

Department Efficiency and Collaboration: Saint Paul Parks and Recreation and Saint Paul Public Library

Report to the Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee

Authors: Chris Bray, Heather Britt, Naw-Amelia Kacher, Audrey Mutanhaurwa, Rachel Fields

OCTOBER 2024

451 Lexington Parkway North | Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700 | www.wilderresearch.org

**Wilder
Research**[®]
Information. Insight. Impact.

Contents

Background.....	1
Research questions.....	1
Methods.....	1
Key findings.....	2
In-depth analysis	4
Recommendations.....	10
High priority recommendations	10
Secondary priority recommendations	11
Future consideration recommendations	12
Appendix.....	13
A. Document review	13
B. Annotated bibliography.....	16
C. Round 2 interview protocol.....	22
D. Guidance around formulation of workgroups.....	26
E. Immediate “low hanging fruit” actions	28

Background

Wilder Research prepared the following final report for the Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee. The report presents an assessment of possible areas for collaboration for Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL) and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation (Parks and Recreation).

SPPL manages 13 library locations, and Parks and Recreation manages 165 buildings. The departments share three co-located library and park buildings: Arlington Hills, Highland Park, and West 7th.

The study goals were to identify efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration, cost sharing, and process improvement within SPPL and Parks and Recreation. The focus for this study was operations in four functional areas of both departments:

1. Human resources and staffing
2. Financial management and procurement
3. Technology management and equipment
4. Facilities and maintenance

Research questions

Wilder's guiding questions for the project include:

- Where are the current effective practices and opportunities for improvement in each of the four functions across SPPL and Parks and Recreation?
- What are the actionable ways to reduce redundancy and create efficiencies in each of the four functions between SPPL and Parks and Recreation?

Methods

To conduct this assessment, Wilder employed three information gathering activities:

Document review

Wilder collected and reviewed relevant documents provided by SPPL and Parks and Recreation pertaining to the four functional areas: human resources and staffing, financial management and procurement, technology management and equipment, and facilities and maintenance. Through this review, Wilder aimed to identify current approaches to each function, current efficiencies and inefficiencies within each function, actionable opportunities

to reduce duplication where feasible, and ways to increase collaboration in function operations. A summary of the document review can be found in Appendix A.

Literature summary

Wilder conducted a broad literature review to learn about shared services and interdepartmental collaboration in other governmental entities across cities and counties in the U.S. and abroad. We identified broad themes in four areas: cost savings and efficiency, collaboration and trust, service integration and sustainability, and strategic planning and implementation. The annotated bibliography can be found in Appendix B.

Key informant interviews

Wilder conducted key informant interviews with two deputy directors, one operations manager, and 12 mid-level managers and supervisors, identified by the SPPL and Parks and Recreation deputy directors. The key informants have expertise in one of the four functional areas within their department. Their information helped Wilder identify: the diverse roles and responsibilities within each department across the four functional areas, opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration and cost savings, and existing challenges presented with staffing and resource management between the two departments. Two interview protocols were used: one for department deputy directors and operations managers and one for mid-level managers and supervisors. The interview protocol used for mid-level managers and supervisors can be found in Appendix C.

Key findings

Based on the results of the three activities listed above, Wilder Research identified the following overarching opportunities and challenges, and key observations, for the two departments. We explore these opportunities in depth in the analysis section and offer recommendations at the end of this report.

Opportunities

- There is a shared vision to find efficiencies across the two departments among high-level managers.
- Staff at all levels shared ideas and suggestions for creating efficiencies and cost sharing, indicating a breadth of experience and knowledge.
- Collaboration and trust currently exist. Enhancing and building on the relationships as the work continues will be important.
- Security and safety are areas ripe for collaboration.

- Co-located sites present unique opportunities to establish collaboration and pilot efficiency measures.
- Defining clear roles and responsibilities is critical as greater collaboration occurs across departments.

Challenges

- Staff who work in a functional area in one department are not aware of the work processes used by their counterparts in the other department. For example, staff who work with vendors are not aware of which vendors are being used by their counterparts. This inhibits the process of creating efficiencies between SPPL and Parks and Recreation.
- Aging buildings in both departments, but especially in SPPL, present substantial budget challenges.
- Both departments experience staffing challenges due, in part, to fixed budgets established through the City budgeting process.
- Labor contract language can prevent accomplishing tasks in the most efficient manner.

Human resources and staffing

- The centralized human resource approach may not fully accommodate the specific needs of different departments.
- Hiring needed staff, especially seasonal staff, can be cumbersome, slowing down the hiring process. There is a need for an efficient hiring and on-boarding process to enable departments to fill positions quickly, particularly during the summer season.
- Cross training staff can reduce costs and create a pipeline for staff movement and promotion.

Financial management and procurement

- More coordination is needed between departments to avoid redundancy and inefficiencies in resource management and to better navigate procurement processes, for example, utilizing common vendors and master contracts.

Technology management and equipment

- Managing budget constraints while keeping up with technological advances is a constant struggle, especially given the rapid pace of change in the technology landscape.

- Greater collaboration on technology investments could prevent duplication of efforts and ensure that both departments benefit from technology advancements.

Facilities and maintenance

- Staff express uncertainty on how best to optimize the use of physical spaces to reduce costs.
- There are current strategies in place to manage physical assets between departments designed to produce efficiencies and cost sharing; however, those strategies might not be used across all working sections in both departments.

In-depth analysis

We offer additional analysis below of the documents reviewed and key informants interviewed. From the documents and key informant interviews, we review the roles and responsibilities for the teams. From the key informant interviews, we offer three sets of observations—opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings, collaboration across departments, and suggestions for further collaboration. Functional areas are identified explicitly in each section where there is sufficient data for in-depth analysis.

