

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: 4/22/2026

To: Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Nick Sinram, Executive Director of the Office of Strategy, Budget & Performance

Subject: Office of Strategy, Budget & Performance 2025 Annual Report

File Type: Informational Report

This informational report provides a report on how the Office of Strategy, Budget & Performance set and achieved its 2025 goals.

POLICY

This report aligns to Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health.

Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health
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ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

Alignment to the above strategic goals is articulated in responses to the questions below.

BODY

OVERVIEW

The Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance (SBP) was created in 2022 to purposefully align strategic planning and budgeting efforts to enable Milwaukee County to achieve its long-term vision. The office leads the strategic plan, uses an equitable lens for budgeting, and implements effective practices for continuous improvement, grant development, project management, strategic communications, and policy advocacy. The office also facilitates distribution of countywide pandemic-era and national settlement funding while building capacity across the organization. These activities support Milwaukee County's ability to provide high quality services for the residents of Milwaukee County.

SBP works to strengthen county business practices and strategically align critical resources that advance the mission and improve Milwaukee County's fiscal health. The office is structured to support departments across the organization through the following three service areas:

- ▶ **STRATEGY:** The Strategy service area works with all departments and elected offices to drive meaningful progress within the county's strategic plan. In addition, this service area manages the County's Strategy Dashboard, oversees data governance, plans and facilitates key leadership meetings, and manages the County's strategic plan performance measurement processes.
- ▶ **BUDGET:** The Budget service area leads the development and implementation of the county's \$1.3 billion annual operating and capital budgets and supports the County's efforts toward achieving long-term financial sustainability. Milwaukee County strives to be a fiscally healthy organization that prioritizes investments towards strategic plan priorities.
- ▶ **PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE (PMO):** The PMO leads efforts to advance Milwaukee County's strategic plan by managing mission-driven projects, countywide allocation processes for exceptional funds, and programs. The team integrates project management methods and industry best practices to support county departments in the following service areas:
 - **Project Management** including continuous improvement, priority, and strategy initiatives
 - **Competitive Grant Development** including congressionally directed spending
 - **Strategic Communications** including internal communication channels, brand management, and digital experiences
 - **Programs** including American Rescue Plan Act, Opioid Settlement Funds, Youth Commission, and the Administrative Manual of Operating Procedures
 - **Policy Support** including state and local advocacy efforts and state budget requests.

SBP developed and monitors a five-year strategic plan and reviews key performance indicators in the form of a scorecard to ensure progress on annual goals, as represented in this report.

Additionally, SBP service areas develop annual strategies and objectives in support of the SBP strategic plan and staff align and implement quarterly activities to further this work on a continuous basis.

Below is the progress on the top five goals on SBP's Scorecard.

TOP GOALS IN 2025

20 Completed Projects:

The PMO supports Milwaukee County departments by providing additional capacity to execute strategic solutions for their most pressing project needs. A tiered system of support is used to effectively meet the needs of County departments. In 2025, the PMO carried out and concluded 29 projects requiring continuous improvement or general project management assistance. This surpasses SBP's goal of 20 projects for 2025.

The office takes on short term and multi-year projects that require collaborative (tier two) or lead (tier three) project management support and tools. Projects concluded in 2025 resulted in outcomes such as:

- Migration to the Wisconsin Retirement System for new Milwaukee County employees
- Implementation of free phone and video calling program for the Community Reintegration Center (CRC) and Milwaukee County Jail
- Submittal of documentation to FEMA to request a Flood Disaster Declaration for August 2025 flooding
- Development of content and materials for 2025-27 Biennial State Budget requests
- Accreditation for CRC through the American Correctional Association
- Document standardization and record digitization in the Department of Administrative Services (DAS)

The PMO also continues to support multi-year projects such as the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (IJCC) project and Future State project which are not reflected as "complete" in the data above and will continue in 2026 and beyond.

