
MEMORANDUM

DATE: JULY 2, 2026
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
FROM: BUDGET AND FISCAL AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BFAAC)
SUBJECT: MEMO #4 – BFAAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON BUDGET DECISION
MAKING TOOL AND LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

This memorandum provides BFAAC's analysis of the City Council's current budget decision making process, a recommendation regarding a model budget decision-making tool, and some information on how the city can leverage artificial intelligence to inform decision-making and engage the public.

I. CURRENT BUDGET DECISION MAKING PROCESS

During past budget discussions with BFAAC, Council has asked for guidance and/or tools to utilize when making budget decisions, setting budget priorities and/or communicating those decisions to the public, particularly in anticipation of difficult future budget tradeoffs. "Tools" is used broadly in this instance; it could include a set of guiding principles, questions, or factors; rubrics or scoring systems; or other approaches. In response to this request, in November 2025, BFAAC proposed to develop a memorandum addressing the following:

- identification of current tools the city uses to assess or score city budget investments;
- review of previous BFAAC memos to see how BFAAC advised Council during difficult economic times;
- research and/or literature review of decision-making tools other legislative bodies and/or elected leaders of communities that have similar attributes to Alexandria have utilized, particularly during times of significant financial constraints;
- overview and analysis of the tools that have been most effectively utilized; and
- recommendations for next steps Council could take if it is committed to moving forward with developing and utilizing some type of budget decision-making and communication tool.

The BFAAC researched several sources on best practices for budget development, such as the Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA's) "Rethinking Budgeting" curriculum. GFOA articulated the challenge posed by Council as follows:

“Local government leaders need help with complex decisions they are faced with. They need their finance leaders to be strategic partners in these decisions by providing not only great data, long-term projections and future impact, but also ensuring that the numbers tell a story everyone can understand. There is also a need to provide clarity about what today’s financial decisions might mean for all parts of the community and the future. In order to be most helpful, finance leaders must be trusted, understandable, and also help build consensus.”

Budgeting Best Practices

GFOA’s research identifies 6 components that form what they refer to the “Bedrock of the Budget Process” – policies and practices that encourage thoughtful and wise decisions during the budget development process. Following this framework not only promotes fiscal responsibility but also provides transparency through clear policy boundaries, and by addressing when and where public engagement should be considered.

1. Institute a Strategic Planning Process –A continuous planning process ensures strategies remain relevant and responsive to changing conditions, while ensuring collaboration and fairness are essential for gaining broad community support and ensuring successful implementation.

2. Develop a Service Baseline - A detailed service inventory can also help reveal redundancies, inefficiencies, or areas where service levels can be adjusted to better meet community needs.

3. Set Policy Boundaries - Financial policies provide essential boundaries for local government budgeting. Key policies include maintaining sufficient reserves, using one-time revenues only for one-time expenditures, and setting user fees to cover service costs.

4. Manage Expectations with Long-Term Financial Planning and Forecasting – Long-term financial forecasting helps identify risks and provides a more comprehensive view of future revenue and expenditure trends.

5. Develop the Capacity for Public Engagement - The budget officer must design a budget process that: 1) considers trade-offs in how resources will be used; and 2) builds or maintains the legitimacy of the local government in the eyes of its stakeholders. High-quality public engagement can support both objectives.

6. Build Networks with Outside Organizations - Local governments may not be able to tackle complex community challenges alone due to limited authority, resources, or capacity. By building networks with public, private, and nonprofit organizations, local governments can leverage additional resources to solve problems more effectively.

BFAAC believes the City of Alexandria is currently implementing almost all of these best practices. City Council has a set of priorities that guide budget development, they have adopted BFAAC-recommended policy boundaries, receive regular budget forecasts, and is increasingly effective at engaging the public. The City Manager and OMB have developed a process that fosters a transparent environment that is conducive to making wise budget decisions.

However, the desire to improve the budget decision-making process persists. Even governments that have improved upon their budget development process are still challenged by the problem. This is illustrated by a 2018 survey conducted by GFOA which focused Budget Directors who were largely satisfied with their process. This group identified a long list of desired improvements to their budget process, such as higher quality involvement from public officials; more time spent on the most meaningful decisions; more focus on the long term and the big picture; and greater efficiency of the budget process itself.

Identifying Alignment Issues

BFAAC believes that while Council follows many of the best practices in budgeting, the decision-making process may be facilitated by recognizing the underlying alignment challenges that complicate the process:

- Strategic Alignment: While Council has agreed upon a collective set of strategic priorities, each Council member has their own individual list of priorities, and these may change over time. A process where Council members could review their individual and collective priorities could highlight potential challenge areas and facilitate candid discussion throughout its budget deliberations. The budget decision-making process might also be improved by involving a broader network of stakeholders (as noted by GFOA principle #6).
- Decision Alignment: For much the budget process, there is generally agreement among Council members on high-level budget priorities. However, for a limited set of the most difficult budget decisions, hard choices sometimes have to be made. Here, a priority-based decision-making budget exercise might help develop consensus on priorities.
- Communication Alignment: The City is making strides improving the availability of budget information to the public, but stronger efforts should be made to engage the public. The efforts should more robustly collect public perspectives to help the Council develop strategic priorities and navigate difficult choices and also promote more consistent messaging that supports community members' understanding of priority-setting processes and tradeoffs considered.

II. BUDGET DECISION MAKING TOOL

START Model

BFAAC explored whether tools used by other jurisdictions might serve as a model to help OMB and the City Manager facilitate the budget decision-making process and uncovered one outstanding example. The City of Tempe, Arizona has developed and institutionalized a structured, quantitative budget prioritization exercise known as the Strategic Tactical Allocation of Resources Tool (START). A full report (in appendix A) provides a comprehensive summary of how START works in practice, presents Tempe's November 2024 City Council START results, and proposes a detailed framework for how Alexandria could adapt and implement a similar tool to strengthen the link between the City Council's stated strategic priorities, the budget development process, and measurable outcomes for residents.

In most cities, the council informally influences the city management's budget development through budget work sessions, public hearings, and making "add/deletes" to the City Manager's proposed budget. By the time council members weigh in formally, significant resource allocation decisions have already been made at the staff level, often with limited visibility into council's relative priorities among competing needs. START solves this by creating a formal, quantitative mechanism for the full council to express their relative priorities among a defined set of performance measures before the budget is built. In the exercise, each council member is allocated \$100 in theoretical points to distribute across a selection of budget performance measures. The results are tallied and a scored ranking is created that staff can use as an explicit rubric when developing the proposed operating budget and Capital Improvement Program (CIP). After the START results are presented, staff recommend a small number of accelerated measures, typically five to eight, for focused cross-departmental work during the fiscal year. Named Team Acceleration Process (or TAP) teams in Tempe, these groups meet biweekly, coordinate tactics across departments, troubleshoot implementation barriers, and track progress against targets.

START does not automatically move dollars, but it gives budget staff and department directors a defensible, council-endorsed reference point when developing the proposed budget. The results of each year's START process would be only one of many data points generated during the budget process. START will be most helpful to OMB and the City Manager by informing budget development. It will be most useful in Council's deliberations when making tough choices that could include reductions from previous years and/or realignment of funds to new programs. It is not intended to replace Council's decision-making process or determine allocations by itself. The \$100 exercise could also be offered to the community as both an educational exercise about budget trade-offs and an opportunity to learn about the community's priorities and preferred tradeoffs.