Document review and key informant interview observations: Roles and responsibilities

The four functional areas are supported by varying degrees of centralization or shared services within the City of Saint Paul. Typically, shared services allow for some level of autonomy and customization tailored to the specific needs of each department, while centralization tends to involve a more integrated and standardized approach driven by central authority. However, the specific degree to which centralization occurs in each of the functional areas within the SPPL and Parks and Recreation departments varies.

The data highlight the diverse roles and responsibilities within the organizations, spanning human resources and staffing, financial management and procurement, technology management and equipment, and facilities and maintenance. Staff members hold specialized roles within functions such as accounting, human resources consulting, technology management, and facilities oversight.

Human resources and staffing roles emphasize recruitment, onboarding, training, coaching, and policy management, leaves of absences, addressing employee questions, and personnel issues. Human resources and staffing activities are more centralized; however, the arrangement allows for decentralization depending on unique circumstances. For example, some departments rely on supervisors and managers for hiring, while others involve the deputy director or human resources senior consultants.

Financial management and procurement roles focus heavily on overseeing budgets, accounts payable/receivable, and procurement processes. Activities are more centralized, though individual departments can choose their own vendors either from a centralized list of contracted services or by working with vendors outside of pre-identified city or state lists. Greater collaboration is crucial to avoid redundancy and inefficiencies in resource management.

Technology management and equipment roles involve managing budgets related to hardware and software subscriptions, maintaining the website and online resources including the intranet, Microsoft SharePoint, and digital projects, and ensuring the technology infrastructure meets the needs of staff and the public.

Facilities and maintenance roles cover the operation and maintenance of multiple locations, including managing contracts and overseeing building maintenance. Facilities management includes some human resources related duties such as planning and payroll, staff management, ordering supplies, and handling building systems management, plumbing and electrical operations, and grounds maintenance. For Parks and Recreation, facilities management includes soliciting bids for large projects and maintaining fire systems. Ground crews in Parks and Recreation provide service operations within recreation centers and supervise park workers.

Key informant perspectives: Opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings

Fifteen key informants from SPPL and Parks and Recreation were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. This section focuses on the collaborative opportunities they identified for efficiencies and cost savings.

Human resources and staffing

Human resources are managed through a centralized approach with some flexibility by individual departments. Human resources consultants in both departments have begun to reduce redundancy through developing consistent materials around training, for example, a frequently asked questions document for parental leave.

Currently the [other department] human resources liaison and I are collaborating on a resource for individuals who want to take a parental leave. We have about an eight page draft document that we're working on and getting feedback from a variety of different people. It's getting really close to being done. – Key informant

In addition, the two department human resources liaisons worked together to develop a presentation addressing pay performance which was recently negotiated.

I focused more on the data and in questioning and ensuring that the data was accurate... She helped with the PowerPoint so together we could benefit from what each other did. And I think that's really wonderful collaboration as well. – Key informant

Opportunities currently exist for cross-training staff to allow movement within and outside departments. According to one key informant, the Community Recreation Leader position is one gateway position that results in lateral and upward mobility.

I believe when someone starts with the city in our Community Recreation Leader position, there are quite a few opportunities for cross-training in that they can move to different sites. There are also opportunities for movement up as well...and options to move to different sites. I think there continues to be more of a need for training opportunities for the Community Recreation Leader to ensure that they are prepared and successful at that next level, whether it be as an Office Assistant, whether it be as a Community Recreation Specialist or whether they go on to a different job someplace within the City of Saint Paul. – Key informant

Maybe there's an opportunity for collaborating with the supervisor academy as well as an opportunity to collaborate on hiring processes and maybe even onboarding on a regular basis. – Key informant

There is a sense of urgency from other functional department managers to create a streamlined, faster process of hiring and onboarding staff, especially for summer work.

If there was a way to streamline the actual hiring process, so that there was even just one or two types of processes, but there are many different types of processes at play at this time... So my hope is that we can streamline the hiring process. To be simplified to just maybe two or three different ways that we're doing hiring versus the probably ten different ways at this point. – Key informant

Financial management and procurement

The financial management and procurement staff that Wilder interviewed were not aware of specifics involving the other department. There is a centralized Office of Financial Services that provides consistency in financial management. Each department has at least one accountant. Though the accountants are aware of the initiative to share services and reduce redundancies, they are not familiar with each other's departments.

I don't really know a lot about how [the other department] operates. I work with that accountant occasionally on some interdepartmental billing. A lot of this stuff is centralized, so there's a budget team over in the Office of Financial Services like our central finance and they assist each department. I know that we share some capital budgets with [the other department] and I work with them on monitoring and reporting on those budgets, but... I don't work with them on a regular basis. So, I'm not really sure what potential efficiencies there are. – Key informant

The City of Saint Paul uses master contracts for certain vendors that go through a competitive bidding process, for example a vendor for office supplies, and any department can utilize those contracted services. Though the two departments may use the same vendors, they are not aware of which vendor each uses to purchase the same services.

I'm not really aware of what [the other department] does operationally, I'm not really aware of what vendors they use, so that might be a better question for our central purchasing office maybe, just to see—they might be more familiar with common vendors I think, but I'm sure there are some. – Key informant

Technology management and equipment

Technology staff in both SPPL and Parks and Recreation see opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings and appear to be in discussions at various levels, though there does not appear to be a formal process in place.

