

ISSUE PROFILE: REPORTING REQUIREMENTS OF CITY AGENCIES

In Brief

This issue profile identifies the reports required by the city charter, ordinance, or state statute to be filed by agencies of the City with either the city council, the city clerk, or both, and documents whether city agencies have filed the required reports.

We found 73 reporting requirements as of January, 1995. Most agencies filed the required reports, but a few did not. Those instances where reports were not filed may indicate a need to reevaluate the reporting requirement.

Relevance for the Council

Reporting requirements are one important means for the Council to accomplish the monitoring and review necessary to fulfill its duties. Such requirements can serve a number of useful purposes. The information provided pursuant to an effective reporting requirement may:

- (1) Enable the Council to monitor the performance of program operations;
- (2) Allow the Council to evaluate the management of city agencies;
- (3) Identify opportunities for continued program improvement;
- (4) Ensure that past problems are not repeated; and
- (5) Open city operations to the public because the reports are available for public inspection.

How the Council Can Use this Report

The information generated from this study can assist the Council by:

- (1) Delineating the breadth of reporting mandates applicable to city agencies;
- (2) Serving as a report reference for future research in particular subject areas;
- (3) Identifying problematic reporting requirements where required reports have not been prepared, not been used, or where the requirement has otherwise not been understood to apply; and

- (4) Suggesting guidelines to be considered in establishing new reporting requirements or in assessing existing requirements.

Objective

This report sought to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the reports which must be prepared by city agencies^a pursuant to charter, ordinance, or state statutes?
- (2) To what extent have city agencies filed the required reports with the council or the city clerk?

Scope and Methodology

We researched those reporting requirements deemed most pertinent to the Council's oversight responsibilities. Thus, the scope for the study focused on those reporting requirements that:

- (1) Apply to city executive agencies;
- (2) Are established by law;
- (3) Stipulate the preparation of continuing, periodic written reports; and
- (4) Stipulate that the reports be submitted to the Council and/or the City Clerk.

We researched several computerized databases covering the applicable laws, including the Revised Charter of the City & County of Honolulu (1994 edition), the Revised Ordinances of Honolulu 1990, and the Hawaii Revised Statutes^b. The reporting requirements contained in resolutions were not included in this research because those requirements usually do not have the force and effect of law and are often of limited duration. In addition, requirements for reports that are stipulated by law to be submitted only to the Mayor and/or agency directors were not included.

To determine whether the agencies met the identified reporting requirements, we researched the records of the City Clerk's office for those reports. When necessary, we contacted the agencies responsible for preparing the reports to verify whether the reports were in fact generated.

Results

Breadth of Reporting Mandates. Our research identified a total of 73 reporting requirements as of January, 1995. Every department of the City, the Mayor, the Managing Director, and the semi-autonomous agencies such as the Board of Water Supply and the Honolulu Public Transit Authority is required

to issue a report of some kind to the Council or City Clerk. The reports prepared pursuant to these requirements varied in format and size, ranging from bound reports to letters and memoranda. The majority of these reports were required to be generated on a quarterly, annual, or biennial basis. Of the 73 reporting requirements, six had been added in the last year and the reports were not yet due.

Report Reference. The detailed listing of the reporting requirements are in the attached table, which is current as of January, 1995. The table identifies the responsible agency, report subject, frequency, report recipient, legal reference, and date and Clerk document number^c of the last recorded report. It is important to note that the reporting requirements and their status are subject to change as time progresses.

Problematic Reporting Requirements. We found that most of the agencies have filed the required reports. However, five agencies^d were not aware of certain reporting requirements and consequently had not prepared the reports. An additional agency^e had discontinued preparing an annual report. Also, the mayor's annual report on the activities of all city agencies did not contain information on the activities of some city boards, commissions, and committees, nor did those agencies file separate reports with the Council or City Clerk.^f Those instances where reports were not filed may indicate a need to reevaluate the reporting requirement.

Suggested Guidelines for Evaluating Existing Reporting Requirements and Legislating New Requirements. A variety of issues need to be considered by the Council when considering existing or new requirements for city agencies to file reports in order to best serve the Council's oversight function:

- (1) Do benefits outweigh preparation costs?

This is perhaps the most important issue. The preparation of a report may require an agency to expend large amounts of time and resources. That cost should be more than offset, at least subjectively, by the benefit to the Council, the public, or other report recipient. Such an evaluation should be made whether or not that benefit can be quantified.

- (2) How frequently should reports be prepared?

Another important concern involves determining whether reporting requirements will be on a periodic or one-time basis. Reports required on a regular basis are usually in a quarterly, annual, or biennial cycle. These types of reports serve a variety purposes, but most importantly provide regularly scheduled feedback on ongoing program operations. On the other hand, reports that are required on a one-time basis are often used for reporting on the progress in implementing new programs, new equipment, or special projects, such as the implementation of the Towers Perrin management study recommendations. Or the report may be on the results of a study or plan that the agency was requested to prepare.

- (3) Should the reporting requirement be codified in ordinance?

In general, if the information contained in a report is needed on an ongoing basis, it is probably appropriate for the report to be codified in ordinance (i.e. included in the Revised Ordinances of Honolulu). Codified reporting requirements are more easily identified, and therefore more accessible to the public, than requirements contained in uncodified ordinances. Conversely, if the reported information is a one-time requirement, it is generally appropriate to establish the requirement by nonbinding resolution.

- (4) How will the Council use the reports and ensure the requirements continue to be worthwhile?

This brings up the final issue of appropriate follow-up on the reports that are submitted. Such follow-up is important to ensure compliance with reporting requirements, and to confirm that the reports submitted meet the purposes for which the requirements were established.

All of the above issues are applicable not only when the merits of a new report requirement are assessed before the requirement is established, but also when existing requirements are reviewed from time to time. Such periodic review is necessary because the Council receives a multitude of communications. Evaluating the need for establishing new requirements and periodically reviewing existing requirements to delete those that may be obsolete is a way of managing the Council's information burden, as well as ensuring that the efforts of those charged to prepare the reports are worthwhile. Periodic reporting requirements established by law should therefore be used judiciously.

- a. Includes any office, agency, department, board, commission or other government unit. (Section 13-101, Revised Charter of Honolulu).

- b. While every effort was made to identify all existing legal reporting requirements within the scope of this study, the completeness of the reporting requirement inventory provided herein is not guaranteed.
- c. The City Clerk assigns a number to all of the documents that are to be recorded. The number is prefaced by a code to indicate the type of the document recorded. For example, "D" refers to Departmental communications (i.e. from City departments), "MM" refers to Mayor's Messages, "M" refers to Miscellaneous communications, etc.
- d. Refer to report numbers 2, 22, 32, 52, 56, and 64 on the attached table for detailed information.
- e. Refer to report number 48 in the attached table for additional information.
- f. Reports could not be located for the Child Care Advisory Board, Pension Board, Board of Parks and Recreation, Commission on Housing and Community Development, Citizens Advisory Commission on Civil Defense, Design Advisory Committee, Honolulu County Committee on Aging, Honolulu County Arborist Advisory Committee, Mayor's Advisory Committee on Bicycling.