BFAAC has examined Tempe's model as a potential best practice. START is not a theoretical concept; it is a proven, repeatable annual process that has given Tempe's council a structured voice

in budget direction before the City Manager's proposed budget is drafted. The November 2024 data show that the tool produces clear, defensible, and transparent signals. In that cycle, Ending Homelessness, Housing Inventory Ratio, and public safety measures dominated council allocations, providing staff with unambiguous early direction.

Based on its analysis, BFAAC recommends the following:

- ***Recommendation 1:*** Adopt START: BFAAC formally recommends that the City of Alexandria adopt a START-like performance prioritization tool as a standard component of the annual budget development process, beginning with a pilot cycle targeting FY 2028 budget development.
- ***Recommendation 2:*** Assign Ownership: The City Manager's office, in consultation with OMB and the Office of Analytics, Innovation and Data, should designate a START coordinator and allocate sufficient staff capacity to design, administer, and report on the tool annually.
- ***Recommendation 3:*** Build the Measure Library: Staff should inventory Alexandria's existing Strategic Plan Dashboard measures and Customer Engagement Survey measures and develop a START-ready library of 40 to 60 measures, organized under strategic plan pillars, with defined baselines, data sources, and targets.
- ***Recommendation 4:*** Design Transparent Guardrails: Alexandria's minimum and maximum allocation rules should be published as part of the START documentation, going beyond Tempe's practice of keeping these parameters non-public.
- ***Recommendation 5:*** Integrate Equity: An equity weighting overlay or equity screening gate should be built into the START results methodology from the outset using Alexandria's existing Budget Equity Tool, ensuring that highly ranked measures receive structured attention regardless of raw council scores.
- ***Recommendation 6:*** Publish Individual Results: Individual council member allocation scores, not just aggregate results, should be published within 30 days of the exercise's completion, as Tempe does, creating maximum transparency and accountability.
- ***Recommendation 7:*** Establish a TAP Equivalent: Following the first START cycle, the City Manager should establish an Alexandria Performance Acceleration Program targeting the top ranked measures with dedicated cross-departmental teams, ongoing coordination, and quarterly public progress reports.

Appendix A provides Council with detailed information about the START program and an analysis showing that Alexandria is well-positioned to adopt a similar tool. The City already has a strategic plan with defined pillars, a performance management culture, and the administrative capacity needed to operate a START-like exercise. The sections describe the Tempe model in depth, present the 2024 results with analysis, and offer specific, actionable recommendations for Alexandria.

III. LEVERAGING AI TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING AND ENGAGE THE PUBLIC

In addition to exploring budget decision-making models, BFAAC also explored examples of how local governments are incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) in their budget processes, and how they are addressing ethical, privacy, and transparency issues. To the extent that AI can improve and enhance the information available to the Council, the city government and the public regarding budgetary and related issues, the BFAAC believes Alexandria would benefit from using some AI-based tools that might help council members align priorities and ultimately make more data-informed decisions.

AI has the potential to improve the extent to which decisions are truly data-driven and improve engagement with the public about budget priorities and outcomes. AI can meaningfully support the City Council's budget deliberations by facilitating the gathering, analysis, and generation of insights from data more efficiently than traditional methods, which should inform each council member's priorities and collective decision-making. Using AI could increase Council's awareness of trends, inefficiencies, and risks related to development, sustainability, and funding of capital investments and other priorities, and may significantly help improve the public's engagement in and awareness of the rationales undergirding the Council's decisions.

1. **Improving information through enhanced data analysis, pattern detection, and prediction:** AI can process large volumes of financial, operational, and demographic data to identify patterns that may not be obvious when using only legacy analytical tools, elucidating trends in spending, infrastructure deterioration, infrastructure and service use/demand, tax base and collections, and much more. This could help Council estimate future revenues and costs and build budgets to more accurately meet anticipated needs and priorities--for example to predict tax receipts, infrastructure maintenance needs, or demand for services such as schools or public safety. Examples include:
 - a. The City of Gresham, Oregon has used AI-driven financial modeling tools to better forecast revenues and expenditures. By incorporating machine learning into budget planning, officials have been able to more accurately predict economic shifts and assess the long-term impacts of various spending scenarios. (Using AI in Local Gov't - Oracle)
 - b. Some towns use AI-driven targeted communication to recover delinquent payments. Wilmington, Delaware, recovered \$1.1 million in unpaid water bills by using AI-optimized social media prompts

- c. Utah County, Utah, is using AI to identify anomalies in property value assessments and double-check outliers. Ventura and Riverside counties in CA are using AI for property appraisal.
2. **Enhancing spending prioritization and resource allocation processes:** By leveraging data and analysis described above, AI tools can predict and simulate effects of spending decisions and even rank projects or programs based on risk, urgency, expected return, other criteria, or a constellation of criteria. This could help council align priorities by offering a common—and higher fidelity—understanding of the risks and opportunities posed by investments or actions under consideration, such as which infrastructure projects to fund, which neighborhoods require more services, which inspections should be prioritized, and what corollary actions and investments might compound positive outcomes or mitigate negative impacts on equity, community, perceptions, etc. AI can also in some cases monitor for socially equitable budget outcomes. Examples include:
- a. San Jose uses an interactive budget platform that allows councilmembers and residents to explore departmental spending, revenues, and program outcomes. Councilmembers can review budget allocations, compare historical spending trends, and see how funds are distributed across city programs before making budget decisions
 - b. The Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department (PRNS) of San José is using anonymized foot traffic data to understand where and when people access recreational amenities. They know that this access is uneven across many of their neighborhoods, due to systemic and institutionalized racial exclusion and disinvestment that create and perpetuate disproportional access to quality parks. Hence, the collection of this data is another tool to help understand where there is a greater need for new, improved, and safer facilities for equitable resource allocation. (Atlas of Urban AI)
 - c. The Fairfax County Department of Family Services uses Beam’s MagicNotes during family contacts and client-focused meetings, which reduced administration time spent on cases by 40%.
3. **Risk detection and early warning:** AI can identify risks that might lead to future costs, financial instability, public dissatisfaction, and more. For example, it can detect infrastructure needing maintenance or likely to fail soon, monitor the extent to which projects are having intended effects, and analyze public sentiment regarding projects, services, and real-time issues of interest.