I can see two groups meeting and talking about “what kind of equipment/software are you using” and learning about new things like scheduling software. I learned that [the other department] is also doing something similar, so what we did was reach out to someone and have a semi-formal meeting about it and how they went through the process...If there was more cross-over, where people can check in regarding technology, some way to share intel and needs. Share successes. – Key informant

Key informant perspectives: Collaboration across departments

Key informants had the following suggestions for collaboration across departments:

- Work together on purchasing security sensing technology.
- Advocate for better pricing on large purchases, such as security cameras.
- Use technology more efficiently in the three co-located buildings, such as using the same video management system, eliminating duplication in credit card processing, sharing a copier/printer vendor, and coordinating purchases.
- Coordinate purchasing and share costs in digital projects.

One difficulty in exploring these ideas is the lack of informal interaction that occurs when working remotely as opposed to working on-site. As one individual said, “Someone could have a good idea that’s worth sharing, but the opportunity doesn’t exist.”

[We are] definitely talking about ways to collaborate more closely on security camera systems. Parks and Recreation and Libraries maintain their own buildings, but there are a couple of cases where parks and libraries are in the same building. Mix bag—but in one location, each has its own security system, which is a duplicate in the building. [In] another building, Parks controls the whole thing, and that can be a challenge for the library staff in that building as they do not have access to the camera footage/have to go through a process of requesting. – Key informant

Facilities and maintenance

Facilities and maintenance staff identified a need to share knowledge to find areas for efficiencies. Facility staff indicated there is some awareness of possibilities and opportunities to collaborate, such as reducing drug use in public restrooms, and sharing and supporting vendors particularly in shared sites. According to one staff person, both departments are working to reduce the use of drugs in public restrooms. This is an opportunity for further, ongoing collaboration between SPPL and Parks and Recreation.

People use our public bathrooms to do drugs. We work on programs that deter that. [The other department] is also working on that—a bit of collaboration. We lean on facility partners at [the other department] if we need help, or when our vendors have troubles. I see some collaboration with staff, but, as of right now, not a lot of cost sharing, but can see the collaboration starting with each other. – Key informant

Area leadership offered an observation that considering the notion of “geographic focus” might be helpful in combining work across departments. Aligning work that needs to be done in specific parts of the city, independent of departments, may present a substantial efficiency opportunity, especially related to grass cutting and snow plowing.

There's a lot of separation of staff. ... What I'm actually working on right now is redoing our grass cutting and plow routes to create efficiencies in that in itself, because we have a lot of people driving right past each other every day to go to something that they could actually already cut rather than driving by each other. So just based on the group that you work in, we're doing a lot of this. – Key Informant

Maintenance staff were less knowledgeable about existing opportunities within the other department; however, one maintenance supervisor suggested the following when asked about suggestions for improving collaboration between SPPL and Parks and Recreation.

The city should have one centrally located supply warehouse for all agencies. We could use an existing building and all supplies can be ordered and delivered through the warehouse. I know we can't do all the supplies, but supplies like toilet paper, soap, disinfectant wipes, copying paper, pencils, pans, etc. This could be a big cost savings for all departments [because] we would be ordering in large quantities and if something like Covid ever happened again, this would put the city in a better position. – Key informant (from an email sent after the interview)

More resource sharing could occur once facilities and maintenance staff in both departments better understand how operations are carried out within the other department. Staff provided several examples of resources to share, including purchasing plans (e.g., for janitorial products), vendor lists, equipment services (e.g., snowplowing, lawn mowing), and skilled tradespeople (e.g., electricians, plumbers).

Even shared knowledge would be super helpful like a plumber and electrician that can tell us what to do rather than guessing. Assisting each other to get things back running. Maybe that's an opportunity that can help us both? But again, [other department] is playing as much catch up to modernize their facilities just like us. – Key informant

One of the challenges we have is the way that our labor contract agreements are written and the way that they operate. There are definitely some fine lines in the sand as far as who can touch what, how they can touch it. So there aren't a whole lot of things that can be spread out too drastically. – Key informant

When it comes to sharing equipment such as snowplows and lawnmowers, there is concern by some that the equipment will not be cared for as it should.

*We could [share equipment]. But the problem is that there are individuals who will treat equipment better than others. Gently saying it—not pointing to specific people. We don't have a mechanic who goes to a shop and can repair it. Sharing equipment is a slippery slope. I would say no... When it comes to sharing vehicles, I would say yes.
– Key informant*

As long as proper training occurs and, you know, they're just taking care of the equipment is the biggest thing when some of the stuff is used by others that we typically would use on our own. We have issues with it not coming back in the same shape as it was before they used it. Damages that have sometimes occurred. That'd be my concern. – Key informant

One caution with collaboration across departments is defining clear roles and responsibilities.

Getting better contracts with vendors—both SPPL and Parks and Recreation—with preventative maintenance and others can have cost savings from one standpoint. I know things can get a little murky with workload and who's calling who, and levels of understanding job responsibilities. – Key informant

Key informants: Suggestions for further collaboration

During the interviews, Wilder Research asked key informants for their suggestions for improving collaboration between SPPL and Parks and Recreation. Key informants provided the following suggestions:

- Implement monthly check-ins to ensure consistency in new materials or policies suggested by or developed for staff.
- In areas where collaboration does not currently exist, use Microsoft Teams to keep each other informed and bring collaborative groups together to problem solve.
- Use the “who is my counterpart” model set by deputy directors who are already having conversations together.

All other key informants interviewed talked about possibilities for collaboration once they have had a better chance to understand their counterpart's job.

Recommendations

Based on findings from the key informant interviews, document review, and literature search, Wilder Research, at the direction of the Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee, prioritized recommendations into three categories: high priorities, secondary priorities, and future considerations.

