

AGA Presents Certificates of Excellence Awards to 10 Federal Agencies



Clay Johnson

AGA honored 10 federal agencies for effectively communicating program and financial performance by producing high-quality Performance and Accountability Reports (PARs). More than 160 agency representatives attended the Sept. 15 luncheon awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., including Education Secretary Rod Paige and Clay Johnson, deputy director for management at the Office of Management and Budget.

AGA Executive Director Relmond P. Van Daniker told the crowd at the National Press Club that his hometown of Lexington, KY, is only 500 miles away, but feels much farther because taxpayers don't have a clear idea of how their money is being spent inside the Beltway. Combining financial reporting with performance reporting—which focuses on results—is the wave of the future, he said, and AGA is a leader in encouraging greater transparency and accountability.



AGA National President Bobby Derrick, CGFM, with (left to right) GAO representatives Sallyanne Harper, CGFM, Gene Dodaro, CGFM and CEAR Board Chairman John Hummel, CGFM.

This year's recipients of AGA's Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting were chosen for giving readers a clear assessment of how the agency managed programs and resources, accomplishments relative to plans, and financial position. In all, 18 agencies demonstrated their commitment to improving the quality of performance information and submitted their fiscal year 2003 PARs for evaluation by teams of expert reviewers. First-time recipients were the Department of Education, Federal Aviation Administration and the General Services Administration. The other agencies to receive awards were: the Department of State, Department of Labor, Department of the Interior, Social Security Administration, Government

Accountability Office, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

Johnson said the awards are "highly prized" among federal agencies. He said that greater accountability requires lots of explaining, which is where clear, accurate reporting comes in. He said the American people may not believe the federal government is results-oriented, but the government is focusing on results through the President's Management Agenda (PMA), a five-part strategy for bringing a more businesslike approach to government operations. Johnson said: "The federal government asks itself, 'Are we achieving a desired goal at an acceptable cost?' " Performance and Accountability reports can provide the answer, and if it is no, the agency should do something about it, he said. Too many agencies, he said, are focusing on "the good stuff" in their PARs and not enough on where the agencies can do better. "No agency in the federal government is performing exactly as it should," he said.

OMB is guiding federal government agencies to comply with the PMA, releasing a traffic light-style scorecard every quarter to show whether agencies are making progress or lagging behind. Not only must agencies combine financial and performance reporting into a PAR, but they must close their books on Nov. 15, 2004, 45 days after the fiscal year end. The next step is to make the reports even more accessible, Johnson said. "We do not provide enough information to the American people on what they're getting for their money," he said.

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The Department of Education's Chief Financial Officer Jack Martin acknowledged the many offices that worked together to produce its award-winning PAR and to meet the accelerated reporting schedule a year before OMB required it. "This report has truly been a team effort," he said, adding that the department is committed to continued excellence.

Scott Cameron, the Department of the Interior's deputy assistant secretary for Performance, Accountability and Human Resources, was confident about the department's ability to meet the new deadline. "We will nail November 15th easily this year," he said, noting the hard work and dedication of Interior's work force. Cameron also remembered R. Schuyler Leshner, CGFM, who lost his battle with cancer on Aug. 23, just weeks before the awards ceremony. The CEAR Board vice chairman and Interior's director of the Office of Financial Management was considered "one of the most respected leaders in financial management," Cameron said. Leshner helped the department earn seven clean audit opinions in a row and inspired the department to go to a "next-generation" financial management system. Leshner's wife Joanne attended the ceremony.

Other comments included:

- Barbara L. Burkhalter, the Department of Labor's deputy chief financial officer, thanked the team of employees who helped Labor to be recognized with the CEAR for the fourth time.
- Christopher B. Burnham, the Department of State's assistant secretary for resource management and chief financial officer, recognized the department's inspector general as a "fantastic partner," and noted that the department operates in 250 locations around the work and must aggregate 131 different currencies.
- John Hennigan, the Federal Aviation Administration's deputy administrator for Financial Services, said the agency understands and controls its costs better than ever. The department's strategic plan and budget were tied, an outdated legacy financial system was eliminated and the property and procurement systems were integrated..
- Gene L. Dodaro, CGFM, the Government Accountability Office's chief operating officer, said it is very gratifying to see the results of the financial reform efforts of the last 10 years. GAO, he said, strives hard to meet the highest standards of excellence.
- Kathleen M. Turco, the General Services Administration's chief financial officer, said that even though GSA had earned 16 clean audit opinions, this was the first year it was honored with a CEAR award. She praised the 800-plus financial professionals who have done a "stellar job" of improving financial management.
- Jon W. Dudas, the United States Patent and Trademark Office's director and Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property, said customers are measuring the U.S. against patent offices in Japan and Europe. This year, the office gained a victory when customers asked Congress to raise fees by 20 percent to allow the office to better serve the public.
- Jesse L. Funches, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's chief financial officer, said the CEAR Program is instrumental in helping the agency to set high goals and meet them.
- James B. Lockhart, the Social Security Administration's deputy commissioner, recalled his naiveté when he joined the federal government 15 years ago and asked why financial statements were not audited. "It's such a change now since those days." SSA has received AGA's CEAR award since its inception. SSA's integrated approach has not only helped it produce award-winning PARs but has launched it to the top of OMB's ranking system, earning SSA a "green light" in the financial management portion of the President's Management Agenda. Lockhart said SSA collects payroll taxes from 150 million taxpayers and issues 50 million checks every month. "We are producing results for the American people."



**Relmond Van Daniker, DBA,
CPA, AGA Executive Director**

In closing, Van Daniker said he hopes for even greater participation among federal agencies in the future. "I would be looking for this expression of excellence from all the agencies," he said. PARs for fiscal year 2004 are due to AGA by Dec. 15, 2004. Contract Lisa Thatcher at lthatcher@agacgfm.org with questions, or go to www.agacgfm.org/performance/cear/default.aspx for more detailed information about the CEAR Program.