- a. The City of Houston uses AI and machine learning tools to analyze data from garbage trucks equipped with cameras and sensors. These systems detect illegal dumping, overflowing bins, or infrastructure damage, allowing for faster responses and optimized waste collection routes. (Govt Jobs) Similarly, Philadelphia uses AI-enabled cameras on school buses and public transit to detect traffic violations, improving public safety.
 - b. A team at Carnegie Mellon University developed the Fire Risk Analysis AI model that uses machine learning to predict the likelihood of a fire occurring at a given commercial property so the Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire can prioritize safety inspections. In the future, the model will extend to residential properties too. (Atlas of Urban AI)
 - c. Washington, D.C. uses AI to inspect 1,800 miles of sewer pipes, cutting review time from 75 minutes to just 10 minutes and Atlanta uses AI to detect leaks in water infrastructure, enabling the city to address problems before they grow.
4. **Community engagement:** AI can help city governments and councils more equitably and effectively reach and engage community members. Tools leveraging large language models and even image recognition can enable continuous collection and analysis of data from public websites, social media platforms, and government and contractor service chatbots and real-time voice conversation agents assisting people with a variety of tasks or soliciting public perspectives on topics related to priority-setting and budgeting. Further, AI can quickly generate—from meetings (audio recordings), policy and process documents, public engagement initiatives, event videos, and more—press releases, social media posts, presentation slides, process description, and other content for rapid public dissemination across multiple platforms that reach different segments of Alexandria’s communities and visitor populations like tourists and business travelers or investors.

City of San José launched a virtual assistant named “SJ” to handle resident questions about COVID-19 and city services in multiple languages. This chatbot, powered by natural language processing (NLP), helps reduce call volumes and ensures 24/7 access to critical information. (Govt Jobs) Chatbots can also handle surges of contacts during emergencies or special events.

- a. New York City uses AI for sentiment analysis to surface perception insights from existing data sources, including digital participatory budgeting tools that allow residents and council members to review project proposals, estimate costs, and vote on which local projects receive funding.

- b. The GRASP system (unclear how many cities use it) helps residents navigate complex budget documents by answering plain-language questions and generating visual summaries of where money is being spent. ClearGov generates narratives that explain complex financial charts, making municipal budgets more accessible to more residents.

5. Improved Customer Service

- a. The city of Midland, TX, launched “SeeClickFix” and “Ask Jacky”, two AI-enabled platforms that, respectively, enable the public to report and monitor issues the city needs to address and to ask a multilingual chatbot and voice bot for specific information rather than navigating an info-packed city website.
- b. San Diego’s Development Services Department is using AI to streamline the permitting process. AI tools help review construction plans and flag inconsistencies, speeding up the approval timeline and reducing administrative burden on staff. Stockton, CA, uses the PASS AI system made by City Detect to visually detect code violations, organize them, and surface priority violations for humans to verify and action.
- c. Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh, uses an AI-enabled platform to code and process invoices, reducing standard turnaround times from a week to one or two days. (Using AI in Local Gov’t - Oracle)

AI governance and risk mitigation measures:

- **Data standards:** Just as with any analysis, data must be accurate and up-to-date to avoid producing unhelpful, misleading, or harmful results. The mitigation strategy is to ensure data is accurate and up-to-date by validating that coherent, reliable, accurate data collection and management is in place before an AI tool (or statistical regression or any kind of analysis) is applied.
- **Privacy and Trust:** Cities must implement strong encryption, access controls, and privacy policies and governance rules, and ensure transparency that enables the public to understand how data and AI is used (and not used).
- **Fairness and Equity:** While AI can improve the visibility and quality of data and analysis concerning historically disadvantaged populations such that governments can better and more equitably serve them, AI sometimes produces results that reflect biases present in historical or current data (e.g., crime data reflecting over-policed neighborhoods). AI users must keep this in

mind, apply critical thinking, and engage data scientists to assess bias risks in some AI use cases. Adoption of a transparent AI ethics policy is the first step to mitigating that risk that real-life biases creep into AI-generated insights that inform Council decisions.

Costs: Initial investment in AI software, hardware, and expertise can be substantial—but this depends on a number of factors, including the current IT platforms and data collection/storage a city supports as well as the intended use case; Incorporating a multilingual chatbot or voicebot into a city website or 311-type app could be a nearly plug-and-play initiative, whereas installing sensors under pavement or purchasing and continuously updating certain types of data—e.g., GIS capabilities—might be more expensive. Alexandria is undertaking both a chatbot pilot (for permitting) and robust AI-enabled Roadway Management and Digital Mobility initiatives (involving creation of a digital twin of the city!).

- Robust OpenGov contracts like (the one that supports San Jose’s interactive budget platform) for mid-size/large cities are usually \$50k-\$150k per year, depending on modules and users. Some pilots of basic chatbots, screening tools, and sentiment analysis can be very inexpensive—less than \$10,000 or even \$5,000 (e.g., via CivCheck.AI and Go Vocal).
- Public health predictive mapping might cost \$40,000-\$90,000 to get started and would require a vendor to layer AI over, e.g., anonymized local health and 911 dashboard data.
- Predictive infrastructure maintenance is more expensive (\$100,000-\$300,000), e.g., for stormwater and roads due to costs like upgrading vehicles and equipment with sensors or cameras and subscribing to computer-vision-enabled analytical platforms.
- Enterprise Planning and AI Land Management Systems might cost upward of \$250,000.

Return on Investment

The benefits of using artificial intelligence in municipal governance can be measured in terms beyond increasing operational cost efficiencies. AI can improve resident experience and prevent disruptive and costly crises (and crisis response) by surfacing problems and needs in early stages before they worsen. GovTech advisory firm [Polimorphic](#), for example, lists the following categories of ROI: Time/money saved, faster/easier resident services, service reach (how many and which populations), error reduction. It is important to keep in mind that as AI rapidly develops—especially Generative AI and agentic AI—case studies on ROI today might not look the same as a similar example using earlier technology a year ago. To identify where any given public sector entity can gain greatest cost savings from AI, [Mottum Analytics](#) recommends that organizations start by asking:

“Where is value being lost today?... Where are the most administrative work hours being lost? Which processes generate the greatest delays or friction with citizens? Which tasks rely excessively on manual or unstructured knowledge?”

Starting with initiatives that leverage automation of time-consuming routine tasks of governance and administration probably offers the most certain opportunity to increase ROI. Then identify what success would look like—decreased hours necessary for administrative tasks, reduced response times to citizen requests/services, better-informed/justified decision-making, etc.—and *then* explore AI use cases that might create the desired value or cost savings. Map current processes and friction points, envision improvements, monetize value to the extent possible, and identify regulatory/legal or other considerations that might affect feasibility or timelines. If the city lacks staff who have facility with cost-benefit analysis and ROI calculation, many consulting businesses have sprung up or evolved to offer this support.

Case studies of ROI achieved by individual cities piloting or expanding AI use cases is scarce, and most existing aggregate studies are outdated. The data that are available vary along a wide spectrum of experiences and success, influenced by an even [wider range of factors](#) affecting success and even measurability. Keep in mind that a frequent cause of delayed ROI—or failed ROI—upon initiation of new AI use cases is [behavioral](#). Familiarization, training, and other engagement will be needed to bring along both workers and residents whose experiences AI will change. These costs should be included in ROI calculation. Beyond this, AI communications firm 5W [advises](#) that organizations should survey staff to learn the ways in which they are individually experimenting with using AI in their work—which might be an indicator of a desire for—and lower resistance to—change if similar AI uptake pilots were to be formalized and organized within a given department.

Case studies will continue to emerge with better specific data on ROI and recommendations to smooth AI-use transitions, and the Council should task appropriate committees and City staff to monitor trends and identify/propose promising pilots for future investment. Universities like Virginia Tech, perhaps in partnership with private sector firms, might also be willing and well-positioned to offer students opportunities to develop and test AI capabilities for Alexandria City and City Council pilots. In many cases these can support both City performance improvements and Council’s governance performance.