Determining the priority of recommendations involved several key criteria:

- **Urgency:** The degree to which the recommendations require immediate attention or action
- **Impact:** The degree to which the recommendations have a positive effect on outcomes or performance
- **Feasibility:** The degree to which the recommendations are easily implementable with available resources
- **Stakeholder Support:** The degree to which the recommendations have backing from key stakeholders
- **Alignment with Goals:** The degree to which the recommendations support strategic objectives

These criteria help prioritize recommendations effectively based on urgency, impact, and resources.

High priority recommendations

Throughout the key informant interviews, Wilder heard the need to build awareness among staff of the work being done in the other department. The culture of collaboration among departments, in this case SPPL and Parks and Recreation, needs to be constantly reinforced and modeled through all staff levels—from directors to front line staff. The overarching message needs to highlight the “one city approach” in all function areas.

Organize workgroups within each function area consisting of staff members who do similar jobs from both departments. Require each workgroup to set regular ongoing meetings using a virtual platform such as Microsoft Teams. The purpose of the workgroups is to:

- Share information about processes in each department.
- Build relationships and trust between staff and their counterparts across departments.
- Explore services within each department that can be shared or centralized.
- Establish priorities for shared service implementation.

At the request of the City of Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee, more explicit guidance around the development and implementation of the workgroup concept is included in Appendix D.

Secondary priority recommendations

Human resources and staffing

- Continue having human resources liaisons assigned to each department and expect these liaisons to collaborate on developing materials for staff across the two departments.
- Consider greater centralization of departments for more efficient hiring, cross-training, onboarding, and career development processes and to negotiate with unions on expanding job roles, for example, engineering and maintenance roles.

Financial management and procurement

- Consider more centralized, integrated services, for example, developing a mechanism to share vendor and contract lists.
- Develop policy guidance for sharing vendors.

Technology management and equipment

- Prioritize safety and security processes as a starting point for collaboration.
- Prioritize exploring efficiencies and cost savings at co-located sites, for example, sharing physical spaces, such as conference space and classrooms, and enabling cross-departmental access for maintenance support.
- Examine opportunities for purchasing technology equipment, such as computers, in greater quantities to access better pricing.
- Continue progress on establishing one video management system for all departments.

Facilities and maintenance

- Examine possibilities for a more standardized maintenance process to create efficiencies among maintenance staff and prevent the frequency of repairs.

Future consideration recommendations

Financial management and procurement

- Examine the benefits of eProcurement systems that exist in other municipalities. (EProcurement refers to the use of an online system managed through a centralized platform that connects various entities, such as city staff to suppliers and contractors. The goal is to purchase products or services at the best price. Results from a survey of 400 municipalities indicated that centralization positively impacts the successful adoption of eProcurement systems. See Appendix B.)
- Examine asset management and set standards, life cycles, and requirements for equipment, including furniture.

Facilities and maintenance

- Develop policies for equipment sharing that address the care and maintenance of the equipment.

In addition to the prioritization of recommendations included above, at the request of the City of Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee, we also include a set of “low hanging fruit” actions that could be put into place immediately based upon interviews with team members across both departments. These items are included in Appendix E.

Appendix

A. Document review

To understand efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration, cost sharing, and process improvement within Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL) and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation (Parks and Recreation), Wilder reviewed documents and information provided by both departments pertaining to the following topics: human resources and staffing, financial management and procurement, technology management and equipment, and facilities and maintenance.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the document review:

1. What is the current approach to each function within SPPL and Parks and Recreation?
2. Where are there efficiencies in operationalization of each function?
3. Where are the inefficiencies in operationalization of each function?
4. What are the comparisons in operationalization of functions across SPPL and Parks and Recreation?
5. Where are the efficiencies in each of the four functions between SPPL and Parks and Recreation?
6. What are actionable ways to reduce redundancy and create more efficiencies in each of the four functions between SPPL and Parks and Recreation?
7. Where are the opportunities for alignment, sharing of best practices, or a unified approach?

Results

The following subtopics are summaries of documents sent to Wilder Research from SPPL and Parks and Recreation:

Budget

SPPL and Parks and Recreation budgets highlight each department's major spending categories, including salaries and benefits, contracted services, supplies and materials, equipment and maintenance, and miscellaneous services.

There may be an opportunity for cost saving through contract terms and shared purchase/service models, such as computer supplies, financial services, communications services, and technology services.

From a revenue vantage point, information from Parks and Recreation shows revenue coming from a gambling tax, federal direct and state-administered grants, and various service charges such as facility rentals and library fees. We are interested in understanding how Parks and Recreation receives library fees, which may be important to help establish revenue flow for each department.

Facilities and maintenance

Parks and Recreation and SPPL provided vendor lists of organizations and individuals working on facilities and maintenance. A few organizations appear on both vendor lists and may have the same responsibilities. Assuming co-located sites are already sharing services, collaborating and using shared services at all sites would benefit both departments with cost savings. Examples of potential collaboration include: HVAC supplies—Parks and Recreation has more than one organization for this, and none are the same vendors as SPPL; fire extinguisher inspection—each department lists a different organization; and snow plowing—SPPL has one vendor, while Parks and Recreation has none.

An opportunity for alignment may be to find ways to coordinate maintenance schedules for specific operations (such as trash, recycling, drinking fountains, and bicycle facilities) and utilize existing facilities through collaboration—specifically through sharing library and park buildings and facilities. Another opportunity for alignment is collaboration on sustainability initiatives—such as energy efficiency and waste reduction.