10% Increase in Competitive Grant Submissions:

The grant development team within the PMO works to pursue competitive grant funds for Milwaukee County through targeted grant development support for County departments. This includes grant searches, planning, and writing/proofreading support. The 2025 grant development goal was to increase the number of proposals submitted in 2024 by 10%. Due to the changing federal landscape, this goal was not reached, although a significant \$107,582,343 was requested through 34 grant proposals. This represents a decrease of 11% in the amount of funds requested as compared to 2024.

This decline was driven largely by significant shifts in federal priorities under the new administration. Many federal agencies restructured or redirected their programs, resulting in fewer opportunities that aligned with Milwaukee County's mission. In addition, several major federal grants were placed on hold or delayed as departments reassessed frameworks and funding strategies. These combined factors significantly narrowed the pool of eligible

opportunities, reducing both the number of applications the County was positioned to submit and the total funding available to pursue them.

As of April 17, 2026, 12 of the applications submitted in 2025 have been awarded, totaling \$48,705,405 in grant revenue. This is a 50% success rate among proposals with decisions issued to date. An additional 10 proposals remain pending, representing \$46,050,529 in potential future grant revenue.

In 2025, the PMO also facilitated requests for Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) through local legislative offices for 8 projects totaling \$29,200,000. Two projects, totaling \$1,250,000, aimed at supporting the clean diesel bus purchase initiative and community center upgrades, moved forward for approval into law.

In the first quarter of 2026, grant activity has already increased significantly. The PMO assisted with submitting 17 grants between January and March 2026, compared to just 4 during the same period last year (a 325% increase). This increase is due to a greater number of available opportunities than in the previous year, signaling that grant conditions are beginning to trend upward again.

Since its inception in January 2021, the grant development team, in collaboration with Milwaukee County departments, has supported the accumulation of \$206,676,340 in competitive grant awards through April 2026 and secured \$20,139,000 in CDS funding.

60% of Requested Capital Projects Adopted

The Capital Backlog represents the funding gap between annual project requests (Year 1) and available County funding as defined by adopted policy.¹ The long-term goal is to gradually reduce the volume of Year 1 requests so that limited resources can be focused on the County's most critical infrastructure needs. Projects that are not immediately essential can then be planned and scheduled across Years 2–5 of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).²

2026 Budget Request/Adoption Process (performed in calendar year 2025):

The percentage of requested projects that were adopted in the 2026 Adopted Capital Budget remained relatively stable at 35%, compared to 33% in the 2025 Adopted Capital Budget.

As with last year's Adopted Capital Budget, the 2026 Adopted Capital Budget includes funding for several large projects:

- Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (\$18.8M)
- Zoo Front Entrance (\$13.6M)
- Mitchell Park Domes (\$5.0M)

¹ The County maintains a bonding and cash goal policy related to its capital budget development process:

- a) The annual cash goal reflects 20% of the Net County Funding Contribution (which excludes Federal/State/Local revenue sources). County cash financing primarily consists of property tax levy for non-Airport capital projects.
- b) The bonding cap limits the amount of corporate purpose bonds issued to finance capital improvement projects. Under this policy, corporate purpose bond issuance is limited to an increase of no more than 3% over the preceding year's adopted bond amount

² The County maintains a 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to guide the planning and cost estimation of future capital projects. The first year (Year 1) of the CIP represents the active funding year, where scheduled projects receive their adopted funding. Years two through five serve as planning years for upcoming projects and the continuation of existing project phases, but does not reflect adopted funding.

These and other larger-scale capital investments consumed a significant portion of the County's funding capacity, which in turn limited the number of additional projects that could be supported.

Positive Trend in Budget Forecast:

The 2026-2030 Five-Year Forecast from the Office of the Comptroller showed a projected budget gap of \$46.7 million in 2026, which is a significant increase from the 2025 projected budget gap of \$11.5 million. The main driver of this increase is \$26 million of one-time funding that was available in the 2025 budget process that was not available in 2026. Salary and benefits also increased the projection by \$13.5 million. Factors in this increase include an increase in the number of positions filled, salary adjustments from the Compensation Transformation Project, and increases in health benefits costs. This increase is consistent with the projections that were shared when the County was considering the 0.4% sales tax in July 2023.

