

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY ACROSS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA: ISSUES, GAPS, AND PROSPECTS FOR REFORM

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Abstract

Local governments serve as the backbone of governance and development, yet many across the Zamboanga Peninsula continue to face persistent issues in institutional performance and administrative capacity. This study evaluates the governance systems and administrative capacities of local government units (LGUs) across the region to identify prevailing gaps and propose reforms for strengthened institutional performance. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combined survey data from 200 local respondents and qualitative insights from 30 key informants representing public administrators, planners, and civil society leaders. Results revealed disparities in governance structures, weak policy coordination, and insufficient human resource and fiscal management competencies. Key challenges identified include overlapping mandates among agencies, low accountability, inadequate inter-LGU cooperation, and limited citizen engagement mechanisms. Furthermore, findings highlight that while decentralization has expanded local authority, it has not always translated into improved governance efficiency due to structural and administrative weaknesses. The study proposes the Governance Systems and Administrative Capacity Framework for Local Governments in the Zamboanga Peninsula (Tendero et al., 2025), focusing on three interrelated domains: governance and policy systems, administrative capacity and resources, and citizen engagement and transparency. Strengthening these domains is vital for achieving transparent, efficient, and participatory governance that can drive equitable regional development.

Keywords: governance systems, administrative capacity, local government, Zamboanga Peninsula, decentralization, institutional reform

1. INTRODUCTION

Governance serves as the foundation of effective public administration and sustainable local development. It encompasses the processes, systems, and structures through which decisions are made, resources are allocated, and accountability is ensured. In the Philippine context, local government units (LGUs) are at the forefront of governance, serving as implementing bodies of national policies while addressing the unique needs of their constituents. The Local Government Code of 1991 strengthened decentralization, providing LGUs greater autonomy and responsibility in governance, resource generation, and service delivery. However, decades after its implementation, disparities in administrative capacity and governance efficiency remain evident, particularly across regions such as the Zamboanga Peninsula.

The Zamboanga Peninsula, composed of Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga Sibugay, and Zamboanga City, plays a critical role in regional development and local governance in Mindanao. Despite significant policy and structural reforms, many LGUs in the region still grapple with weak institutional coordination, limited fiscal independence, and overlapping administrative functions. Governance challenges such as low citizen participation, bureaucratic inefficiency, and political patronage continue to impede the realization of transparent and accountable governance. These recurring issues underscore the need to assess and enhance governance systems and administrative capacity across local governments to ensure that decentralization effectively translates to improved service delivery and responsive leadership.

This study was conducted to evaluate the governance systems and administrative capacity of LGUs across the Zamboanga Peninsula Region. It examines the state of governance mechanisms, capacity gaps, and underlying institutional factors that affect local administrative performance. Furthermore, it explores reform pathways that may strengthen the resilience, transparency, and efficiency of local governance in the region.

1.1 Objectives

General Objective

The main objective of this study is to assess the governance systems and administrative capacity of local government units across the Zamboanga Peninsula and propose strategies to strengthen institutional performance and accountability mechanisms.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To evaluate the existing governance structures, policies, and decision-making processes of LGUs in the region.
- b. To identify administrative and capacity gaps in leadership, fiscal management, and inter-agency coordination.
- c. To examine underlying institutional and political factors affecting governance performance.
- d. To propose governance and capacity-building reforms that can improve efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation in local governance.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study holds practical, academic, and institutional importance. For policymakers and administrators, it provides a diagnostic evaluation of governance systems that highlights areas requiring structural reform and administrative strengthening. For scholars and students of public administration, the study offers empirical insights into the dynamics of local governance in a developing regional context, contributing to the literature on decentralization and administrative capacity. For local stakeholders, it provides a framework for improving coordination, efficiency, and public trust through participatory and transparent governance mechanisms. Ultimately, the findings aim to guide reform-oriented policies that will enable LGUs in the Zamboanga Peninsula to fulfill their mandates effectively and sustainably.