Human resources and staffing

Parks and Recreation's annual reports mainly provide a high-level overview of park activities and metrics. The Parks and Recreation Department provided an organization chart listing each leader and the number of FTEs under that leader's direction. The top-level department leadership includes the director, two deputy directors in charge of Youth Employment and Support Services (58.03 FTEs) and Recreation Services and Department Budget Strategy (3 FTEs). The next level includes Community First Public Safety (10 FTEs), Design and Construction (13.8 FTEs), Special Services (46.75 FTEs), and the Como Campus (Conservatory and Zoo; 102.8 FTEs). The final leadership level displayed includes Operations (179.83 FTEs), Finance and Administration (13 FTEs), and Recreation Services (151.23 FTEs). There was a separate text block labeled ARP with 28.93 FTEs. The total

number of FTEs for Parks and Recreation was 608.37. Most documentation was focused on programming and its successes and progress in development.

SPPL has a clear way of recruiting, hiring, and training new staff members. There are specific models used to onboard individuals, and there are steps to request subs for circulation and reference. An extensive list of all SPPL employees is organized by general administration (director and deputy directors), public services, system support services, facility operations and maintenance, and Friends of the Library grants (Right Track workers). Each entry on the list includes the employee's name, position (number), job class (name of the position), grade, count, and FTE. Some vacant positions are shown in the chart. As of May 8, 2024, SPPL employs 237 individuals, up to 180.1 FTEs.

The Right Track Program has been mentioned in both departments. Although not mentioned in any documentation, each end has an unknown collaboration. This could be an opportunity for alignment and may have a Human Resources approach that could be shared.

Technology management and equipment

The City of Saint Paul has a Safety and Security Surveillance Workgroup. This work comprises six departments: SPPL, Office of Financial Services (OFS), Office of Technology and Communication (OTC), Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD). The main goal is to control, consume, and share data/videos, track, manage, and maintain a video system, and promote high technical standards for collection, retention, and transmission.

Conversations have taken place about having subgroups for governance, program management, and technical components in the workgroup. A recommendation is to discuss the efficiency and progress of the workgroups and see if it is impacting SPPL and Parks and Recreation technology.

Parks and Recreation and SPPL are already collaborating using the same management system, ExacqVision. The libraries have 202 cameras, and the parks have 397. Information was given about SPPL and SPPR equipment; some cameras have been disabled yet are still in the system. To reduce redundancy, it may be important to understand why an asset is still in the system and used in specific buildings.

B. Annotated bibliography

To learn more about inter-departmental service and resource sharing, collaboration, and efficiencies within municipalities, Wilder Research conducted a brief search for literature on these topics. Wilder also conducted a brief field scan for examples of this work at a local government level. Broad themes from the search are described below, with the associated source articles and reports.

Cost savings and efficiency

Shared services can yield cost savings and efficiency improvements, but outcomes vary widely depending on the service type and implementation strategy.

Aldag A., Warner, M., & Bel, G. (2020). It depends on what you share: The elusive cost savings from service sharing. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 30(2), 275-289. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muz023>

This study involved a survey of local governments in New York State to examine service sharing and cost saving outcomes. Researchers found that shared services led to cost savings in certain instances while not in others; savings occurred in waste management, roads and highways, police, library, and sewer. No evidence was found for economic development savings. Elder costs, zoning, and planning resulted in higher costs. The differences are explained by the characteristics of the services. Economies of scale are critical only if they do not increase administrative intensity or compromise quality. “Solid waste management ... and library are the only services where costs show a continued downward trend.” The final caution is not to assume cost savings when sharing services.

Elston, T., MacCarthaigh, M., & Verhoest, K. (2018). Collaborative cost cutting: Productive efficiency as an interdependency between public organizations. *Public Management Review*, 20(12), 1815-1835. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1438498>

Using organization theory and a multi-dimensional approach, the authors compare similarities and differences between two antecedents of inter-organizational collaboration, efficiency vs. complexity-driven collaboration. Their framework suggests that managing these interdependencies effectively can lead to significant cost savings, but the outcomes vary depending on the strength and nature of these interdependencies. Future research should include evaluating the impact of these collaborations on financial and non-financial outcomes such as accountability and responsiveness.

Office of the New York State Comptroller. (2019). *Intermunicipal cooperation and consolidation: Exploring opportunities for savings and improved service delivery.*

<https://dos.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2019/05/cooperation1.pdf>

This paper examines opportunities for consolidation and cooperation in New York State among counties and municipalities. Several examples of county/municipality partnerships are provided. The key takeaways are the emphasis on a process that enables government entities to determine where cooperation and consolidation will provide the most benefit. The process starts with a needs assessment of functions that can benefit followed by a feasibility study to determine the likelihood of cost savings or benefit. When a determination is made to go forward, a written agreement is advised to prevent misunderstandings.

Walzer, N., & Posis Plasch, C. (2016). Shared services as a response to governmental fragmentation. *Illinois Municipal Policy Journal*, 1(1), 1-14.

<https://las.depaul.edu/centers-and-institutes/chaddick-institute-for-metropolitan-development/research-and-publications/Documents/Shared%20Services%20as%20a%20Response%20to%20Governmental%20Fragmentation%20-%20N.%20Walzer%20and%20C.%20Plasch.pdf>

The Governmental Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force in Illinois was assembled to remove the obstacles that hindered progress to achieving cost savings. This article reviews the work of the Task Force and discusses streamlined service delivery in local governments. The Task Force's final report gives examples of successful collaborations and four suggestions for shared services efficiencies, which include: look for duplication, reduce costly fragmentation by consolidating governmental units, use a needs assessment to identify efficiencies, and draw from other's experiences.