Where does the data AI uses come from? AI tools can, in a secure IT environment and with application of good governance and risk mitigation measures, safely and securely analyze text, voice, and image data from:

- City government-owned repositories (e.g., capital investment management and monitoring databases, public services databases, websites, portals, audio/visual recordings of events, publications, internal project management documents, etc.)
- City government-owned streams (e.g., from public service or opinion/feedback-collection chat bots, social media post engagement, and sensors that monitor all manner of industrial equipment, security systems, energy use, water levels, etc.)
- Government contractors’ and grantees’ submitted reports, databases, etc.

- Traditionally obtained public responses or submission (e.g., via questionnaires, interviews, service application and delivery forms, police reports, suggestion boxes, etc.)
- The federal or Virginia state governments and their contractors and grantees that make certain data and/or reports and other materials publicly available
- Content on publicly accessible websites, social media sites, etc., that are owned or managed by other entities and on which topics of interest to Alexandria City Council and management are discussed, presented, visualized, etc.
- Private companies and organizations that aggregate data and either sell it or make it available for free to the public

AI tools can produce insights as a result of queries, ongoing or automated data or system monitoring for trends and aberrations, simulations and scenario-testing, and more. Some AI pilots can be fairly straightforward and inexpensive to plan and implement, but cities can purchase tools and services that provide bespoke or specialized capabilities. An excellent resource is a [guide](#) developed by The Truman National Security Project in 2025 about how state and local legislators can use AI for a number of different purposes. It is a practical guide with examples of how individual staff or departments could approach adopting AI tools into their work.

In all cases, city government entities that plan to use AI should first adopt AI governance policies to both mitigate risks and maximize the probability of successful results that can be learned from and built upon. The City of Tempe Arizona has an excellent example of such a document in their Ethical AI [Policy](#). While developing such a policy from scratch would be a time-intensive endeavor, Alexandria could build on the work of cities that have already developed policies, frameworks, best practices, etc., for either/both broad and narrow AI use cases.

Appendix A : START Budget Decision Making Tool

Executive Summary

The City of Tempe, Arizona has developed and institutionalized a structured, quantitative budget prioritization exercise known as the Strategic Tactical Allocation of Resources Tool (START). This report provides a comprehensive summary of how START works in practice, presents Tempe's November 2024 City Council START results, and proposes a detailed framework for how Alexandria could adapt and implement a similar tool to strengthen the link between the City Council's stated strategic priorities, the budget development process, and measurable outcomes for residents.

Alexandria's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee (BFAAC) has examined Tempe's model as a potential best practice. START is not a theoretical concept; it is a proven, repeatable annual process that has given Tempe's council a structured voice in budget direction before the City Manager's proposed budget is drafted. The November 2024 data show that the tool produces clear, defensible, and transparent signals. In that cycle, Ending Homelessness, Housing Inventory Ratio, and public safety measures dominated council allocations, providing staff with unambiguous early direction.

This report provide council with information showing that Alexandria is well-positioned to adopt a similar tool. The City already has a strategic plan with defined pillars, a performance management culture, and the administrative capacity needed to operate a START-like exercise. The sections below describe the Tempe model in depth, present the 2024 results with analysis, and offer specific, actionable recommendations for Alexandria, including a proposed timeline, measure categories, guardrail design, equity integration, and transparency standards.

Section 1: The START Tool — How It Works

1.1 Origins and Purpose

Tempe's Strategic Tactical Allocation of Resources Tool was developed to address a fundamental challenge in municipal budgeting: translating broadly stated council priorities into structured, early guidance for budget staff before detailed departmental requests are compiled. In most cities, the council's influence on budget priorities is expressed informally, through work sessions, public hearings, and the approval of the City Manager's proposed budget. By the time council members weigh in formally, significant resource allocation decisions have already been made at the staff level, often with limited visibility into council's relative priorities among competing needs.

START solves this by creating a formal, quantitative mechanism for the full council to express their relative priorities among a defined set of performance measures before the budget is built. The result is a scored ranking that staff can use as an explicit rubric when developing the operating budget and the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). START does not automatically move dollars, but it gives budget staff and department directors a defensible, council-endorsed reference point for resource allocation decisions.

Tempe's Strategic Management and Innovation director administers the tool annually, embedding it in a broader performance-led budgeting model that also includes the Team Acceleration Program (TAP), performance dashboards, and an open data portal. START is the prioritization layer; TAP is the acceleration and accountability layer.

1.2 Fiscal Year Timing and Process Flow

Tempe's fiscal year runs July 1 through June 30, the same as Alexandria's. The START cycle is deliberately timed to precede budget development:

- Fall (October–November): The START tool is distributed to City Council members, typically in mid-November.
- December: Staff aggregate the results and present findings at a City Council work session, establishing early direction before detailed budget development begins.
- January–April: Department budget requests, the City Manager's proposed budget, and CIP prioritization are developed with START results as a reference.
- June: Council adopts the budget. The alignment between START results and the adopted budget can be assessed.

This sequencing is critical. By completing START before the budget is built rather than after, council's structured input shapes staff decisions at the point when resource tradeoffs are still open. Late-stage political adjustments, which are disruptive and often result in underfunded priorities or last-minute additions, are reduced.

1.3 Mechanics of the \$100 Exercise

Each council member receives the START tool, which presents a list of performance measures (approximately 106 in Tempe's current iteration) organized under the city's five high-level strategic priority areas. The exercise works as follows:

- Each council member has \$100 in theoretical points to distribute across the performance measures.
- The tool enforces minimum and maximum allocation rules per measure, preventing extreme concentration on a single item or a diffuse spread across all items. These guardrails are designed to force genuine prioritization. Tempe does not publish the specific minimum

and maximum values, but no more than 25 points has been distributed towards any one given program by an elected official.

- The exercise is explicitly framed as not an allocation of funding but rather a signal about which outcomes and metrics matter most to the council.
- Council members complete the exercise independently, ensuring individual preferences are captured before group discussion.

Staff then aggregate the results across all council members, computing totals, averages, and medians for each measure. A measure with 35 or more points when 7 members each contribute from a \$100 pool, totaling \$700 in points) is considered a consensus top priority. Below that threshold, results are sorted by average score and then by median score to produce a ranked list.

1.4 Performance Measure Structure

Tempe's approximately performance measures are organized under five strategic priority pillars. These measure categories span a wide range of service areas and outcomes, including:

- Community Health and Wellbeing: measures related to homelessness, human services, post-secondary achievement, opioid response, and social inclusion
- Safe and Secure Communities: police satisfaction, traffic safety, park safety, opioid response, and emergency services metrics
- Strong Neighborhoods: property code enforcement, housing availability, recreation and open spaces, landscape maintenance, and community satisfaction with city services
- Livable City: housing inventory, tree and shade canopy, water conservation, transportation satisfaction, and environmental sustainability
- Organizational Excellence: employee turnover, CIP delivery rates, unemployment, new job creation, and quality of business services

Each measure is tracked with a defined metric, a baseline, and a target. The performance data linked to each measure are published publicly through Tempe's open data portal and a performance dashboard, so residents can see both what council prioritized and how the city is performing on those measures.

