



with

DANELLE MACEWEN



Danelle MacEwen is performance management specialist for the City of Olympia's Office of Performance and Innovation. GFOA's **Eva Olsaker** talked to Danelle about her work with the city, the importance of performance management, and how to make an ERP implementation work for the organization.

You have a diverse background! Can you tell us about your path to your current position?

Early in my career at Olympia, I had a variety of assignments in the Public Works Department. I was assigned to work on a team run by Debbie Sullivan—who was the Deputy Public Works Director at the time—in General Services, focusing on energy management. Here is where I got to pursue a passion, process improvement. I earned my Lean Six Sigma green belt. I took the training with Debbie, who also spearheaded a continuous improvement mindset in Public Works. Debbie was later promoted, and she asked me to join her team, and that's when we started the Office of Performance and Innovation (OPI). I was brought into the OPI team because of my Lean training and my curiosity—I always ask “why” about business processes. Debbie's leadership is key. She's always been one to strive for excellence and to promote continuous learning and improvement—it's something we share.

How did you start using Lean Six Sigma?

The city had dabbled in Lean process improvement for years but never really fully embraced it. Public Works led the way with Lean training for staff and Lean projects. Our green belt project was around project archiving in Public Works contracts. The Public Works Contract team had an archiving backlog of more than 100 projects. We were able to clear out that backlog, but we also redesigned their process so they wouldn't get behind again. The contracts team was integral in examining their process and designing the improved solution.

A focus on continuous improvement isn't new to government, but there is a shift from private-sector to government thinking—who our customers are and if they're internal to our organization or citizens and residents of our city, and how we can best serve them. We're also very mindful of maximizing resources and trying to do more with less. And that's where process improvement and Lean methodology comes in.

Not a lot of governments have embraced process improvement the way you all have, although other governments are definitely working on it.

And we've learned a lot from other governments. We were members of the Alliance for Innovation, but we had to put that on hold because of the COVID pandemic. We've learned a lot from other groups as well.

When the members of OPI took the Six Sigma green belt class through the University of Washington in Tacoma, it turned out that our instructor had worked with us as a consultant on a few big process improvement projects with the city. We took that as an opportunity to develop our skills, so we'd be able to continue this work throughout the organization.

One big aspect of that is having your leadership onboard. Our director of Public Works was very supportive and has always allowed staff to participate on these types of projects. Sometimes the projects can take a lot of resources, so having leaders who are invested is important to moving things forward.

It really is. Does the city have any projects lined up for your team?

I always say OPI gets to tackle the big, hairy problems that our community and organization are facing, and that's kind of how I got started with the city's ongoing ERP project. It's a big project with a big impact on the organization. OPI is ideally suited to manage this, looking at it from a process improvement perspective. We're looking at our current state and proposing future states to make the improvements we need, and I'm coming from a position of neutrality, which is important. If this project were pushed by IT, Finance, or HR, it might not be as readily accepted by the rest of the organization, but OPI is in a fairly neutral position.

My colleague, Stacey Ray, who's our strategy and performance manager, leads OPI now. She's tackled homelessness in our community—she worked on a public involvement project that developed what we call the One Community Plan,

which consists of outreach to all the stakeholders in our community in an effort to address homelessness. Now, that's a huge issue. She's currently working on what we're calling Reimagining Public Safety. These are complex projects with a myriad of stakeholders throughout our community, and OPI is ideally qualified and positioned in our organization to tackle them.

When those big projects come up, the city tends to tap into OPI. In fact, we'll be looking into expanding in future years because we have more requests than people to do the work. Right now, it's just me and Stacey, and we brought on Alyssa Wiedenheft, who's the OPI performance management specialist, to backfill my position while I'm working on the ERP implementation.

Tell us about other projects you've been involved in, and their impact on the city.

My focus is primarily internal, but my work—our forays into process improvement—has an impact on the community. Before taking on the ERP project I worked with Public Works, the Parks Department, and also our Homeless Response Unit, developing performance metrics and looking at what they're measuring to determine what kind of progress we're making. Our council has a keen interest in metrics and data because they need to see how we're doing, and our community has a keen interest as well. I helped those departments develop performance metrics and a formalized way of reporting on them, and then we look at the data together to dig in and find out what's working and what's not working so well. Then we decide what we might want to improve.

I haven't been doing as many process improvement projects as I would like. Before I started working on the ERP initiative, OPI had started a project around taking citizen complaints. The city doesn't have a centralized way to do that currently, which is a problem, particularly for our Police Department,

which was taking complaints through a variety of mediums, including social media and emails. There was no centralized way to make sure that we were getting the complaints, reporting back to the people who made them, and making sure they're resolved. So that's a project that's still ongoing, and it has a huge impact on our citizens.

I wanted to ask about your process improvement and ERP selection project. These projects can be challenging since they require governments to think about process improvements before you have all of the information on what your system will be able to do. Do you have any advice for other governments?

The preparation work we did was invaluable for so many reasons. We got the teams familiar with business processes and mapping out the current state—it would have been a struggle for them if we hadn't done that. There were also areas where we made some minor improvements that are going to reap benefits as we get into this implementation. A big one was changing our payday dates. All we did was shift our paydays five days out, and that saved six weeks of staff time each year that was spent correcting time tracking information. We also learned a lot about change management.

We did research to learn about the level of resources we'd need through the implementation. We were shocked when we found out about the intensity of an ERP project—we thought, "oh no, are they serious?" But we got the same information over and over, so it prepared us and encouraged us to develop a robust and thoughtful resource plan. We took that information to our executive sponsor, executive team, and city council, and we were able to get them onboard with it. That was so important because the project could have very easily been under-resourced. In the throes of the implementation, we've sometimes wished we had more resources, but overall, I think we've done a good job

of putting the right people in the right spots. Our teams are tired right now, but it could have been so much harder had we not thoughtfully resourced.

That's definitely a challenge—if you haven't done that prep work, you won't know how many resources you'll need for the job and you'll get burnt out, take shortcuts, and make decisions that aren't well-informed. You wouldn't get as good a result as you otherwise could.

Absolutely. The Finance department was pretty straightforward in that we knew what we were getting into. That wasn't so much the case with HR, though, and I wish we'd learned more about the HR modules, for example.

Last question—can you share any other lessons learned from your ERP project?

Collaboration across departments is key. This is an organization-wide project, and it requires involvement and support from all departments. And as I mentioned, a strong project sponsor and leadership support are imperative, and that support from leadership needs to be conveyed to staff. They need to know that the project is an organizational priority, and leaders need to create and maintain time and space for whatever is needed to make the project a success.

An ERP project requires a lot of resources, and you can't skimp. Backfill key positions to create time and space for experts to work on the project. Day-to-day work obviously needs to continue, and you need to ensure that the people you've put into leadership positions on the project have the capacity to lead. Ignoring the resource needs of the project and not planning for them in advance could lead to staff burnout and even turnover, which disrupts the project and could even derail it. ■

Eva Olsaker is a senior manager in GFOA's Research and Consulting Center.