Collaboration and trust

Effective intergovernmental and inter-institutional collaborations require building trust, clear communication, and strong leadership.

Bhagavathyla, S., Brundiars, K., Stauffacher, M., & Kay, B. (2021). Fostering collaboration in city governments' sustainability, emergency management and resilience work through competency-based capacity building. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2021.102408>

Through a lens of planning for climate resiliency and sustainability, the authors worked with the City of Tempe, Arizona, to build capacity for collaboration across city departments. An evaluation of this capacity building program concluded that city governments can

enhance collaboration across departments through a two-step process: first, by crossing silos through awareness and increased interaction and, second, by dismantling them through integrated planning and interdisciplinary roles. Although not all competencies were equally developed and short-term collaborations need institutional support to be sustainable, the program demonstrated the importance of interdisciplinary skills and institutional enablement for long-term resilience and policy change.

Costumato, L. (2021). Collaboration among public organizations: A systematic literature review on determinants of interinstitutional performance. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 34(3), 247-273.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-03-2020-0069>

The dynamics of “public inter-institutional collaboration” receive little attention. This systematic literature review aimed to bridge the concepts of collaborative governance with performance measurement within public institution research. The literature revealed determinants that can be fostered to increase collaboration. These determinants include trust, power sharing, leadership style, management strategies, and formalization of rules and operating procedures. These determinants are crucial for enhancing collaborative performance.

de Jong, J., Edmondson, A., Moore, M., Bowles, H. R., Rivkin, J., Martinez Orbegozo, E. F., & Pulido-Gomez, S. (2021). Building cities' collaborative muscle. *Stanford Innovation Review*.

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_cities_collaborative_muscle

From 2018 to 2020, the authors worked with cross-boundary collaborations in North America, Iceland, and the United Kingdom to examine collaboration goals, barriers, and progress. They developed a set of tools to identify and measure these concepts. Additionally, the authors present important front end steps to building successful collaboration, which include: selecting the right people and building trust, agreeing on what the problem is and the goal/preferred outcome, getting parties on board who lend legitimacy, agreeing on how to accomplish objectives, creating a work plan, agreeing on how decisions will be made, establishing communication channels, defining roles, establishing a governance structure, and measuring progress.

Hasche, N., Høglund, L., & Martensson, M. (2020). Intra-organizational trust in public organizations—The study of interpersonal trust in vertical and horizontal relationships from a bidirectional perspective. *Public Management Review*, 23(12), 1768-1788. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1764081>

The authors analyzed trust (high vs. low) between and within groups of superiors and subordinates (horizontal vs. vertical) using the three antecedents of trust proposed by Mayer et al (1995): ability, benevolence, and integrity. They use a case study of the Swedish Public Employee Service to illustrate. Findings include that trust varies significantly across vertical and horizontal relationships, with ability-based trust being high in both contexts but fluctuating based on the roles of trustor and trustee. Benevolence-based trust is consistently low across both types of relationships, influenced by opportunistic behavior and an authoritarian culture, while integrity-based trust shows high levels only in specific vertical relationships despite overall low trust in horizontal **interactions**.

Zeemering, E., & Delabbio, D. (2013). *A county manager's guide to shared services in local government*. IBM Center for the Business of Government. <https://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/A%20County%20Managers%20Guide%20to%20Shared%20Services.pdf>

This report focuses on shared services within county government using multiple county case studies to draw conclusions and make recommendations. The authors detail preconditions for successful shared services whether the goal is to improve service quality, improve decision-making, or achieve cost savings. Preconditions for success include: strong support from top leaders in the entity using teams to maintain forward movement; developing trust among shared service partners; transparency; and establishing clear goals with expected outcomes. Five recommendations are made for planning and implementing shared services: establish a team to identify opportunities for collaboration, look for government units with complementary strengths and needs, begin with pilot projects, identify and document roles and responsibilities for each partner, and adjust as needed.

Service integration and sustainability

To achieve sustainability and efficiency, integrating services and choosing the right organizational structure are critical. Different approaches yield varied results.

Blank, J. T., & Niaounakis, T. K., (2021). Economies of scale and sustainability in local government: A complex issue. *Sustainability*, 13.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su132313262>

Issues related to developing economies of scale and implications for local government policy include: amalgamation, cooperation, and outsourcing. The authors conclude that the relationship between scale and sustainability is complex, and there is no such thing as “one size fits all.” Different perspectives may play a role and should be considered when suggesting solutions and providing recommendations to achieve sustainable goals.

Chen, Y., Bretschneider, S., Stritch, J. M., Darnall, N., & Huseh, L. (2021). E-procurement system adoption in local governments: The role of procurement complexity and organizational structure. *Public Management Review*, 24(6), 903-925.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1874497>

Public entities have adopted e-procurement systems to deal with increasing complexity and achieve cost savings. This study sought to understand how local government structure and procurement complexity affect e-procurement. Based on a survey of 400 cities, the findings indicated that centralization positively influences the adoption of e-procurement systems. Conversely, decentralized organizational structures show mixed effects, with coordinated structures relying more on intra-organizational collaboration rather than e-procurement technology to handle procurement challenges.

Lambert, T. (2017). Bringing the library home: Adding libraries to public housing developments shares resources and costs. *American Libraries*, 48(5). 14-15.

<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/05/01/bringing-library-home-public-housing/>

This article presents examples of how libraries are sharing locations with other public sector entities to lower costs and keep libraries relevant. Case studies discussed include shared partnerships between public libraries and public housing authorities and boards of education in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Milwaukee. The goals of these partnerships are to bring public library services to underserved communities.

