant to participate in an evaluation, fearing excess scrutiny or – maybe worse – having to adapt to further sweeping change in standard operating procedures.

In another situation, officials sought a travel agent for better control as well as expedience in city employee travel. I audited existing travel records to compile measurements of current operations, so that implementation could address underlying issues: the turnaround times at each step of the travel approval process; the incidence of proper expense reconciliation; average costs per ticket by types of destinations. The audit revealed the need for redesign of the travel approval process and further clarity of travel policies, and it supplied the travel agent with information with which to negotiate carrier deals on the city's behalf.

Other examples of methods issues in which a policy analyst is versed include: what and who to benchmark; when to audit an operation or map a business process in order to change staffing of it; when an organizational chart should be analyzed before a budget change is made; what kind of performance measures are needed.

3. Sufficient Grasp of Statistics and Other Data-gathering to Know Their Applicability

Statistics refers to the manipulation of data. A vast array of data is easily accessed in this information age. Use of data in decision-making should center on the method of its collection. Primary data is actually observed or collected firsthand, secondary data relies on another source and its methods need to be considered. Training in policy analysis includes such applied statistics: knowing if the right dataset is compiled, and the right statistic is requested.

Early in a new Mayoral Administration, statistics became an issue when an eager new appointee decided to produce a document graphing a 100% increase in the city of Detroit population in an eight-year period. His wanted to increase optimism about development in the city, which has been documented in new housing and downtown business starts since the mid-1990s. This document was produced at the same time that finance officials were getting the message of retrenchment to employee unions and the city council. I provided references to our local Council of Government population projections showing continued decline, to current U.S. Census growth rates in growing cities, and to the period of Detroit's greatest boom where the explosion of the auto industry yielded a lesser increase.

A census is a complete count of every unit of concern, whereas a survey involves a sampling of some subset. That makes census data an inherently more accurate reflection of a population than survey data (or housing starts), if equally reliable in execution. For surveys, what was the sampling process, and what is the confidence interval (the "+ or -") around the findings?

Further, a trend analysis assumes that the variables that have driven a number will continue as they have been, whereas a forecast makes assumptions about how each variable will change moving forward. Different statistics tell different stories, and are subject to different limitations.

This issue comes up frequently in conjunction with program performance measurement. Some analysis is required to understand what the numbers are really saying, and how they really relate to the budget.

4. Ability to Facilitate Decision-making and Project Management

Decision-making is all about roles and processes: who has the authority, on whom do they rely for information, what steps occur in the gathering and communication of that information, what points of contingency or discretion will occur in implementation. Some of the skills of the policy analyst include: knowledge of legal and institutional structures and of decision making models, sensitivity to consensus building, a knack for identifying criteria or guiding principles.

A few years before the blight violations initiative, there was a renewed focus on the city's inspection activities. The 1996 city charter revisions created a Department of Environmental Affairs, before anyone really figured out what it was supposed to do. With thirteen different types of inspections occurring out of seven different departments (listed in Exhibit 4), it was clear that some duplication of effort was occurring alongside citizen dissatisfaction with multiple simultaneous and redundant inspections. What would be the most effective division of labor?

I developed an inventory of city services having environmental impacts, in order to sort out current tasks and staff responsibilities. Health department environmental inspections were intertwined with numerous small community-based programs, oriented to prevention through partnerships. The public works department, with responsibility for physically maintaining public land, was overwhelmed with vacant lots and used their inspectors to track grass cutting and other activities (billing for cuttings; issuing commercial refuse containers; rodent baiting; community outreach; snow and ice hazard enforcement). The new department, freshly armed with a charter mandate and strong concern about illegal dumping, would bring an enforcement mentality.

The proper location of these inspectors depended on the priorities of the Administration – prevention, cleanup, or getting tough on crime. They chose a get-tough approach, and with the exception of rodent control baiting, the inspection functions were reassigned to the new environmental department.

5. Subject Matter Expertise

Health care and transportation are probably more common than local government specialties in the policy analysis discipline. But almost every subject matter expertise can be found: economic development, solid waste handling, energy and utilities, housing, education, corrections.