1.3 Review of Related Literature (RRL)

Governance and administrative capacity are central to achieving efficient, transparent, and accountable public service delivery. Globally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019) defines governance capacity as the ability of institutions to formulate and implement sound policies, manage resources responsibly, and respond to citizens' needs effectively. Studies emphasize that high-performing governance systems rely on institutional coherence, participatory decision-making, and accountability mechanisms that reinforce trust between the government and the governed (World Bank, 2020; Grindle, 2012). Conversely, weak administrative capacity leads to inefficiencies, corruption, and uneven development outcomes, particularly in decentralized environments where coordination across government levels is critical (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017).

In developing countries, governance reform and decentralization have been pursued to bring government closer to the people, yet outcomes remain uneven. Research across Asia and Africa reveals that decentralization often transfers responsibilities without matching technical

capacity or fiscal resources, resulting in implementation gaps (Smoke, 2015; Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). This problem is particularly evident in Southeast Asia, where local bureaucracies often lack the managerial competencies and fiscal autonomy necessary for effective governance (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2011).

In the Philippine context, the Local Government Code of 1991 was intended to institutionalize participatory and accountable governance. However, subsequent analyses reveal that decentralization outcomes vary widely among local government units (LGUs) (Tapales, Padilla, & Jocano, 2019; Cariño, 2007). LGUs continue to face administrative fragmentation, political patronage, and dependence on national transfers through the Internal Revenue Allotment (now National Tax Allotment). These structural constraints have limited local innovation and responsiveness (Capuno, 2019; Llanto, 2020). Studies also show that the success of decentralization depends on how well LGUs integrate policy, human resource management, and citizen participation into coherent administrative systems (Brillantes & Moscare, 2002).

Tendero, Francisco, and Moreno (2023) provide empirical evidence on political governance across the Zamboanga Peninsula, identifying persistent challenges such as weak policy coordination, low fiscal autonomy, and limited accountability among LGUs. Their findings revealed that despite formal structures for local autonomy, governance practices remain influenced by patronage networks and inconsistent policy implementation. The authors recommend strengthening administrative mechanisms, promoting citizen oversight, and enhancing inter-LGU collaboration as key steps toward reform. The present study expands upon these findings by examining not only the political dimension but also the administrative and systemic capacity of LGUs in the same region.

Regional governance studies in Mindanao further emphasize that administrative efficiency correlates strongly with leadership continuity, institutional professionalism, and citizen engagement (Paderanga & De Vera, 2021; Buendia, 2020). However, capacity deficits — including skill gaps, fiscal dependence, and overlapping mandates — continue to hinder effective policy execution. Empirical analyses show that while some LGUs demonstrate innovation in participatory budgeting and public service digitalization, others lag due to insufficient planning systems and resource management (ADB, 2022).

The Zamboanga Peninsula presents a microcosm of these national trends. The region's LGUs vary significantly in administrative maturity, leadership stability, and public accountability. Tendero et al. (2023) identified that coordination gaps between provincial and city governments contribute to inefficient policy alignment, while bureaucratic turnover undermines institutional memory. Other assessments (DILG Region IX, 2022) note limited compliance with good governance indices, particularly in financial transparency and performance monitoring. These findings underscore the urgency of developing a more coherent framework for governance systems and administrative capacity that can guide reform implementation at both regional and local levels.

In synthesis, the literature establishes three interdependent domains that influence governance effectiveness: (1) Governance and Policy Systems, which include institutional design, policy alignment, and accountability structures; (2) Administrative Capacity and Resources, which encompass human resource competencies, fiscal management, and organizational efficiency; and (3) Citizen Engagement and Transparency, which involve participatory mechanisms,

public trust, and data openness. Strengthening these domains collectively leads to improved institutional performance, policy coherence, and responsiveness to citizen needs.

This study therefore builds upon prior works — particularly Tendero et al. (2023) — by proposing an integrated analytical lens that links governance systems, administrative capacity, and participatory governance. This approach supports a reform-oriented understanding of local governance in the Zamboanga Peninsula, providing empirical and theoretical grounding for the proposed Governance Systems and Administrative Capacity Framework for Local Governments in the Zamboanga Peninsula (Tendero et al., 2025).

