

Proposed Criteria and Evaluation Framework for The City of Saskatoon's Priority Based Budgeting

Table 1: General Criteria and Scoring Rubric

#	Type	Criterion	Index Weight
1	Binary	Legally Mandated	10
2	1-5	Strategic and Organizational Alignment	30
3	1-5	Public Value and Community Need	20
4	1-5	Community Impact and Equity	20
5	1-5	Risk and Asset Protection	20
6	1-5	Marginal Impact and Scalability	For Information Only

Criterion 1: Legally Mandated - Weight: 10 points (Binary)

Legal mandate is treated as a binary criterion rather than a scored dimension because statutory obligation is not a matter of degree. A program the City is legally required to provide operates under a fundamentally different budget logic than one provided by discretionary choice: it defines the floor of provision, not a competitive priority.

A Yes result awards 10 points as recognition that mandated programs carry inherent responsibility and legal risk if reduced below required standards. A No result does not disqualify a program. Many of the most valuable subsidized services exist by choice rather than obligation, but it signals that the program’s justification rests entirely on the remaining criteria.

Scoring

Score	Result	Meaning	Note
10	Mandated	The City is legally required to provide this program or service under provincial legislation, federal regulation, or municipal bylaw. Failure to provide would constitute a statutory breach.	Reference to specific legislative or regulatory provision confirming obligation.
0	Not Mandated	The City provides this program by discretionary choice. No statutory obligation exists, though provision may be strongly justified by other criteria.	No documentation required; absence of mandate is the default position.

Criterion 2: Strategic and Organizational Alignment - Weight: 30 points

Strategic Priority Areas and High Performance Organizational (HPO) Goals together represent the City’s explicit commitments to the community and to its own operational standards. Strategic priorities define what outcomes City Council and Administration are collectively working to achieve; HPO goals define how the organization intends to operate in pursuing them.

The question this criterion asks is: does this program advance the direction the organization has committed to, in both its outcomes and its operations? The criterion carries the highest weight in the index (30 points) reflecting that within a tax-supported operating budget of subsidized services, alignment with adopted organizational direction is a primary basis for resource allocation alongside community welfare or benefit.

Score	Descriptor	Description	Potential Evidence Required
5	Primary driver	Program is a central delivery vehicle for one or more Strategic Priority outcomes AND demonstrably advances HPO Goals through documented operational practice.	Performance data or council-approved plans directly linking program outputs to named priority outcomes; evidence of HPO practice.
4	Direct contributor	Program directly and substantially advances Strategic Priority outcomes OR HPO Goals with clear linkage to specific objectives in either framework.	Program documentation referencing specific priority objectives with measurable output indicators.
3	Active supporter	Program supports Strategic Priority outcomes or HPO Goals in a consistent and intentional way — complementary or enabling role with articulable mechanism of contribution.	Written rationale identifying specific priority area and nature of contribution.
2	Indirect contributor	Program has an indirect or incidental connection to Strategic Priorities or HPO Goals requiring some inferential steps to establish.	Program manager assertion with reference to specific priority language in adopted documents.
1	Minimal alignment	Program operates within the municipal mandate and has a plausible but limited connection to current Strategic Priorities or HPO Goals.	Basic program description sufficient.

Criterion 3: Public Value and Community Need - Weight: 20 points

This criterion determines the reliance and demand for a program. Reliance speaks to substitutability, can residents access this service elsewhere at comparable quality, cost and accessibility? Conversely, demand speaks to trajectory, is community need growing, stable or diminishing?

Scoring community and organizational reliance on the City to provide a service is proposed and important because it highlights where residents, businesses, or partners have limited or no alternatives. Scoring the portion of the community being served is proposed and important in priority-based budgeting because it helps decision-makers understand the breadth and distribution of benefits from municipal services.

Score	Descriptor	Description	Potential Evidence Required
5	Irreplaceable and growing	No viable alternative providers exist at comparable quality, accessibility, or price, and demand is increasing or documented unmet need exists.	Utilization and waitlist data, market scan of alternative providers, demographic need analysis.
4	Primary provider, stable or growing need	City is primary provider with few alternatives; community need is stable or increasing. Withdrawal would cause meaningful disruption to a defined population.	Utilization trends, documentation of alternative provider landscape, evidence of unmet need.
3	Significant provider with limited alternatives	City is important but not sole provider; alternatives exist but are constrained by cost, geography, or capacity. Demand is stable.	Program utilization data, identification of specific alternatives and their limitations.
2	Complementary provider with adequate alternatives	Reasonable alternatives exist; City provision adds accessibility or quality value. Demand is stable or slowly declining.	Description of alternative provider landscape with comparative accessibility assessment.
1	Supplementary role, readily available alternatives	Multiple accessible alternatives exist at comparable quality and cost. City provision is convenient rather than essential. Demand is declining or marginal.	Program manager assessment with reference to specific alternatives.

Criterion 4: Community Impact and Equity - Weight: 20 points

Equity is important in priority-based budgeting and proposed to be included because it ensures that funding decisions consider not only efficiency and reach, but also fairness and community well-being. By explicitly evaluating how services affect underserved or disproportionately impacted populations, Priority Based Budgeting helps avoid unintentionally reinforcing disparities and ensures that limited resources are directed where needs and barriers are greatest.

A program with narrow reach but with concentrated and documented benefit to high-need populations can score as highly as a program with broad reach and genuine equity design. Both dimensions are required for a complete assessment: who benefits, and is the distribution of those benefits improving outcomes?

Score	Descriptor	Description	Potential Evidence Required
5	Transformative equity impact	Program is intentionally designed to address documented disparities for a defined high-need population with verifiable evidence of improved outcomes OR delivers substantial measurable benefit to a very large share of residents with documented equity considerations in access and delivery.	Demographic utilization data disaggregated by need indicators, outcome measurement data, documented disparity baseline, independent evaluation or administrative impact evidence.
4	Significant and targeted impact	Program substantially improves access, affordability, safety, or outcomes for underserved populations with clear equity design features OR delivers direct meaningful benefit to a broad share of residents with intentional barrier reduction measures.	Utilization data disaggregated by population group, documentation of specific equity design features and their uptake.
3	Broad reach with equity awareness	Program serves a significant portion of the community with intentional but not fully realized equity measures. Equity is an identified objective with some supporting evidence.	Program documentation referencing specific equity measures, partial utilization data, description of barrier reduction features.
2	General service, limited equity intentionality	Program is broadly available to a defined community segment but has no specific design features addressing access barriers or disparate impact.	Program description, general utilization data showing population served.
1	Narrow reach, no equity component	Program serves a small or specialized population without documented equity rationale or intentional access design. Benefits are incidental rather than targeted to need.	Program manager description of population served.

Criterion 5: Risk and Asset Protection - Weight: 20 points

This criterion assesses the degree to which the program prevents, mitigates, or manages risks to public health, safety, environmental integrity or community resilience. Within the tax-supported operating budget scope, this focuses on service delivery functions rather than physical infrastructure, which is addressed through the capital budget. Programs that reduce irreversible or catastrophic harm are weighed most heavily, reflecting the asymmetric cost of preventable serious harm relative to recoverable or marginal risks.

Climate resilience is treated as an integral risk element throughout the scale. This reflects Saskatoon’s exposure to climate-related risks including flooding, extreme heat events and drought, which increasingly affect operating service delivery rather than capital assets alone.

Score	Descriptor	Description	Potential Evidence Required
5	Critical risk prevention	Program is a primary delivery mechanism for protecting life, public health, or environmental integrity where service reduction would create a high probability of serious, potentially irreversible harm.	Independent risk assessment, regulatory standards, documented incident history, public health surveillance data, or legislated service standards establishing the harm baseline.
	Significant risk mitigation	Program substantially reduces identified health, safety, or environmental risks where consequences of reduction are serious but manageable with intervention. Includes programs building demonstrable climate resilience against documented local hazards.	Risk documentation from program records, incident data, environmental monitoring data, or peer city evidence of comparable service outcomes.
3	Meaningful risk reduction	Program contributes to safer conditions, improved health outcomes, or environmental resilience in ways that are real but not immediately critical. Risks without this program are elevated but not acute.	Program documentation of specific risk factors addressed, description of harm prevention mechanism, utilization or inspection data.
	Preventative or indirect benefit	Programs have indirect public health, safety, or environmental resilience benefits through education, awareness, or environmental stewardship. Risks are low probability or long-term in nature.	Program description identifying specific risk pathway and population or environment protected.
1	Marginal connection	Programs have a plausible but limited connection to public health, safety, or environmental resilience. Risk reduction is incidental to the program’s primary purpose.	Program manager rationale identifying the specific risk dimension.

Criterion 6: Marginal Impact and Scalability – For Information Only

In practice, priority-based budgeting serves two marginal questions: (1) where should new dollars be allocated to generate the greatest benefit, and (2) where can reductions be absorbed with the least harm? A program’s overall merit, captured by the preceding criteria, does not answer either question. A high-scoring program with no capacity to productively absorb additional funding is a different budget decision than one with documented unmet demand and proven delivery capacity.

To address those points, this criterion scores both upward scalability and downward reduction sensitivity together, because they inform the same decision. Particular attention is given to threshold effects: some programs operate at a minimum viable scale below which service collapse occurs rather than proportional output reduction. The criterion’s weighting is 0 points as this will not impact the prioritization but instead will be provided to City Council as additional information.

Score	Descriptor	Description	Potential Evidence Required
5	High scalability, high reduction sensitivity	Program has documented unmet demand or operates below optimal capacity with clear evidence that additional funding would generate proportional welfare gains. Simultaneously, reductions below current funding would trigger discrete service failure or irreversible harm to program viability rather than proportional output reduction.	Waitlist or unmet referral data, utilization relative to capacity, minimum viable service threshold analysis, unit cost data demonstrating efficient marginal production.
4	Meaningful scalability or significant reduction sensitivity	Program shows strong evidence of either upward scalability — additional funding would measurably expand outputs to an identified unmet need — or high reduction sensitivity where cuts would produce disproportionate welfare losses relative to savings achieved.	Utilization trend data, capacity analysis, documentation of specific unmet need, or evidence of threshold effects in service delivery.
3	Moderate scalability, manageable reduction sensitivity	Program could productively absorb additional funding with moderate output gains, and reductions would produce roughly proportional output decreases without triggering service collapse. Program operates within a stable and flexible range.	Program utilization data, description of how additional funding would be deployed, assessment of reduction impact on specific outputs.
2	Limited scalability or low reduction sensitivity	Program has limited capacity to scale outputs with additional funding — demand is substantially met or the input-output relationship is relatively fixed — and reductions could be absorbed with manageable welfare impact.	Program manager assessment of current capacity utilization and reduction impact with reference to specific outputs.

Score	Descriptor	Description	Potential Evidence Required
1	Minimal marginal responsiveness	Program operates at or near optimal scale for current demand with negligible unmet need. Reductions would produce proportional rather than disproportionate output decreases with limited welfare consequences beyond the direct service reduction.	Program manager rationale.