I am also an historian of big cities, so I brought to the city of Detroit an understanding of the evolution of administrative structures and processes between local, county, state and other governmental actors. This meant I could see what of the current service mix were not always city responsibilities, how city service delivery approaches have changed, and how the service delivery environment has changed. It also provides a solid basis for benchmarking studies.

A Policy Analyst Understands Service Delivery and Policymaking

Budget professionals can't rely solely on recommendations brought to them by agencies or other

stakeholders. Do agencies have narrower agendas than the global concerns of balancing the jurisdiction's budget? Does their vested interest compromise their recommendations? Are budget professionals in a position to evaluate the method behind their research? Is the research produced in an auditor's or other independent office tailored to budget-oriented issues?

The policy analyst brings to the budget process the insights of academia without its stringent standards of generalizability or theoretical completeness. The field of policy analysis centers on service delivery and public policy making models shown in Exhibit 1. The public policy making model is part and parcel of accurately defining service or policy challenges, formulating options for approaching them, facilitating decision making, and evaluating results of these decisions. Implementing the decisions can involve a service delivery model reflecting assumptions about the problem and the operating environment, captured in the budget. The better are measured these assumptions and conditions, the better the recipe or formula for achieving goals is understood, and feedback to the larger process is provided.

Service delivery analysis dates back a century in the public administration field.⁵ Public administrators no longer accept a dichotomy between politics (the advocacy) and administration (the purely technical expertise), and models of service delivery today appreciate the variety of jurisdictions and funding sources, legal constraints, and the demographics of service demand. This environment can cause competing expectations of administrators, which become criteria or measures of their success, including: unit or overall costs, user costs, volume of outputs delivered, equity of outcomes, impact on the problem of concern, or qualitative concerns. Policy analysis is practical, and can deflect political criticism when it is gained from a well-supported and well-executed research process where the researcher gets cooperation from agencies and a degree of independence from decision makers.

The GFOA Committee on Governmental Budgeting and Fiscal Policy offers guidelines that Exhibit 2 shows are within the policy analyst's skill sets. The policy analyst's expertise is also supportive of the Service Efforts and Accomplishments initiative of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, and has substantive overlap with the International City-County Management Association core content areas for effective local government management.

Job descriptions of the Budget Analyst tend to list operations and research projects among job responsibilities. Policy analysis might be good training for this position. Or, having a policy analyst position itself may help institutionalize the link between results management practices and resource planning. These activities can represent a commitment to the kind of transparency and impartiality that supports accountability, which everyone believes, after all, is the basis of good government.

Endnotes

1. For example, the city of Portland Auditor's Office, headed by an elected official, and the city of New York's Independent Budget Office, a nonpartisan publicly-funded independent agency.
2. For information about the career, the websites of the Association of Public Policy and Management (www.appam.org) and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (www.naspaa.org) are recommended.
3. The Budget Department Policy Analysis Division, of which I am head, completes an array of research studies. The benchmarking studies included areas such as showcase park management,

environmental and cultural functions handling, refuse collection, and organizational chart structures.

4. The Report of the Citizen Budget Program details the methodology more fully, and is available on the city of Detroit website (www.ci.detroit.mi.us), Budget Department page, under “Citizen Survey” and “Archive” links.

5. These early studies, most notably Frederick Taylor’s time and motion studies, all were preoccupied with cost cutting efficiencies. Auto pioneers here in Detroit used this in perfecting the assembly line for mass production. Public policy watchdogs, in the form of civic league reformers and local bureaus of municipal research, developed at this same time to demand structure and accountability of local government.