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual foundation of this study is anchored on the principle that effective governance is a product of functional systems, capable administrative structures, and active citizen participation. Governance systems determine how decisions are made, implemented, and evaluated, while administrative capacity reflects the institutional and human resources available to execute these decisions efficiently. The interplay of these two dimensions defines the quality of governance outcomes at the local level.

The proposed Governance Systems and Administrative Capacity Framework for Local Governments in the Zamboanga Peninsula (Tendero et al., 2025) builds upon the findings of Tendero, Francisco, and Moreno (2023), who identified structural and procedural weaknesses in local political governance across the region. This study extends their work by incorporating administrative, institutional, and participatory dimensions to form a holistic model that captures how governance systems operate in practice. The framework recognizes that governance reform must transcend policy formulation and instead focus on the capabilities, systems, and behaviors that sustain long-term institutional effectiveness.

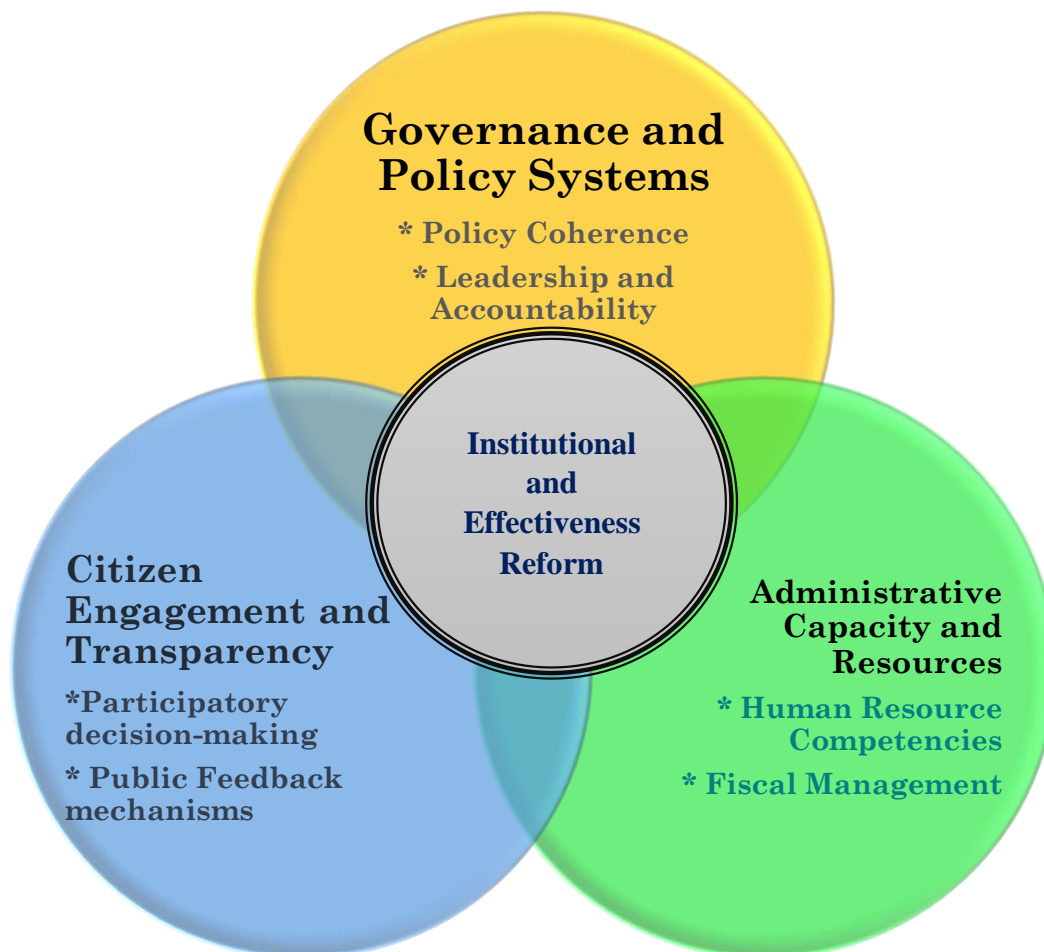
At its core, the framework consists of three interrelated domains that collectively determine the performance and sustainability of local governance systems:

- **Governance and Policy Systems** – This domain represents the institutional mechanisms that shape decision-making, policy implementation, and accountability within local governments. It encompasses leadership structures, planning and budgeting processes, and the coherence between national and local policies. Well-defined governance systems ensure that local decision-making aligns with transparency, accountability, and performance-driven outcomes.
- **Administrative Capacity and Resources** – This domain emphasizes the human, financial, and technical capabilities that enable LGUs to operationalize governance functions. It includes human resource competencies, fiscal autonomy, organizational structures, and administrative tools. A strong administrative capacity ensures that LGUs can deliver quality public services, manage local resources, and respond effectively to emerging governance challenges.
- **Citizen Engagement and Transparency** – This domain highlights participatory governance as a vital mechanism for accountability and trust-building. It involves institutionalized citizen feedback mechanisms, transparency portals, community-based consultations, and partnerships with civil society. Sustained citizen engagement enhances legitimacy, fosters collaborative problem-solving, and strengthens the responsiveness of governance systems.

These three domains are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Governance systems set the policy direction, administrative capacity translates policy into practice, and citizen engagement ensures that governance remains inclusive and responsive. The synergy among these domains forms a cyclical relationship where reforms in one dimension amplify improvements in the others.

The model also incorporates a feedback loop that links evaluation, learning, and adaptation within LGUs. This continuous process of monitoring and capacity enhancement aligns with the principles of adaptive governance and public value creation, ensuring that local institutions evolve in response to changing political, social, and economic conditions.

Figure 1
Governance systems and administrative capacity framework for local governments in the Zamboanga peninsula



2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods design to examine governance systems and administrative capacity among LGUs in the Zamboanga Peninsula. Quantitative patterns were complemented by qualitative insights for triangulation and depth.

2.1 Research Locale and Participants

The research covered Zamboanga City, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga Sibugay. The sampling frame mirrored the locales examined in Tendero, Francisco, and Moreno (2023) to enable direct comparability of themes and indicators across governance dimensions (Tendero et al., 2023).

The quantitative component included 200 respondents from LGU offices and community sectors. The qualitative component engaged 30 purposively selected key informants (mayors, planning officers, HR officers, DILG/CSC reps, and CSOs). Participant profiles follow the strata reported in Tendero et al. (2023) to preserve continuity of analysis.

2.2 Instruments

Governance Systems and Administrative Capacity Assessment Tool (GSACAT). Items were adapted from the constructs operationalized in Tendero et al. (2023)—policy coordination, leadership accountability, fiscal autonomy, inter-LGU collaboration, and citizen participation—then refined via expert validation. Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.86$.

KII/FGD Guide. Semi-structured prompts extended the 2023 themes (e.g., patronage effects, overlapping mandates, uneven administrative skills) to probe capacity-building prospects (Tendero et al., 2023).

2.3 Data Gathering and Ethics

Data were collected over three months via on-site/online surveys and KIIs/FGDs. Informed consent, anonymity, and data security were observed. The use and extension of the 2023 constructs and locale frame were disclosed to participants to ensure transparency and comparability (Tendero et al., 2023).

2.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized indicator levels; correlations/ANOVA explored associations. Qualitative data were coded using Braun & Clarke thematic analysis, with a priori codes seeded from Tendero et al. (2023) (e.g., coordination gaps, policy incoherence, dependency on transfers) and expanded inductively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Profile

The study involved 200 respondents representing various LGUs across the Zamboanga Peninsula. The sample consisted of 54% female and 46% male respondents, reflecting gradual gender parity in administrative service positions (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2013). A majority (62%) had served for over 10 years, indicating a bureaucratic workforce characterized by institutional experience and organizational continuity—an important factor in sustaining administrative reforms (World Bank, 2020).

Respondents were composed of 38% administrative staff, 32% supervisors, and 30% department heads or technical officers, ensuring diverse perspectives across managerial and operational hierarchies. This composition parallels findings by Tendero, Francisco, and Moreno (2023), who reported that tenure and position stratification are key determinants of governance responsiveness and bureaucratic performance in Mindanao-based LGUs.