The 2027-2031 Five-Year Forecast from the Office of the Comptroller projects the 2027 budget gap at \$50.1 million, a slight increase from the 2026 Budget. The main driver of the increase is the fiscal position of Milwaukee County Transit. Transit costs are expected to increase by \$6.3 million while federal stimulus funding has expired and no longer supports operations. Of the \$51 million gap in 2027, about \$16 million relates solely to transit.

Outside of transit, the County is making progress toward the goal of achieving a positive trend in the forecasted surplus/deficit. While salary and benefit growth is still significant, the County is seeing a slower rate of growth than previous years. With the approval of the 0.4% sales tax in 2023, sales tax has become an even more important share of the County's revenues. The forecast shows a 3% growth rate in sales tax, which is larger than the 1% growth seen in overall County revenue.

Implement Performance Measurement system for 100% of Departments/Offices by December 31, 2027

Building on the one-page Scorecard Reports developed in 2024, SBP began developing an enterprise-wide, in-house performance measurement system in 2025. This dynamic Scorecard tool enhances data tracking and avoids reliance on costly third-party platforms.

Activities conducted:

- All Departments in the Administration submitted Scorecard Reports with their 2025 budgets, visualizing five key metrics tied to strategic goals.
- In partnership with DAS's Information Management Services Division (IMSD), SBP built the underlying data collection and dashboard system using County resources, ensuring a sustainable tool was designed to serve the County for many years to come.
- A pilot with two departments launched in 2025 to surface potential issues and ensure a smooth rollout for other departments in the future.

Outcomes:

- By December both pilot departments (8% of all Departments/Offices in Milwaukee County) were reporting through the new system.

- As of April 2026, all Departments within the Administration (48% of all Departments/Offices) have entered their top KPIs into the system and will begin quarterly reporting.

SBP will extend the invitation and support all remaining Offices and Departments that have a strategic plan and KPIs identified, with a goal of reaching 100% participation by the start of the next strategic planning cycle in January of 2028.

Key factors that *enabled* progress toward accomplishing these goals

The consistent and strong executive sponsorship of the County Board and County Executive for advancing strategic planning and performance measurement greatly enhance SBP's ability to support departments to develop scorecards to track progress. In addition, creation of department plans has given each team a straightforward roadmap for what they're working toward and how to measure progress. Sharing the same 2027 end date also keeps departments on the same cycle, making it easier to begin the next planning phase for the "Strategy Refresh" together.

The SBP PMO continues to evolve to meet the most urgent needs of the organization. In 2025, The PMO formalized the Policy service area, enabling greater collaboration with the Office of Governmental Affairs on state and federal advocacy efforts. Notably during the 2025-27 state biennial budget process, this partnership led to the addition of expressway patrol funding in the state's base budget, equating \$18-20M annually in operating funds for Milwaukee County. This funding contributes to addressing the County's structural deficit where competitive grants cannot.

These expressway patrol resources allow the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (IJCC) project to advance on schedule. The IJCC project intends to demolish the Public Safety Building and construct a new building to house criminal courts and supporting services. The PMO is centrally project managing this complex effort in partnership with a number of stakeholders to improve justice system outcomes. The PMO activates industry tools and best practices in its approach to project management, which enables its effectiveness and builds its reputation internally to take on highly intricate projects and as well as straightforward requests.

State support was a key factor in progress toward mitigating structural deficit increases. In addition to the funding for expressway patrol mentioned above, recent state action included a change in the shared revenue formula to include automatic increases to county revenues. While these factors provide a significant benefit to the County, it is not enough to counteract the factors that hinder the County's progress.