EXHIBIT 2

Analysis of Environmental-related Inspections Agency Activities Sorted by Function

Inspection Functions

Department-Division

- (1) *inside of occupied buildings*
 - Health-Community & Industrial Hygiene
 - Health-Lead Poison Program
 - Planning & Devt-Housing Service (Rehab)
- (2) *inside of food service buildings*
 - Health-Food Sanitation
- (3) *operation of bldg struc./systems*
 - DPW-City Engineering
 - BSE-Property Maintenance
- (4) *demolition process*
 - DPW-Demolition
 - DPW-Street Maintenance
- (5) *dumping/outside env. conditions*
 - DWSD-Industrial Waste Division
 - DPW-Environmental Control
 - Police
 - BSE-Zoning
 - Board of Zoning Appeals

EXHIBIT 3 (Selection from Report)

How Current City of Detroit Services are Administered in Other Major Urban Areas:

The City of Detroit has more responsibility than its counterpart cities

8 MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF DETROIT CITY GOVT List of Departmental Programs in the Budget Budgetary Activity, Dept - description	Fund/ (millions, fy'05)	How our General Fund functions are handled in other jurisdictions					
		core municipal activity	typically regionally controlled	typically not done or not munic	controlled by nonprofits	study notes	
4. DEVELOP ECONOMIC CAPACITY							
Civic Affairs							
0514 Civic Center - Civic Center Administrative Services	\$16.90		X			not as an authority	
1514 Civic Center - Civic Center Facilities Operations							
3514 Civic Center - Property Management							
Industrial & Commercial Assistance							
1535 Non Departmental - Detroit Building Authority (DBA)		X					
1536 P&DD - Development and Planning		X					
2036 P&DD - Bonded Capital Projects		X					
Job Opportunities							
0529 Human Rights - Human Rights Administration	\$2.10				X		
1029 Human Rights - Contract Compliance	Grant						
1540 Senior Citizens - Senior Aides Program							
Enrichment Opportunities							
1521 E.& T. - Adult Client Services	Grant						
2021 E.& T. - Youth Services Summer							
3521 E & T - Work First - General Fund							
5. FACILITATE TRANSPORTATION							
Street Maintenance							
3019 DPW - Street Fund	Grant						
4019 DPW - Snow and Ice Removal		X					
5519 DPW - Street Maintenance		X					
7019 DPW - City Engineering		X					
Mass Transit Systems							
0520 DOT - Administration	\$80						
1020 DOT - Plant Maintenance and Construction			X				
1520 DOT - Vehicle Maintenance							
2020 DOT - Transportation							
Air Transportation							

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0510 Airport - Airport Operations	\$2.60			X		
Parking						
0534 MPD - Automobile Parking Division	\$12.20			?		subsidy
1034 MPD - Parking Violation Bureau		X				
6. BUILDING SUPPLY & CONDITIONS						
Building & Safety Code Enforcement						
0513 BS&E - Administration and Licenses		X				# of required inspections
1013 BS&E - Inspection Services						
Community Redevelopment						
1036 P&DD - Neighborhood Development Division		?				
7. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT						
Solid Waste						
3519 DPW - Solid Waste		X				no commercial pickup
2035 Non Deptl - Gr Detr Resource Recovery Auth (GDRRA)	\$41			X		high cost of disposal
Regulation						
0522 DEA - Environmental Affairs	\$1.20			X		not sep department
1022 Environmental Affairs - Environmental Code Enforcement		X				
0545 DAH - Department of Administrative Hearings	\$1.70		X			
0551 BZA - Land Use Controls		?				unknown
Street Lighting						
0538 PLD - Administration						
1038 PLD - Engineering						
1538 PLD - Construction and Maintenance					X	
2038 PLD - Operating Division						
2538 PLD - Heat and Power Production						
3038 PLD - Capital Improvements	\$6.50					
Community Beautification						
4519 DPW - Street Cleaning		X				
2536 PDD - Ofc of Neighborhood Commercial Redevelopment		?				unknown