Quitau, M-B., Gustafsson, S., Hoffmann, B., & Krantz, V. (2022). Sustainability coordination within forerunning Nordic municipalities—Exploring structural challenges across departmental silos and hierarchies. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.130330>

The focus of this study is sustainability based on the experience of two Scandinavian municipalities, with discussion of the structural tensions in aligning different perspectives. The authors emphasize the need to foster communication and balance centralized and decentralized approaches to create a cohesive strategy for integrating sustainability across municipal departments.

Strategic planning and implementation

Successful shared services require careful strategic planning, including needs assessments, pilot projects, and clear agreements to ensure effective implementation and collaboration.

Campbell Public Affairs Institute. (2017). *Considering shared government services in New York State: A guide for citizens and public officials*. Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University. https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/nys-shared-services-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=d10bb554_3

This guide provides case studies involving shared government services in New York State, most of which are between municipalities. The authors identify best practices and lessons learned based on examples from New York State, California, and large government mergers (Indianapolis, Indiana, merger with Marion County and Louisville, Kentucky, merger with Jefferson County). The guide also includes a list of key issues and questions that municipalities can use to inform shared service planning.

C. Round 2 interview protocol

Interview Framework for Operational Efficiency

Mid-level managers/staff

Background

The Saint Paul City Audit Committee is working with Wilder Research to identify opportunities for collaboration, cost-sharing, and process improvement between the Saint Paul Public Library and the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department **in four areas: Human Resources, Finance/Procurement, Buildings/Maintenance, and Technology**. Wilder will assess current operations and make recommendations aimed at improving service delivery and ensuring efficient use of City resources.

To inform the work, we are interviewing key individuals who work for the City of St Paul in the four areas in both departments. You were identified as one of these individuals to interview.

We will combine your feedback with that of others, to look for themes, as well as gather information about any questions that emerge. The results will be combined with other's perspectives from the interviews and shared in a report to the Audit Committee.

We know we have 1 hour so we may need to move to the next question to be sure we get through the main questions.

Before we start, do you have any questions?

In addition, would you be OK with us recording this so we can reference it when taking notes?

Participation in this survey will not impact your relationship with The City of St Paul. Individual quotes will be de-identified and results from the survey will be reported in aggregate. Please indicate the level of confidentiality you would like us to maintain for your own responses in our report:

- Do not share any of my open-ended responses. Only combine my feedback with others.*
- Share my de-identified open-ended responses: You can share key quotes, but any other information that will identify me will be removed.*

Key Questions

Background information

1. Briefly describe your role in your department and the activities of your daily work related to HR/staffing, Financial management/procurement, Technology and equipment, **OR** Facilities/maintenance.
2. What new opportunities are you seeing now that there's an intentional effort to find efficiencies and cost sharing opportunities between SPPL and SPPR?

For team members from Human Resources

Human Resources (Staffing Approach, Processes, Pipeline Management)

1. Current Staffing Approach:

- How are staffing decisions made in your department?
- What are the main challenges you face with the current staffing levels?

2. Processes:

- How are HR processes such as recruitment, onboarding, and performance management handled?
- Are there any HR processes that you feel are duplicated or could be streamlined?

3. Pipeline Management:

- How does your department handle staff training and development?
- What opportunities exist for cross-training staff to cover multiple functions?
- How effective is your current pipeline for bringing in new talent?

For team members from Finance & Procurement

Financial Management and Procurement

1. Budget Management:

- How are budgets currently allocated and managed in your department?
- Are there any financial practices that could be streamlined or improved?

2. Procurement Processes:

- How do you handle procurement of supplies and services?
- Are there any common vendors used across both departments?
- What challenges do you face with the current procurement process?

3. Cost-Saving Measures:

- Have any cost-saving measures been implemented recently? If so, what were the results?

- What areas (HR, Financial/procurement, Technology/equipment, Facilities/maintenance) do you see as having the most potential for cost savings?

For team members from Technology

Technology and Equipment

1. Technology Usage:

- What technology systems and software does your department currently use?
- How effective are these systems in supporting your daily operations?

2. Equipment Management:

- How do you handle the procurement and maintenance of equipment?
- Are there any technology or equipment needs that are not currently being met?

3. Opportunities for Improvement:

- What opportunities do you see for integrating technology and equipment across both departments?
- How can the current technology infrastructure be improved to enhance efficiency?

For team members from Facilities & Maintenance

Facilities and Maintenance

1. Facilities Management:

- Can you describe how facilities maintenance is currently managed in your department?
- What are the main challenges you face with facilities maintenance?

2. Maintenance Processes:

- How are preventive maintenance and emergency repairs handled?
- Are there any maintenance processes that you feel could be streamlined or improved?

3. Shared Facilities:

- Are there opportunities for sharing facilities and maintenance resources with the other department? For example:
 - Standardized trash and recycling receptacles
 - Basic seating and benches with specific material and design recommendations.
 - Bicycle facilities, including racks and maintenance stations, at multiple locations.
 - Lighting enhancements to improve safety and aesthetics
 - Installation of drinking fountains

- Maintenance and introduction of native vegetation for low maintenance and habitat support
- Are there opportunities to share equipment that is used for facility maintenance, for example, snow removal, lawn maintenance?
- How can the use of physical spaces be optimized to reduce costs?

(For everyone)

Collaboration

1. Do you have any suggestions for improving collaboration between the SPPL and SPPR departments?
 - What do you see as benefits to the collaboration?
 - What do you see as opportunities for improvement in the collaboration going forward?
2. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered?