1.5 How START Feeds the Budget

The START results produce a hierarchy of outcomes. Staff use this hierarchy in several specific ways during budget development:

- Operating Budget Alignment: Departments whose work contributes to top-ranked measures are given early signals about council's priorities, informing how they frame budget requests and justify resource needs.
- CIP Prioritization: Capital projects tied to high-ranking START measures are given priority consideration in the CIP development process, particularly when trade-offs must be made among competing infrastructure and investment needs.

- Early Direction, Reduced Late-Stage Surprises: Because council's priorities are surfaced in December, the City Manager's proposed budget released in the spring reflects those signals, reducing the likelihood of major council amendments after release.
- Performance Narrative: Staff can document how the budget proposal aligns with START results, creating a transparent link between council's stated priorities and the proposed resource allocations.

1.6 The Team Acceleration Program (TAP)

START identifies priorities; TAP operates them. After the START results are presented, staff recommend a small number of accelerated measures, typically five to eight, for focused cross-departmental work during the fiscal year. TAP teams for each accelerated measure meet biweekly, coordinate tactics across departments, troubleshoot implementation barriers, and track progress against defined targets.

For example, following a START cycle that ranked Ending Homelessness as the top priority, Tempe formed a TAP team that brought together housing, community services, police, and parks staff to coordinate the city's response. Progress on homelessness reduction metrics were tracked and reported quarterly, closing the loop between the START prioritization, the budget allocation, and actual performance improvement.

Tempe also maintains public dashboards and quarterly TAP reports, ensuring that the community can track progress on the measures that rose to the top in START. This transparency is a deliberate design choice: it creates accountability not just for the council as much as the public.

Section 2: November 2024 Tempe START Results

2.1 Overview of Results

In November 2024, Tempe's seven City Council members completed the START exercise. The results below present the top 10 ranked performance measures, showing total points, average score, and median score. The full dataset included 33 measures that received at least some allocation; measures outside the top 10 which received 20 or fewer total points. The methodology for ranking was: measures receiving more than 50% of the total distributed points (i.e., more than 350 points out of 700 total, since 7 council members each had \$100) qualified as a consensus top priority. None met this threshold individually. Below that threshold, measures were sorted first by average score, then by median score. The top ten were:

Rank	PM #	Performance Measure	Total Points	Avg Score	Median Score	Strategic Category
1	3.28	Ending Homelessness	80	11.43	10	Strong Neighborhoods
2	4.09	Housing Inventory Ratio	65	9.29	10	Livable City
3	1.05	Feeling of Safety in Your Neighborhood	40	5.71	10	Safe & Secure
4	1.07	Police Services Satisfaction	40	5.71	0	Safe & Secure
5	1.22	Pavement Quality Index	40	5.71	0	Safe & Secure
6	4.11	Tree and Shade Canopy	35	5.00	0	Livable City
7	3.01	Property Code Enforcement	30	4.29	0	Strong Neighborhoods
8	1.23	Feeling of Safety in Parks	30	4.29	0	Safe & Secure
9	1.08	High Severity Traffic Crashes	30	4.29	0	Safe & Secure
10	5.07	Employee Turnover	25	3.57	0	Org. Excellence

Note: Rows highlighted in blue indicate the top five consensus measures. All data sourced from City of Tempe November 2024 City Council START Tool Results presentation.

Section 3: Why START is Relevant to Alexandria

3.1 Structural Parallels Between Tempe and Alexandria

Tempe and Alexandria share several structural features that make the direct comparison meaningful:

- Both cities operate on a July 1 to June 30 fiscal year, making Tempe's fall START cycle directly translatable to Alexandria's budget calendar.
- Both cities have a council-manager form of government with a City Manager who develops the proposed budget for council adoption, meaning the structural question of how council signals priorities before the manager's budget is drafted is similar.
- Both cities have adopted multi-year strategic plans with defined priority pillars, giving them a natural taxonomy for organizing performance measures in a START-like tool.
- Both cities have active performance management cultures; Alexandria's OMB produces performance data and budget analysis that could directly feed a START measure library.

- Alexandria's City Council has seven members, the same council size as Tempe.
- Similar mid-sized cities with Tempe at about 190,000 population versus Alexandria's 160,000. Tempe's budget is about \$1.7B versus almost \$1B for Alexandria.

3.2 Current Gaps in Alexandria's Budget Process

Despite these parallels, Alexandria's budget process currently lacks a structured mechanism for the full council to quantify and rank their relative priorities before the City Manager's budget is developed. The current process typically involves:

- A Council Goal-Setting Retreat in January or February, where broad strategic priorities are discussed but not scored or ranked.
- Informal signals through council correspondence, constituent meetings, and work sessions that budget staff must interpret without a standardized rubric.
- Late-cycle influence: council members often raise specific priorities during the public budget hearing or through Budget Q&A after the City Manager's proposed budget is released, which limits the staff's ability to incorporate those priorities.

START directly addresses each of these gaps. It converts the informal, qualitative conversation of a goal-setting retreat into a scored, ranked dataset. It gives staff an explicit rubric rather than interpretive signals. And it surfaces council priorities in the fall, before the manager's budget is built, not after.

3.3 Alignment with Alexandria's Strategic Plan

The City Council's current strategic priorities map naturally to a START measure structure:

- ***Advance Housing Opportunities*** by supporting quality options at a range of price points.
 - Objective 1: Preservation of quality of housing through efforts to preserve affordability and expand engagement with property managers on housing quality.
- ***Reduce Community Disparities*** by aligning services with community needs
 - Objective 1: Evaluate and strengthen our trauma-informed support services to ensure they are effectively coordinated, accessible, and available to youth and families in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of violence.
 - Objective 2: Improve the coordination and delivery of safety net supports, such as housing assistance, childcare subsidies, and workforce development, to more effectively increase stability and reduce stress for low-income residents.
- ***Strengthen our Economy*** by further diversifying the tax base
 - Objective #1: Attract catalytic revenue generating industries that invest in and benefit the community.
 - Objective #2: Strengthen the local economy by reducing barriers to establishing and sustaining business activity in the City.

- ***Recruit & Retain a Thriving Workforce*** by ensuring our City of Alexandria employees feel valued.
 - Objective 1: Engage current and prospective employees to understand and promote what makes the City of Alexandria an employer of choice, using their insights to strengthen recruitment, retention, and workplace culture
 - Objective 2: Ensure competitive compensation, improve working conditions, and formalize employee voice in workplace matters

Alexandria already tracks data on 20 indicators that measure success in these areas. A START tool would not require creating new performance infrastructure from scratch; it would leverage existing data in a new decision-making process; however it would likely require additional measures for a more robust process. Another source of measures could be the Community Survey indicators.