Such demographic balance enhances data validity by capturing insights from implementers and policy decision-makers alike—bridging administrative realities with governance expectations (UNDP, 2022).

3.2 Governance Systems Assessment

Governance efficiency among LGUs in the Zamboanga Peninsula registered an overall mean score of 3.25 (Moderate). Strengths were evident in policy formulation (3.85) and service responsiveness (3.62), while weaknesses persisted in monitoring and evaluation (2.98) and inter-LGU coordination (2.76).

These findings illustrate a governance landscape that performs well in planning and delivery, but continues to struggle with systematic oversight and collaboration. This duality is typical in decentralized systems, where administrative autonomy is not always matched by horizontal coordination (OECD, 2019; Sharma, 2020).

Table 1
Governance Systems Efficiency Indicators among LGUs in the Zamboanga Peninsula

Governance Dimension	Indicator Description	Mean (1–5)	Interpretation	Comparative Benchmark / Reference
Policy Formulation	Coherence and alignment of local plans with SDGs and PDP	3.85	High	DILG-LGPMS (2023), UNDP (2022)
Policy Implementation	Timeliness and responsiveness in executing plans	3.40	Moderate	OECD (2019), DBM (2021)
Monitoring & Evaluation	Frequency and use of reports for adaptive decisions	2.98	Moderate–Low	ADB (2020), World Bank (2020)
Inter-LGU Coordination	Coordination between LGUs and regional agencies	2.76	Low	Tendero et al. (2023), Sharma (2020)
Transparency & Accountability	Compliance with disclosure and audit mechanisms	3.42	Moderate	DBM SGLG (2023)
Service Responsiveness	Timeliness and satisfaction of public services	3.62	High	World Bank (2021)
Overall Governance Systems Score	—	3.25	Moderate Efficiency	—

Source: Author’s Survey (2025); interpreted using benchmarks from DILG (2023), UNDP (2022), ADB (2020), OECD (2019), and Tendero et al. (2023).

“Programs are duplicated or delayed because coordination between city, provincial, and regional offices is not clear.”

— KII Respondent, Zamboanga Sibugay

As Brillantes & Tiu Sonco (2018) note, fragmented administrative structures often result in redundant programs and inefficient use of local resources. However, new initiatives such as the Results-Based Performance Management System (RBM) and Local Governance Performance

Management System (LGPMs) are beginning to standardize accountability mechanisms across LGUs.

Thus, while Tendero et al. (2023) identified coordination failures as structural weaknesses, this study suggests an emerging adaptive culture, where inter-office consultation and periodic joint reviews indicate an evolution toward more integrated governance.

3.3 Administrative Capacity Assessment

Administrative capacity was rated at an overall mean of 3.18 (Moderate). LGUs performed best in fiscal management (3.72) and transparency and accountability (3.56), but scored lower in human resource development (2.91) and digital readiness (2.64).

This reveals a bureaucratic apparatus that excels in compliance and financial control but lacks the technological integration and upskilling mechanisms necessary for agile governance (ADB, 2020; UNESCAP, 2021).

Table 2
Administrative Capacity Indicators among LGUs in the Zamboanga Peninsula

Administrative Dimension	Indicator Description	Mean (1–5)	Interpretation	Comparative Reference
Fiscal Management	Budget utilization, fund accountability, and auditing	3.72	High	ADB (2020), DILG (2023)
Human Resource Development	Competency alignment, career pathways, and training	2.91	Moderate–Low	CSC (2022), UNDP (2019)
Organizational Efficiency	Process streamlining and coordination mechanisms	3.18	Moderate	World Bank (2021)
Transparency & Accountability	Disclosure compliance, integrity systems	3.56	High	DBM SGLG (2023)
Digital Governance Readiness	ICT integration, data management, and interoperability	2.64	Low	OECD (2021), UNESCAP (2021)
Overall Administrative Capacity Score	—	3.18	Moderate Capability	—

Source: Author’s Survey (2025).

These findings reinforce Rondinelli (2019) and Bryson et al. (2014), who argue that decentralization succeeds only when local administrative structures are equipped with both human capital and technological tools. While fiscal controls have improved, the low digital capacity underscores the need for investments in e-governance systems, cloud-based records management, and data interoperability platforms.