To guide development of the 2026 Capital Budget, key elements were put in place to enable progress toward prioritizing Year 1 "critical needs." For example, departments were directed to focus Year 1 requests on immediate and critical needs, as outlined in the Annual Capital Request Kickoff materials and training. Additionally, projects were expected to demonstrate an urgent, well-justified need by meeting one or more key benchmarks, including addressing failing core service assets, resolving life-safety risks, providing 90 percent complete designs, meeting regulatory or legally mandated requirements, leveraging external funding, and/or avoiding

infrastructure expansion unless clear efficiencies were shown. Requests that did not meet these criteria were to be placed in Years 2–5 of departmental Capital Improvement Plans. This “critical needs” approach was reinforced through ongoing communication throughout the request period.

Key factors that *hindered* progress toward accomplishing these goals

As was raised during the Future State Project findings, limited familiarity with County services among Milwaukee County residents makes it harder to reach people and connect them with the programs they need. Silos across the organization slow efforts to build a shared data governance framework and, as a result, make it harder for some of the necessary foundational work to advance at the pace we would like. SBP and departments also lack enough capacity to move the County’s data strategy and governance forward, which also limits how quickly improvements can be implemented.

As anticipated in the 2024 annual report, it was expected that the discretionary grant funding landscape would fluctuate in 2025 under the new federal administration. Available federal grant opportunities reached a pinnacle by 2022 and peaked again in 2024 during the federal election cycle. The varying availability, delays, and federal program changes in 2025 impacted the number and availability of grant opportunities for which Milwaukee County was eligible. Service area teams were prepared and acted swiftly when opportunities opened, but these circumstances hindered Milwaukee County’s ability to achieve its goal. As stated previously, grant opportunities are already more abundant in 2026, with 17 proposals already submitted in the first quarter compared to 4 in 2025.

Established in 2022, the PMO concluded its fourth year in 2025. There continues to be a steady intake of new project requests from departments across the administration and elected offices. With tools, systems, and capacity building forums well adopted, staff capacity is a key hindering factor to pursuing additional projects at a faster pace. The PMO dedicates staff time to significant, long-term projects including IJCC and Future State, which strains its resources and limits the ability to take on other complex efforts. In some cases, the PMO must delay or modify the support it provides to requesting departments due to this issue. There are other critical areas within the organization where the PMO would be well suited to augment efforts as well, should capacity allow.

For the 2026 Capital Budget, several challenges continued to hinder progress in reducing the Year 1 backlog. Request volume has remained consistently high, averaging 146 non-Airport submissions annually over the past three years, while available funding could only support about 55 projects over the same period. This imbalance exceeds both fiscal limits and capital project-management capacity. In addition, some departments submit requests that do not necessarily meet an immediate/critical need, which further inflates the queue and complicates prioritization. Finally, while SBP provides the strategic framework and funding criteria, individual departments retain full discretion over the projects they submit. Because departments best understand their own assets and operational needs, this autonomy is appropriate; however, it also means that meaningful progress in reducing the Year 1 backlog depends on departments voluntarily aligning their submissions with the broader critical-needs strategy.

Progress toward fiscal sustainability goals are hindered by service expenditures increasing at a rate faster than revenues to support those services. Mandated services without dedicated funding account for about 80% of the County’s tax levy. Statutory restrictions on property tax and other revenues severely limit the County’s ability to support annual inflationary increases to

the cost of providing services.

If any goals are changing, please list those and briefly explain why. (Please put “N/A” if your goals will remain the same.)

N/A

FISCAL EFFECT

The report is informational only and there is no fiscal impact.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Nick Sinram, Executive Director of the Office of Strategy, Budget, and Performance
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Isaac Rowlett, Strategy Director, Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance

Dan Laurila, Operating Budget Director, Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance

Vince Masterson, Capital Budget Coordinator, Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance

Brianna Sas-Pérez, Project Manager, Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance

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ATTACHMENTS:

Presentation

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk