

COMMENTS FROM AGA'S CEAR CEREMONY



On September 12, 2003 AGA hosted its fifth annual Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting (CEAR) Program Awards Ceremony to recognize the recipients of the Certificate of Excellence. Patricia McGinnis, president and CEO of the Council for Excellence in Government,

originally expected to personally attend the event and share these remarks.

I'm very pleased to join you all in this celebration of Excellence in Government. This event and the agencies you are recognizing are helping to chart the path toward higher government performance and greater accountability to the public.

The Council for Excellence in Government, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, is dedicated to two goals, which are quite strongly related: Improving the performance of government, and improving public trust and participation in government.

It is our firm belief that as the public sees the performance of its government improving, trust and participation will increase.

Greater public trust in government is a cornerstone of our democracy. As it grows, it gives government the capital of public "good will" to engage in bolder efforts to improve the quality of life in our nation and around the world. High quality public reporting on performance is an essential tool for public accountability and trust.

I know that AGA has been recognizing the highest quality annual financial accountability reports from government agencies for some years. I believe that effort has played an important role in raising the quality and usefulness of those reports.

This year for the first time, the law requires agencies to combine financial reports with the annual performance reports required by the Government Performance and Results Act. The integration of performance data and financial data across all departments can now, for the first time, begin to present to the public a meaningful picture of what their tax dollars are being spent for in an accessible format.

As the owners of government, the American people deserve to receive an understandable accounting, a meaningful annual report, of how their agencies are doing and the return on their investment, in the short term and in the long term. The challenge is to provide often complex information in an easy-to-use format. As we all know, reports for their own sake are of limited value. But I believe that by raising the profile of these reports through these awards, they can become important tools for public accountability. If more attention is paid to the performance described in these reports, that will support efforts inside agencies to manage more effectively. Managers will be able to report on better and better performance, and as importantly, address with candor how they are dealing with problems and shortfalls.

Today's award ceremony marks a milestone on the path toward excellence in accountability reporting. I mean by that

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to distinguish on the one hand, between the desired end result of uniformly high quality integrated financial and performance reports that fairly reflect actual agency management effort, and on the other, today's marker for progress toward that result. Today we are recognizing the agencies that have been found through AGA's peer review process to have done the best reports this year. We are not declaring victory.

Just as it has taken years of hard work in the agencies, OMB and the financial community to establish the standards of high quality for financial reports, so it will take more years and more hard work to develop and test standards for high-quality integrated reports in the many complex settings of government programming. I cannot imagine a better way to begin that process than by building on AGA's long experience and recognized competence in the financial arena.

I am so pleased to see that we are joined today by high-level representation from the Office of Management and Budget in the person of Robert Shea, counselor to the deputy director for Management and governmentwide leader for Budget and Performance Integration. OMB's current efforts to improve the way in which performance information is systematically incorporated into decision-making is itself a key milestone in the process of improving the quality of decision-making and performance. That effort can only be enhanced by the kind of high quality public reporting we are encouraging through these awards.

The Council joins with AGA, OMB, and others in the continuing effort to improve the quality of Performance and Accountability Reports. We are all in this business for the long haul and have every confidence that better government will be the result. This is all about excellence in government.

Let me join everyone here today in extending my congratulations to all the winners, and in expressing my confidence that your reports will continue to improve and that you will be joined in the future by many other agencies as they too rise with increasing success to this important challenge.

Thank you. ■

The Council for Excellence in Government is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, national organization committed to improving government performance at all levels and increasing citizen confidence and participation in governance. Visit www.excelgov.org for more information.