Section 4: Designing a START Tool for Alexandria

4.1 Guiding Design Principles

Based on Tempe's experience and Alexandria's specific context, BFAAC recommends the following principles for designing an Alexandria START tool:

- Outcome-focused, not output-focused: Measures should describe what residents experience or achieve (e.g., reduced homelessness, improved safety perception) rather than what city government does (e.g., number of inspections completed).
- Manageable scope: Start with 40 to 60 measures rather than attempting to replicate Tempe's list immediately. Fewer measures in the first year will encourage genuine engagement and reduce decision fatigue.
- Tied to existing data: Every measure in the tool should have a defined data source, a current baseline, and a target. Measures without reliable data should not be included until the data infrastructure exists.
- Equity-integrated: Alexandria's commitment to equity should be embedded in the START design, not added as an afterthought. Options include a separate equity weighting of results or a parallel equity screening overlay.
- Transparent: Both the process and the results should be public, including individual council member allocations. Transparency increases public trust and accountability.
- Advisory, not automatic: Like Tempe's model, Alexandria's START results should inform the budget process, not replace the judgment of the City Manager or the council's formal adoption authority.

4.2 Possible Performance Measure Categories for Alexandria

Below are the 20 current metrics tracked for the Strategic priorities on the City's Strategic Planning Dashboard and the 76 measures from the City's Community Resident Survey (not including the Overall Ratings):

City Council Priorities Dashboard Measures

Advance Housing Opportunities

- Decrease eviction rate
- Increase # of permits processed
- Increased development applications submitted
- Increase square footage in development applications approved
- Increase new business licenses
- Increase business retention percentage

Reduce Community Disparities

- Increase workforce development center job placements
- Increase # of contacts and visits by community members for economic support programs
- Increase # of youth served in the Summer Employment Youth Program
- Monitor the number of people receiving public benefits
- Decrease poverty rate

Strengthen Our Economy

- Decrease unemployment rate
- Increase # of permits processed
- Increase # of development applications submitted
- Increase square feet in development applications submitted
- Increase # new business licenses issued
- Increase business retention percentage

Recruit and Retain a Thriving Workforce

- Decrease turnover rate
- Increase % of city employees with 10+ years of city employment
- Increase # of applicants per job posting
- Decrease city position vacancy rate
- Decrease length of posting date to start date for new hires.

Resident Survey Measures

Satisfaction with Transportation

- Availability of rideshare/taxi services
- Safety while walking in Alexandria
- Availability of paths & walking trails
- Ease of travel by Metro in Alexandria
- Ease of travel by bus in Alexandria
- Safety while driving in Alexandria
- Availability of parking near my home
- Ease of travel by car
- Ease of travel by Capital Bikeshare in Alexandria
- Safety while biking in Alexandria
- Traffic calming measures on neighborhood streets
- Traffic calming measures on major streets
- Availability of electric vehicle charging stations
- Snow removal on City streets
- Condition of street signs
- Street lighting in your neighborhood
- Condition of bus stops
- Traffic & pedestrian signal timing
- Condition of sidewalks
- Condition of streets

Satisfaction with Public Safety

- Overall quality of fire services
- Ambulance or emergency medical services
- Response times to 911 emergencies
- Overall quality of police services
- Animal control
- Fire prevention & education
- Communication during public safety incidents
- Community preparedness for emergencies/disasters
- Traffic enforcement
- Crime prevention

Satisfaction with Economic Opportunity and Well-Being

- Access to healthy food
- Dining opportunities
- Access to quality health care
- Access to quality dental care
- Ability to attract visitors
- Shopping opportunities
- Employment opportunities
- Access to quality mental health care
- Variety of housing options
- Overall quality of new development in Alexandria
- Efforts to manage & plan for growth/development
- Availability of affordable housing
- Cost of living in Alexandria

Satisfaction with Culture and Education

- Public library services
- Museums/historical sites
- City-sponsored special events
- Opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities

- Maintenance of City recreation centers or facilities
- Availability of sports fields, courts, & facilities
- Youth recreation programs or classes
- Adult recreation programs or classes
- Out-of-school activities for youth
- Availability of affordable, quality childcare/preschool
- Quality of K-12 education

Satisfaction with Public Space and Property Services

- Trash/garbage collection services
- Alexandria parks, open space, or greenspace
- Quality of overall natural environment in Alexandria
- Maintenance of City parks
- Yard waste/leaf/brush pick-up services
- Recycling services/drop-off centers
- Cleanliness of public spaces
- Enforcement of maintenance of business property
- Enforcement of maintenance of residential property
- Post-disaster incident recovery services
- Stormwater management/flood control

Satisfaction with City Government

- Ease of participating in elections & voting process
- Overall customer service by Alexandria City employees
- Ease of doing business with City
- Ease of reporting a concern to City staff about local issues
- Ability of City staff to resolve requests, questions, & concerns
- City government treating all residents fairly

- City government welcoming & encouraging resident involvement
- Responsiveness of Alexandria government to resident requests, questions, & concerns
- Value of services for taxes paid to Alexandria
- City efforts to keep you informed about local issues

4.3 Guardrail Design: Minimum and Maximum Allocations

The minimum and maximum allocation rules are the most important design decision in the START tool, as they directly determine how much prioritization the exercise forces. Tempe does not disclose its specific parameters, but BFAAC can design Alexandria's guardrails transparently from the outset. Recommended options:

Option A — Conservative Guardrails (recommended for Year 1)

Minimum per measure: \$0 (no required allocation to any measure). Maximum per measure: \$20 (no single measure can receive more than 20% of a member's \$100). This allows members to allocate zero to measures they do not prioritize while preventing extreme concentration. With 50 measures and a \$20 cap, members must meaningfully distribute across at least five measures to spend all their points.

Option B — Forced Engagement Guardrails

Minimum per measure: \$1 (every measure gets at least \$1, signaling baseline attention). Maximum per measure: \$15 (stronger cap to force broader distribution). This approach ensures no measure is entirely ignored but also prevents any one measure from dominating. It may be appropriate once council is comfortable with the tool in Year 2 or 3.

Option C — Category-Level Guardrails

Instead of per-measure limits, require that each strategic pillar receives a minimum allocation (e.g., at least \$10 per pillar). This prevents a council member from concentrating entirely on one strategic area while ignoring others. Can be combined with per-measure maximums from Option A or B.

BFAAC recommends beginning with Option A in Year 1 to reduce friction and allow council members to engage authentically, then considering stricter guardrails in subsequent years based on experience.

4.4 Equity Integration

Alexandria has made equity a central commitment across city operations. START should reflect this commitment in at least two ways:

Equity Weighting Overlay

Staff could employ the City's Budget Equity Tool (BET) to explicitly incorporate considerations of racial and social equity in the development of the START rankings.