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		core municipal activity	typically regionally controlled	typically not done or not munic	controlled by nonprofits	study notes
Environmental Protection						
5019 DPW - Vacant Lot Clean-up		X				highest vacancy problem
Water Supply & Sewerage Disposal						
0541 Water - Administrative Services	Enterpr					
1041 Water - Financial Services						
1541 Water - Facilities Management						
2041 Water - Plant Operations						
2541 Water - Engineering Services						
3041 Water - Capital and Debt Services						
0542 Sewerage - Administrative Services						
1042 Sewerage - Financial Services						
1542 Sewerage - Facilities Management						
2042 Sewerage - Engineering Services						
2542 Sewerage - Sewer Operations						
3042 Sewerage - Capital and Debt Services						
Demolition						
2013 BS&E - Demolition		X				highest vacancy problem
8. DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT						
Executive Management						
0528 HR - Administrative Services		X				EAC unknown
1028 HR - Employee Services						
1528 HR - Organization/Employee Development						
2028 HR - Labor Relations						
2528 HR - Field Operations						
3028 HR - Hearings and Policy Development						
4028 HR - Service Improvement Process		?				unknown
0532 Law - Administration		X				
1532 Law - Risk Management		X				
0533 Mayor's Office - Executive Office		X				
0935 Non Departmental - Grants Acquisition Office	\$0.50					
2135 Non Departmental - Ofc of Targeted Business	\$0.40				x	

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		core municipal activity	typically regionally controlled	typically not done or not munic	controlled by nonprofits	
2235 Non Departmental – Program Management Office	\$0.45			^		not separate agency
2335 Non Departmental – Strategic Management Center	\$0.62					
0536 P&DD - Administration		X				
Infrastructure Management						
0519 DPW - Administration		X				
6519 DPW - Vehicle Management		X				
0531 ITS - Computer Operations		X				
Fiduciary Transactions						
0512 Budget - Budget Operations		X				
9918 Debt Services - Bond Interest and Redemption		X				
0523 Finance - Administration		X				
1023 Finance - Assessments						
1523 Finance - Purchasing						
2023 Finance - Treasury						
2523 Finance - Accounting Operations						
3023 Finance - Income Tax Operations						
4523 Finance - Pensions and Employee Benefits						
0535 Non Departmental - claims, TIFAs, vehicles, DRMS, etc		?				
0550 Auditor General - Auditing Operations		?				
Community Extension Services						
0516 Consumer Affairs – Consumer Advocacy	\$0.42			X		
1033 Mayor’s Office - NCH - Neighborhood City Halls		X				
5239 Recreation - After School Programs	\$1.50	X			?	
0540 Senior Citizens - Senior - Senior Citizens Advocacy				X		
1040 Senior Citizens - Senior - Information and Referral	\$1					
2040 Senior Citizens – Consumer Advocacy				X		
1052 City Council – Advisory Planning Services	\$2			X		
0553 Ombudsman - Investigation of Complaints	\$1.40			X		
Public Policy Representations						
1032 Law - Legislative Liaison					?	
0835 Non Departmental - Board of Ethics	\$0.25			X		
0552 City Council - City Legislative Functions		X				

unknown

2 agencies

unknown

size of personal staffs

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		core municipal activity	typically regionally controlled	typically not done or not munic	controlled by nonprofits	study notes
0570 City Clerk - City Clerk Operations		X				unknown
0571 Elections - Conduct of Elections		X				
Contributions, Subsidies and Advances						
2535 Non Deptl - MAAH; Port Auth; Housing subsidies	\$4.75	?				
APPROX ANNUAL COSTS FOR NON-CORE SERVICE OPERATIONS			135,100,000	78,320,000	10,730,000	224,150,000
APPROX ANNUAL G. O. BONDED CAPITAL EXPENDITURES FOR NON-CORE SERVICES						49%

EXHIBIT 3: POLICYMAKING and SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

The Policy Analyst is skilled at conceptualizing and measuring policy making and service delivery activities

