

# Staffing and Utilization Studies

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Staffing and utilization studies examine “what the organization does, how much it does, how well it does it, how its workload has changed over time, and how these things compare with the organization’s performance expectations.”<sup>1</sup> The process often studies the structure, staffing, employee workload, resource requirements and consumption, and use of technology within the various levels of government.

Such studies usually employ a variety of methods, procedures, and techniques, but a good study will be tailored to the specific needs and problems of the individual local government. A local government that commissions a staffing and utilization study should be prepared for an in-depth examination and analysis of its functions and processes.

Before proceeding with a staffing and utilization study, the local government needs to ensure that the following prerequisites exist:

1. A solid agreement by the governing council and manager to proceed with the study, and a commitment to fund many, if not most, of the study’s possible or probable recommendations.
2. A willingness to invest a significant amount of time, money, and personnel effort in order to develop a more effective and efficient local government.
3. Stability and cooperation among the top policy makers and managers and a previous record of success in establishing good management organization and procedures. (However, the reality is that many staffing and utilization studies are undertaken only when problems exist or in response to specific precipitating incidents or crises.)

If the study involves a complete enterprise-wide review, it may be helpful to have an ad hoc committee appointed by the council or the manager for the duration of the study. This committee may include representative members from the governing council, school board, and other bodies, such as a public works commission, depending on the purpose of the study; it may also include key department heads, the local government manager, and the superintendent of schools. If the study’s recommendations are to be implemented successfully, it is essential that all ranks of personnel—clerks, supervisors, managers, union representatives, and others—be involved from the outset in framing and executing the study.

A study that has the support of the key policy makers, department heads, and staff from the outset will enjoy more cooperation during the study process and will produce more willingness at the end to implement change based on its recommendations. Thus, it is important to provide ample opportunities for everyone to express ideas and concerns in order to create a feeling of investment in the process. The manager in charge of the study should also regularly update the key players and the governing council with progress reports. This simple action avoids surprises and provides opportunities for feedback during the process, raising the probability of support for the study’s recommendations.

Whenever a staffing and utilization study is being conducted, there is a strong potential for misalignment between expectations for the study and the realities of what actually may be accomplished. Whoever conducts the study should be sensitive to the expectations that others may

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<sup>1</sup> Palm Beach County Office of Financial Management and Budget, *Planning, Zoning and Building Department: Code Enforcement Division Staffing Adequacy*, Project No. 02-M-03 (Palm Beach, Fla., September 2002), 3–4. Available online at [http://www.pbcgov.com/fin\\_mgt/reports/02-M-03.pdf](http://www.pbcgov.com/fin_mgt/reports/02-M-03.pdf).

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have about its purpose and guard against misunderstanding. In undertaking a staffing and utilization study, a local government also needs to consider what its priorities are for resource allocation and staff deployment decisions and whether these priorities are flexible.

Studies should be undertaken only after sober consideration of the local government's potential resources: it does no good to launch a study that has little or no chance of having its recommendations implemented.

Finally, studies do not mandate change; instead, they should help local government leaders make informed choices among options, and they should provide a blueprint for implementation.

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### WHAT IS A STAFFING AND UTILIZATION STUDY?

A staffing and utilization study is a process for analyzing a local government's staffing and organizational structure, the workload of staff, and the technology and resources required at various levels of the organization. Such a study also measures comparative service levels and costs.

- *Staffing* refers to the combination of positions, filled either by staff or through contract, involved in the performance of specific functions in the local government. A study also looks at the related hours of work; the application of information technology; and the combination of knowledge, abilities, and skills required for each position.
- *Organization* refers to the arrangement of position levels that the local government provides for certain functions as part of its government.
- *Utilization* looks at how efficiently and effectively the local government deploys its human, fiscal, informational, and capital resources in the delivery of services.

The policies of the local government itself, as well as mandates from state or federal governments, may have a fundamental impact on the quantity and quality of services because these affect staffing, organization, and utilization.

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### WHY CONDUCT A STAFFING AND UTILIZATION STUDY?

The major goal of a staffing and utilization study is to improve the delivery of services. This involves exploring ways in which the local government can go beyond its

#### Expected Products of a Staffing and Utilization Study

- Assessment of the current use of human resources
- Identification of trends
- Assessment of the use of information technology
- Identification of current operations, organization, and management (i.e., a baseline)
- Detailed alternatives for improvement
- Recommendations for modification

current standards and achieve a more effective mode of operations, as well as recognizing those things that the organization has done well in the past. The accompanying sidebar lists some of the possible products of a study.

Such studies force local governments not only to analyze past trends and changes in service demands but also to anticipate future trends and changes. By analyzing the characteristics of the workforce and other resources needed to meet these changing demands, the local government can be better equipped to serve its customers. At the same time, it may reduce costs by recognizing areas that require fewer resources and by shifting existing resources to areas of growing demand. Cost savings will vary greatly by the size, flexibility, and current status of the organization.

Additionally, staffing and utilization studies, when executed well, should increase the local government's standing in the eyes of its citizens since the effort will demonstrate the local government's commitment to excellence in service and fiscal responsibility. A study can be a tool to communicate with citizens and bring into focus the many services that the local government performs. Most citizens do not understand that their local government routinely delivers hundreds of separate services, and a staffing and utilization study can give credit to the staff and volunteers for what they have achieved.

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### INITIATING A STUDY

Before beginning the study, the local government must consider several issues:

- **Goals and objectives.** What exactly is the local government trying to achieve by the study?
- **Scope.** How far will the study reach? Will it include a single government function or many? One department or several? Will it design a completely new work flow or only revise current procedures?