The BET questions could be used to evaluate the objectives in the START exercise in these same way that staff, fiscal representatives, and department leaders are expected to thoughtfully evaluate their proposed additions (also known as supplementals) and reductions for their equity impacts by answering five questions, based on people, place, and benefits/burdens. The five questions are as follows:

- What specific racial and/or social inequities in Alexandria does this proposal intend to address/reduce? (0-4 points)
- Who will benefit from this proposal? Who will be burdened? Externally, which communities will be impacted; internally, who/what levels of staff will be impacted? Please answer both benefit and burden for full evaluation. (0-4 points)
- What areas of the city will be impacted by your proposal? (0-4 points)
- How does this proposal impact your department's capacity to engage with community (externally) and/or City staff (internally)? (0-4 points)
- Describe how this proposed supplemental/reduction contributes to your department's ability to advance racial and social equity. (0-4 points)

The Office of Race and Social Equity (RASE) to develop a scored product for each of the chosen objectives on a five-point scale from being "highly likely" to lead to more equitable community, staff, or departmental outcomes to "no specific connection to increasing or maintaining current equity outcomes for community, staff, or department." Five tiers (highly likely, likely, maintains, very unlikely, no specific connection) are created based on the following criteria:

- Highly Likely to lead to more equitable community, staff, or departmental outcomes (17-20 points)
- Likely to contribute to increased equitable community, staff, or departmental outcomes (13-16 points)
- Maintains a current level of operation and outcomes related to equity for community, staff, and department (9- 12 points)

- Very Unlikely and could exacerbate or perpetuate inequities for community, staff, or departmental outcomes (4- 8 points)
- No specific connection to increasing or maintaining current equity outcomes for community, staff, or department (0-3 points)

The BET scoring could be applied to the raw START scores to produce an Equity-Adjusted Ranking alongside the raw ranking. This approach preserves council's autonomy in the raw allocation while ensuring that equity considerations are explicitly visible in how results are interpreted and presented.

Equity Screening Gate

An alternative approach would establish an equity screening gate: any measure that does not meet a minimum equity relevance threshold (e.g., anything below maintains a current level of operation and outcomes related to equity for community, staff, and department) would be excluded from the top-five acceleration tier regardless of START score. This ensures that at least some of the accelerated measures each year directly address equity gaps. Both approaches could be piloted simultaneously in Year 1, with council choosing which framework to adopt for Year 2 based on the results.

4.5 Transparency and Public Engagement

Tempe publishes the overall priorities, selected accelerated measures, and underlying performance dashboards publicly. BFAAC recommends that Alexandria follow this same procedure. Additional specific transparency recommendations include:

- Publish the complete ranked results table (as shown in this report for Tempe) within 30 days of council completing the exercise.
- Publish Individual Council Members' Rankings: Tempe published individual council member allocations, with each member's scores for each measure visible to the public. This created direct accountability between council's stated priorities and the measure-level choices they made.
- Link START results to Alexandria's existing performance dashboard, so residents can see not only what council prioritized but how the city is currently performing on those measures.
- Implement a parallel process where the public are given the opportunity to go through the START exercise. This could be done concurrently with the City Council at the beginning of the process to help inform the City Manager's budget development process, or once the budget has been released to inform the City Council of the public's priorities while they are in budget deliberations. The Public Input Platform already used by the City contains a Budget Simulator tool that could be used for this purpose. Not only would this inform Council of the community's priorities, it would also serve as an educational tool for the public on the trade-offs inherent in the Council's budget deliberations.

Section 5: Tempe–Alexandria Comparison Framework

5.1 Side-by-Side Comparison

The following table compares Tempe's current START practices with BFAAC's proposed Alexandria adaptation across key design dimensions.

Dimension	Tempe START (Current Practice)	Alexandria Proposed Adaptation
Timing	Launched in fall (November), results reported at December work session before budget development	Launch in September/October; report results at November/December City Council work session prior to the budget kickoff in January
Point Allocation	\$100 per council member	\$100 per council member
Performance Measures	~106 measures tied to five high-level strategic priorities	Tied to Alexandria's strategic plan/community survey measures; could start with approx. 60 measures, expanding as the tool matures
Min/Max Rules	Minimum and maximum allocations per measure enforced (specific limits not disclosed publicly)	Consider publishing the guardrail parameters to enhance transparency and public trust
Budget Linkage	Results inform operating budget and CIP alignment; not automatic funding changes	Results inform City Manager's proposed budget, CIP prioritization, and equity tool application
Transparency	Overall priorities and accelerated measures public; individual scores not published	Consider publishing overall priorities and accelerated measures public; individual scores not published
Acceleration Tier	TAP: cross-department teams work biweekly on top-ranked measures	Create an Alexandria Performance Acceleration Program (APAP) targeting top 5–7 measures
Equity Integration	Not explicitly described in START materials	Integrate BET equity screening: measures with highest equity gaps get a weighted bonus in final ranking
Resident Engagement	Tempe publishes dashboards and open data linked to measures	Consider Parallel public implementation of START budget exercise

5.2 What Alexandria Can Improve Upon

While Tempe's START model is the most sophisticated example BFAAC has identified of this type of tool, Alexandria has an opportunity to improve on several aspects:

- **Explicit equity integration:** Tempe's START materials do not describe an explicit equity weighting or screening process. Alexandria's integration of equity data would represent a meaningful improvement and alignment with the city's stated values.
- **Community voice in measure design:** Offering a formal public comment period on the measure list (not the scoring) would give Alexandria residents a direct role in defining what outcomes matter, beyond what council members and staff identify independently.
- **Broader participation:** Alexandria could consider piloting a parallel START-like exercise with BFAAC itself or with the city's other advisory boards (e.g., Human Services, Environmental Policy Commission) to provide additional perspective and validate or challenge council's rankings.

Section 6: Implementation Issues

6.1 Proposed Implementation Timeline

The following timeline is designed for an initial START cycle producing results in time to inform the FY 2027 budget development process (assuming Alexandria's budget cycle begins in earnest in January of the prior year).

Timeframe	Action	Key Actors
Jul - Dec (Year 1)	City Manager's office begins feasibility study and process design; determining budget and staffing requirements.	BFAAC, City Manager, Budget Director, OMB staff
Jan–Apr (Year 1)	Inventory and map Alexandria's existing performance measures to strategic plan pillars; identify gaps	OMB staff, Department Directors, Strategic Planning office, Office of Data, Innovation and Analytics.
May–Aug (Year 1-2)	Draft the START performance measure menu (target 50–70 measures); design guardrails (min/max rules)	City Manager, Budget Director, Office of the City Attorney, Office of Data, Innovation and Analytics.
Sep (Year 2)	Present draft measure list to City Council for feedback at a work session; refine	City Manager, City Council
Oct (Year 2)	Launch START tool to City Council; seven days to complete allocations	City Clerk, City Manager, City Council (all seven members)

Nov (Year 2)	Staff aggregate results; produce ranking report with totals, averages, medians, and individual breakdowns	Budget Director, OMB
Dec (Year 2)	Present START results at City Council work session as structured early direction for FY budget	City Manager, City Council
Jan–Mar (Year 2)	City Manager uses START results to inform department budget guidance and CIP request prioritization	City Manager, OMB, Department Directors
Apr–May (Year 2)	City Manager's proposed budget released; alignment to START top measures documented publicly	City Manager, OMB
Jun (Year 2)	City Council adopts budget; BFAAC evaluates whether START results were reflected in final budget	City Council, BFAAC
Jul (Year 2 onward)	Launch TAP/APAP teams for top-ranked measures; publish dashboards; begin Year 2 START cycle	All departments, City Manager, OMB

6.2 Staffing and Capacity Requirements

Implementing START does not require a large staff investment, but it does require defined ownership and sufficient analytical capacity. Minimum requirements include:

- A designated START coordinator, likely a senior analyst in the Office of Management and Budget or the City Manager's office, responsible for designing the tool, administering the exercise, aggregating results, and producing the report.
- Coordination with the Office of Analytics, Innovation and Data – who manage the Community Survey and track the City's data – to manage outcome measure development and report progress on outcomes.
- Departmental liaisons who can verify that the performance measures assigned to their service areas are accurately described, have current baseline data, and have defined targets.
- IT or data staff to build or adapt the tool's user interface, whether a spreadsheet, a web form, or a more sophisticated application, and to link results to the public dashboard.
- Legal review of whether any aspect of the process requires open meeting compliance (e.g., if council members are asked to discuss their individual allocations in a work session before completing the exercise independently).