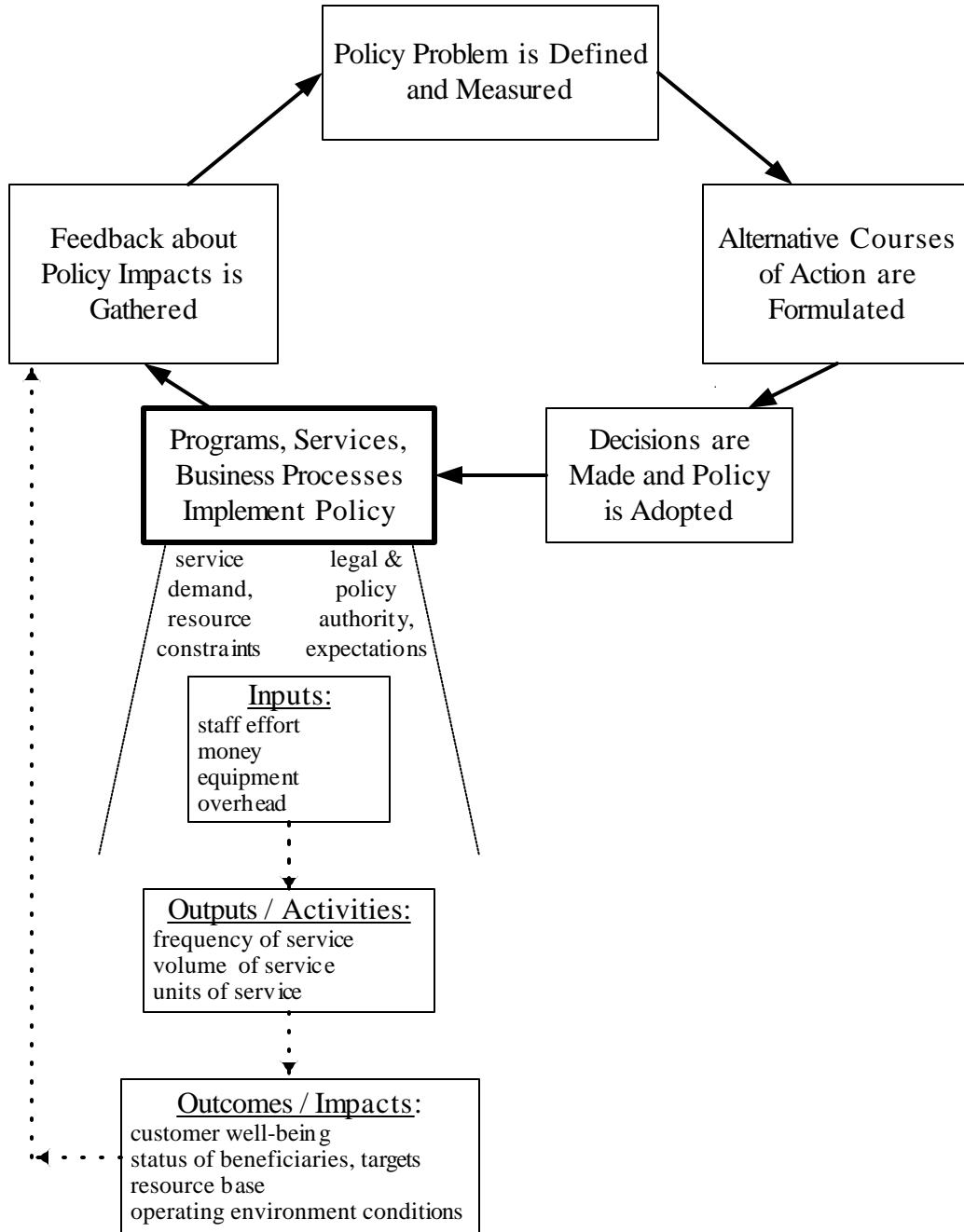


EXHIBIT 4

GFOA Recommended Practices in Budget and Fiscal Policy	Policy Analyst Skill Set
Economic Development Incentives	X
Providing a Concise Summary of the Budget	
Setting of Government Charges and Fees	X
Recommended Budget Practices of the National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting	X
Financial Forecasting in the Budget Preparation Process	X
Relationship Between Budgetary and Financial Statement Information	
Use of Financial Status in the Budget Process	
Adoption of Financial Policies	X
Appropriate Level of Unreserved Fund Balance in the General Fund	
Measuring the Cost of Government Services	X
Performance Management: Using Performance Measurement for Decision Making	X
Sustainability	X
Using Websites to Improve Access to Budget Documents and Financial Reports	
Establishment of Strategic Plans	X
Business Preparedness and Continuity Guidelines	X
Statistical/Supplemental Section of the Budget Document	X