Analytics Kickstart: Compared to Jackson
Jackson, MS
November 2016

What Works Cities — RESOURCE

The Bottom Line

Jackson wants to make informed choices about allocating scarce resources. So GovEx partnered with the city to: identify a mathematically similar cohort of cities, collect, transform and normalize data from those cities, and train Jackson to conduct analysis using an interactive tool called *Compared to Jackson*.

Problem

In recent years, Jackson has faced numerous budget shortfalls and uncertainty about the way the city resources its operations. After the successful completion of open data and performance management scopes of work, Jackson asked WWC to focus this kickstart on projects that contribute to Jackson's bottom line: gaining operational efficiency and improving the collection and allocation of scarce resources.

Leadership

The City of Jackson's WWC engagement began with a strong public commitment from the Mayor to govern using data, and the budgeting process is no exception. By comparing Jackson to peers, the city's leaders want the rationale for resource decisions to be more visible to residents. This increased transparency enhances the city's ability to make compelling arguments about which programs to support.

Staffing

The project involved a collaboration between four members of the GovEx team and at least three members of the Jackson team, all of which worked on this project part time.

Data

All data for this project is available to the public upon request. It includes data from the U.S. Census, budget and FTE data from select mid-sized cities, and data about Jackson's existing workforce.

Technology

During the planning and development of *Compared to Jackson*, the GovEx team used Excel, CSV, R, R Studio, Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Tableau Desktop Professional.

Methodology

Multiple clustering algorithms were used to identify Jackson's cohort of comparison cities. Analysis of the cohort involved descriptive statistics and the construction of interactive data visualizations limited to line, bar, and pie charts for ease of consumption.

Results

Jackson spends more per capita than its peers, but personnel spending is not what is driving the difference. Operations is the real cost driver in Jackson, particularly in public works programs.

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