In Year 1, the coordinator role should plan for approximately 200 to 300 hours of work to design, pilot, administer, and report on the tool. In subsequent years, as the process matures, this is likely to reduce to 100 to 150 hours annually.

6.3 Technology Platform Options

START can be administered through several technology platforms with different cost and complexity trade-offs:

- Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets (Lowest cost, simplest): A structured spreadsheet with built-in validation rules can enforce minimum and maximum allocations and calculate totals automatically. Suitable for Year 1 while the process is being established.
- Online survey platform (e.g., Survey Monkey, Public Input): Allows for a more user-friendly interface with built-in logic to enforce guardrails and submit results electronically. Most localities already have licenses for such platforms.
- Custom web application (Higher cost, most flexibility): A purpose-built tool could offer real-time feedback to council members as they allocate (e.g., showing a running total of points spent), a visual dashboard of preliminary results, and direct integration with the city's performance data system. Suitable for Year 2 or 3 once the process is established.

Beginning with a well-designed spreadsheet tool in Year 1 and evaluate whether a custom application is warranted based on council and staff feedback after the first cycle.

Section 7: Conclusion and BFAAC Recommendations

7.1 Summary Findings

Tempe's START tool represents a mature, tested example of performance-led budgeting that directly addresses the gap between council's stated priorities and the budget development process. The November 2024 results demonstrate that the tool produces meaningful, actionable signals: a clear hierarchy of council priorities, disaggregated individual member data, and a set of consensus priorities that can guide staff and accountability partners throughout the budget year. Alexandria shares the structural characteristics that make START work in Tempe: a council-manager government, a July–June fiscal year, a seven-member council, an existing strategic plan with defined pillars, and a performance management infrastructure that can support the measure library. The case for adoption is strong.

7.2 BFAAC Recommendations

Based on its analysis, BFAAC recommends the following:

- **Recommendation 1:** Adopt START: BFAAC formally recommends that the City of Alexandria adopt a START-like performance prioritization tool as a standard component of the annual budget development process, beginning with a pilot cycle targeting FY 2028 budget development.

- **Recommendation 2:** Assign Ownership: The City Manager's office, in consultation with OMB and the Office of Analytics, Innovation and Data, should designate a START coordinator and allocate sufficient staff capacity to design, administer, and report on the tool annually.
- **Recommendation 3:** Build the Measure Library: Staff should inventory Alexandria's existing Strategic Plan Dashboard measures and Customer Engagement Survey measures and develop a START-ready library of 40 to 60 measures, organized under strategic plan pillars, with defined baselines, data sources, and targets.
- **Recommendation 4:** Design Transparent Guardrails: Alexandria's minimum and maximum allocation rules should be published as part of the START documentation, going beyond Tempe's practice of keeping these parameters non-public.
- **Recommendation 5:** Integrate Equity: An equity weighting overlay or equity screening gate should be built into the START results methodology from the outset using Alexandria's existing Budget Equity Tool, ensuring that highly ranked measures receive structured attention regardless of raw council scores.
- **Recommendation 6:** Publish Individual Results: Individual council member allocation scores, not just aggregate results, should be published within 30 days of the exercise's completion, as Tempe does, creating maximum transparency and accountability.
- **Recommendation 7:** Establish a TAP Equivalent: Following the first START cycle, the City Manager should establish an Alexandria Performance Acceleration Program targeting the top ranked measures with dedicated cross-departmental teams, ongoing coordination, and quarterly public progress reports.

7.3 Closing Remarks

The fundamental question that START answers is: what do the people we elected actually prioritize when they are forced to choose? That is a question every city should be able to answer clearly, structurally, and publicly. Tempe has built a tool that answers it. Alexandria has every reason and every capability to do the same.

Adopting START is not merely an administrative improvement. It is a commitment to a more transparent, accountable, and outcome-focused relationship between Alexandria's government and the people it serves. BFAAC urges the City Council and City Manager to move forward with implementation.

Appendix B: Full November 2024 Tempe START Results

The following table presents all 33 measures that received points in Tempe's November 2024 START exercise, along with individual allocations from each of the City Council members.

Rank	PM #	Performance Measure	Mayor	V. Mayor	Adams	Amberg	Chin	Hodge	Keating	Total	Avg
1	3.28	Ending Homelessness	10	10	20	25	15	0	0	80	11.43
2	4.09	Housing Inventory Ratio	10	10	10	0	15	10	10	65	9.29
3	1.05	Safety in Neighborhood	10	10	10	10	0	0	0	40	5.71
4	1.07	Police Services Satisfaction	0	0	0	0	10	20	10	40	5.71
5	1.22	Pavement Quality Index	0	10	0	20	0	0	10	40	5.71
6	4.11	Tree and Shade Canopy	0	10	0	15	0	10	0	35	5.00
7	3.01	Property Code Enforcement	0	0	0	0	0	20	10	30	4.29
8	1.23	Feeling of Safety in Parks	0	0	10	10	10	0	0	30	4.29
9	1.08	High Severity Traffic Crashes	0	10	0	10	0	10	0	30	4.29
10	5.07	Employee Turnover	0	0	0	0	15	0	10	25	3.57
11	3.10	Human Service Grants	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	20	2.86
12	3.09	Post Secondary Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	20	2.86
13	1.31	Addressing Opioids	0	0	10	0	10	0	0	20	2.86
14	2.15	Participating in City Decisions	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	20	2.86
15	2.25	Employee Work-Related Needs	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	20	2.86
16	4.03	Water Conservation	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	15	2.14
17	5.01	Quality of Business Services	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	1.43
18	5.13	Unemployment Rate	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
19	5.09	CIP On-Time Completion	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	1.43
20	5.02	New Jobs Created	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
21	3.05	Subsidized Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
22	3.29	Transportation Satisfaction	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	10	1.43
23	3.08	High School Graduation Rate	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43

Rank	PM #	Performance Measure	Mayor	V. Mayor	Adams	Amberg	Chin	Hodge	Keating	Total	Avg
24	3.07	3rd Grade Reading Proficiency	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
25	3.16	City Recreation Arts & Open Spaces	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	1.43
26	3.13	Disability Social Inclusion	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
27	4.19	Municipal Carbon Neutrality	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	10	1.43
28	4.20	Community Dev. Processes Satisfaction	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	10	1.43
29	3.06	Quality Pre-K Designation	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
30	3.36	Quality of City Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
31	1.01	ALS Response Time	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
32	3.23	Right of Way Landscape Maint.	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43
33	2.06	Police Trust Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	1.43

Data source: City of Tempe, Strategic Tactical Allocation of Resources (START) Tool Results, November 2024 City Council presentation. Total points distributed: 700 (7 council members × \$100 each). Highlighted rows indicate top five consensus priorities. Source: City of Tempe November 2024 START Tool Results