D. Guidance around formulation of workgroups

To formulate workgroups, identify key areas across both departments where staff are interested in collaboration and partnership (these may include the broader areas outlined in the report or may be more focused). Identify staff members who do similar jobs across both departmental areas and invite those team members to a workgroup launch meeting. Support that meeting with a senior manager to set the collaborative tone and expectations and provide rotating support for capturing notes and to-do items. Use the city's Microsoft Teams platform to establish regular sessions for the workgroup and a collaborative workspace for capturing notes and identifying action items.

Spend time in the first 1 or 2 meetings of the workgroup to define its purpose and objectives. Core to collaborative workgroups that will build relationships, and eventually efficiencies across the two departments, will be a focus on explicit relationship-building activities for team members in the workgroup; open sharing of approaches, techniques, tools, or software used to address specific departmental needs; and sharing of problem areas and/or potential areas for partnership and collaboration. Establish a set of short-term objectives for the workgroup with time-bound goals focused on: what is the need the workgroup is addressing, what are the expected deliverables, and what is the timeline for completion.

Also during the first 1 or 2 meetings, identify co-leads for the workgroup, one from each department. Discuss the explicit accountabilities or expectations for the co-leads (e.g., planning and facilitating meetings, recording action items, following up on additional needs for the group, adding workgroup members as needed). Also discuss the explicit accountabilities or expectations for each one of the workgroup members.

Finally, during the early meetings, discuss and clarify how the workgroup will do its work, including the frequency of meetings, mode of meetings (in-person versus hybrid), expected behavior and involvement during meetings, navigation of deadlines, and communications protocols. Be sure to discuss decision-making processes and navigating accountabilities across departments.

Develop a high-level workplan for the workgroup, including the key objectives identified above, as well as task assignments related to these objectives (assigned to group members based upon availability and expertise), timelines for those tasks, and check-in points to review progress. For cross-functional workgroups, consider whether tasks should be assigned as "pairs" – one person from each department focused on that work (e.g., reviewing and presenting on what tool each department uses for a particular type of work).

Use the Microsoft Teams suite and its capabilities for effective communication as a workgroup. Meeting agenda and notes, real-time communication, and preparation of joint materials can be accomplished through Teams. Email can also be used for regular communication, but, for important shared information, use the Microsoft Teams capabilities so that a shared structure and shared storage across departments can be undertaken.

Keep departmental leadership apprised of progress of the workgroup (including relationship-building activities) through regular messaging or invitation of leaders to periodic conversations. Check in as a workgroup regularly (monthly or quarterly) to determine if the workgroup is making progress toward its shared objectives. Regular reflection also allows for identifying places where the team may get stuck, may need leader support, or may need to explore other resources. Evaluate as you progress where the workgroup is on its objective plan, determining whether the workgroup should continue its work or has met its initially identified needs and is ready to be completed. Given the breadth of opportunities across the two departments, future workgroups will arise for additional membership. At the end of a workgroup, host a celebration and debrief session to celebrate wins and collaborations as well as to understand what processes should be altered for the next workgroup.

E. Immediate “low hanging fruit” actions

1. Understand which vendors SPPL and Parks and Recreation use and if any can be combined or streamlined.

I don't know all the ins and outs of Parks and Recreation – their vendors and what their operation is like. Wonder why they can't be on the same purchasing plans for janitorial materials. Can be cost savings when we do same program. There can be vendor lists – preferred vendors would be great. – Key informant

2. Lean on one another when in need of help.

Lean on facility partners there at Parks and Recreation if we need help, or when our vendors have troubles. – Key informant

Staff can utilize an internal team rather than asking external organizations. – Key informant

3. For shared sites, share common items such as an alarm system, keys, and responsibilities for facilities (HVAC, water heaters, and so on) rather than trying to get in touch with the other department for assistance.
4. Solidify responsibilities to ensure there is no repeated/inconsistent work.

There's a lot of separation of staff. ... What I'm actually working on right now is redoing our grass cutting and plow routes to create efficiencies because we have a lot of people driving right past each other every day to go to something that they could actually already cut rather than driving by each other. – Key informant

5. Create documents that can help new staff members with standard protocols/rules.

Like providing an FAQ for staff members as the policy is made I see an opportunity to collaborate with tip sheets, tools, resources for staff. – Key informant

Why do we need five different FAQs when we can just do one, where a generalist can get that and it can be shared with the rest of the staff members? – Key informant

6. Improve general training and development for City of Saint Paul employees.

The City of Saint Paul does do a Saint Paul orientation, but they only do it once a quarter, or once every couple of months. And it's frustrating because it's kind of like a fixed mindset [of having this onboarding]. Why can't we have a version of it and offer it monthly or every other month, and for a whole day. Why does it have to be all day? And why does it have to be a specific day? That maybe isn't necessary. – Key informant

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee for supporting this research and staff from Saint Paul Public Libraries and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation who were interviewed for this study.

In addition, we would like to thank the following Wilder Research Staff who contributed to this report:

Chris Bray
Heather Britt
Marilyn Conrad
Rachel Fields
Naw-Amelia Kacher
Heather Loch
Audrey Mutanhaurwa
Stephanie Nelson-Dusek
Niyati Panchal

Wilder Research, a division of Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, is a nationally respected nonprofit research and evaluation group. For more than 100 years, Wilder Research has gathered and interpreted facts and trends to help families and communities thrive, get at the core of community concerns, and uncover issues that are overlooked or poorly understood.

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700 | www.wilderresearch.org

Wilder Research®

Information. Insight. Impact.



SAINT PAUL
MINNESOTA

