

---

## *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*

Vol. 6, No. 2

---

# **City on the Line: How Baltimore Transformed its Budget to Beat the Great Recession and Deliver Outcomes by Andrew Kleine**

Vincent Reitano – Western Michigan University

Kleine, A (2019). *City on the line: How Baltimore transformed its budget to beat the Great Recession and deliver outcomes*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. \$35.00 (Paperback), ISBN: 978-1538121887.

Keywords: Public Budgeting, Baltimore, Book Review

In *City on the Line*, Andrew Kleine offers a self-described “memoir, manifesto, and manual” on budgeting. He begins by considering the “old way” versus the “new way” of budgeting. The “old way” is focused on last year’s spending on an agency basis and creates contention over “what to cut” (p. 12). In contrast, the “new way” of outcome budgeting essentially focuses on outcomes for results in the future by fostering more effective discourse among stakeholders about “what to keep” (p. 13). This demarcation creates a novel foundation for Kleine to show how to turn budgeting from a technocratic exercise into a transformative approach focused on outcomes despite bureaucratic norms, conflicting stakeholder priorities, and resource constraints.

Kleine uses each of the eleven chapters in his book to detail not only the technical aspects of outcome budgeting but also the insightful, candid, and challenging conversations that occurred during implementation. Chapter 1 introduces the outcome budgeting cycle by succinctly detailing each of its eight phases, from selecting outcomes to budget decision-making. In Chapter 2, the argument that “agencies don’t matter” in outcome budgeting is translated into practice, with vivid examples showing how programs are reconsidered as services (p. 29). There is also an intuitive matrix showing how to evaluate service importance versus service satisfaction and how to counter challenges from agency bureaucrats unwilling to cede power, let alone adopt a new approach to budgeting. Chapter 3 builds on the prior foundations and shows how to think about performance measures with respect to output, efficiency, effectiveness, and outcome.

Chapter 4 details implementation in terms of “Results Teams.” These are teams that “focus...on the value offered by the service proposals they receive” and can offer “a mixture of subject-matter expertise and unconventional thinking” when considering conflicting budget priorities (p. 81). To do so, the book details the concept of a “Cause-and-Effect Map” so that Results Teams consider how certain factors are related to outcomes that yield results without falling into myopic decision-making. This is a critical chapter and is appropriately titled “Making the Magic Happen.”

Not surprisingly, Chapter 5 details the various shifts in stakeholder perspectives and assumptions, harkening back to the old versus new way of budgeting detailed in Chapter 1. Kleine makes the case that challenging old assumptions, such as hiring for experience versus talent and understanding how to work with leadership, are critical components to outcome budgeting. Kleine reiterates the point that the behaviors of stakeholders, whether internal or external, matter. This view takes on increasing importance when considering all of the stakeholders that could potentially be involved with government, especially with outcome budgeting.

Chapter 6 continues with the theme of stakeholders and considers the critical importance of engaging the public. Kleine states that,

I was determined to change everything about how residents were involved in the city’s budget, first by explaining it to them, next by showing them why they should care about it, and finally by giving them a chance to roll up their sleeves. (p. 137)

He advocates that residents should engage in budgeting for visible change in Baltimore. Throughout the chapter, there are sections devoted to a variety of concerns, such as the role of special interest groups and methods of civic engagement. Much of the chapter provides a firsthand account about how to actually engage the public in budgeting.

Chapters 7 through 9 continue to detail various facets of outcome budgeting and explores concepts such as strategic planning and implementation. In Chapter 8, there is a step-by-step guide to “Turn the Curve Planning” which any government can use (p. 180). Kleine continues the theme that budgeting is not just about the numbers or a visualized curve measuring historical and projected performance in this case, but also the story and stakeholders engaged with outcomes that matter.

In Chapter 10, Kleine specifies the “Value as Results” equation as results divided by dollars spent given “more results for the same money, the same results for less money, or best of all, more results for less money” (p. 219). Results are conceptualized along a continuum. This further shows how to think about outcomes over time. Chapter 11 concludes with a call to action and lists ten questions facilitate such action. This is a critical addition for practitioners.

Throughout each of these chapters, Kleine clearly presents a range of strategies and tools; and, in each chapter he details how to use them. He appears to advocate for use of a mixed

methods approach, where quantitative analysis matters for prioritization, evaluation, and long-term planning but qualitative insight from key stakeholders is just as important. Underlying the range of content are succinct chapters that conclude with takeaways, questions, and resources that can benefit students, professors, and practitioners, and even citizens who want to become more knowledgeable of public budgeting. This critical text manages to offer all of this with a light-heartedness that will interest even the most uninterested students in a public budgeting class.

Kleine concludes on a candid note by stating that “Baltimore’s Outcome Budgeting experience was one of trial-and-error.” These experiences, he suggests, can inform future budgeting (p. 238). Students, scholars, practitioners, consultants, and members of the public can all benefit immensely from Kleine’s text. Without reservation, it should be standard reading for any course on public budgeting. Indeed, it is relevant to a range of other graduate courses and will hopefully pave the way for even more insightful texts from practitioners, including Kleine, in the future.

### **Disclosure Statement**

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

### **Author Biography**

**Vincent Reitano** is an Assistant Professor in the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Western Michigan University.