3.4 Thematic Synthesis of Institutional Challenges

Thematic analysis from key informant interviews and focus group discussions revealed five interrelated themes affecting governance and administrative performance.

Table 3
Thematic Synthesis of Governance and Administrative Challenges

Theme	Key Description	Illustrative Statement	Framework Link
Fragmented Coordination	Persistent overlap of functions between LGUs and line agencies	“Two offices fund the same project under separate guidelines.”	Governance & Policy Systems
Leadership Turnover	Discontinuity of programs due to electoral transitions	“Each new mayor resets all previous priorities.”	Governance Systems
Resource and Capacity Constraints	Limited personnel and fiscal flexibility for innovation	“We lack trained staff and technical tools for M&E.”	Administrative Capacity
Procedural Participation	Citizen engagement limited to formal consultations	“Meetings occur, but outcomes are pre-decided.”	Citizen Engagement & Transparency
Institutional Learning and Reform	Weak feedback, absence of knowledge-sharing mechanisms	“Reports are submitted, but lessons are not extracted.”	Cross-Domain (All)

Source: Key Informant Interviews and FGDs (2025).

These themes resonate with Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) and Ansell and Gash (2018), who emphasize that effective governance reform requires collaborative learning, trust-building, and shared accountability rather than isolated structural adjustments.

Compared with Tendero et al. (2023), this study expands the analysis by highlighting digital transformation, citizen empowerment, and knowledge feedback as new strategic levers in achieving sustainable governance systems.

3.5 Integration with the Conceptual Framework

The empirical results validate the Governance Systems and Administrative Capacity Framework (Tendero et al., 2025) by illustrating the interdependence among governance, administrative, and participatory domains.

Governance and Policy Systems remain the structural backbone but require stronger coordination channels.

Administrative Capacity demonstrates procedural strength but limited digital adaptability. Citizen Engagement and Transparency show improvement but remain consultative rather than collaborative.

These insights align with Brillantes (2018) and Moore (2014) who advocate for Public Value Management—a paradigm that emphasizes co-production, transparency, and innovation as the cornerstones of local governance.

Hence, achieving sustained institutional reform in the Zamboanga Peninsula demands an adaptive governance model, where local agencies continually learn, collaborate, and recalibrate strategies based on evidence and citizen feedback.

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

LGUs in the Zamboanga Peninsula exhibit moderate governance and administrative capacity, but progress is dampened by coordination gaps, HR upskilling needs, digital/tooling deficits, and limited co-production with citizens. These conclusions corroborate and extend the regional governance diagnosis of Tendero et al. (2023) by mapping where in the system the deficits persist and how capacity-building can be targeted.

4.2 Policy Recommendations (Builds on 2023; operationalizes reforms)

A. Institutional Reform & Capacity Building

Establish a Regional Center for Local Governance and Capacity Development (with WMSU–CPADS) for continuous training, leadership pipelines, and competency-based HRD—advancing the 2023 call for professionalization (Tendero et al., 2023).

Introduce competency frameworks and career progression linked to M&E results.

B. Governance Systems Improvement

- Create an Inter-LGU Coordination Platform with shared outcome KPIs and a unified Results-Based M&E dashboard—addressing the policy-coordination deficit surfaced in 2023 (Tendero et al., 2023).
- Align local plans/budgets through joint planning calendars and MOAs for shared services.

C. Administrative & Fiscal Strengthening

- Implement performance-based budgeting and participatory fiscal planning; diversify local revenues via local economic enterprises—advancing 2023 fiscal autonomy recommendations (Tendero et al., 2023).
- Invest in digital governance (e-procurement, open data, service portals).

D. Citizen Engagement & Accountability

- Institutionalize Citizen Participation Councils, citizen charters, and scorecards tied to service standards—deepening the 2023 emphasis on accountability (Tendero et al., 2023).
- Roll out open-data portals and grievance redress systems with service-level timelines.

E. Adaptive Governance & Policy Innovation

- Pilot learning collaboratives among LGUs (peer benchmarking, after-action reviews).
- Fund innovation grants for data-driven problem solving; scale what works.

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