Using Performance Information to Drive Performance Improvement

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Executive Summary

This project explores the federal government’s use of performance information to drive performance improvement, a program that was established within the last two years and is still evolving. It describes the status of the process within the 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies and selected components. The main purpose of the project, however, is to provide recommendations and other ideas for how the process, also known as data-driven performance reviews, can be extended deeper into the agencies, across all their programs and most important, beyond changes in personnel and administrations.

The research project was based primarily on interviews conducted with persons who are involved at some level in the federal government with the use of performance information to drive performance improvement. The rapidly evolving nature of this program means that many policies and practices have changed, and are still changing, since the time of the interviews.

Key Findings

The CFO Act agencies have begun to apply the data-driven performance review process to the high-priority performance goals on which the Obama administration has asked them to focus. Some agencies and their components, however, have been conducting such reviews for several years. The primary determinant as to whether the process is used in an agency is its leadership—their interest and the time they devote to performance reviews and improvement.

Our research shows the primary measures used for monitoring performance and seeking improvement are activity and output measures. These are the measures used to manage day-to-day operations. This can cause difficulties for and with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), whose primary interest is results, which are demonstrated by outcome measures. Other types of measures, such as stakeholder satisfaction, productivity and sub-unit measures are of limited interest to the interviewees. Regardless of the measures, the agencies appear to be satisfied with the data’s reliability, even though few structured processes are used to assure reliability.

A few agencies reported having automated performance information systems, with one reporting that its system has built-in business intelligence and data mining capabilities. In most instances, however, the data are collected with data calls and entered into Excel spreadsheets. The agencies would prefer to have an automated performance information system, but lack of resources appears to be the primary obstacle.

On balance, the data-driven performance review process is working. Several instances were described in which analysis of performance measures revealed performance shortcomings, alternatives were explored and adopted, and performance improved.

Recommendations

Since leadership is the primary determinant of the success of the process, the recommendations start with the organizational issues: how to assure the Chief Operating Officer (COO), or other official who will lead the effort, has the capabilities and interest to do so; and that the Performance Improvement Officer (PIO), who is designated to support the COO, has the experience, knowledge and freedom to fill that role effectively.

Other recommendations address expanding the process from the high-priority performance goals to the agency’s remaining goals and programs; the attributes the performance measures should possess; the manner in which the performance data should be collected, accumulated and analyzed; and the manner in which the data-driven performance reviews should be structured. Special attention is given to reconciling the agencies’ need for output measures data and the desire for outcome information; and to steps that can be taken to build assurances of reliability into the performance data before they are even collected.

The final recommendations are devoted to what is needed to support, expand and continue the process: training, establishing the necessary infrastructures in the agencies and in OMB, and enabling persons to appreciate the benefits of using performance information to drive performance improvement.
Introduction

Performance measures are indicators of progress or achievement for a service or program, typically quantifiable but sometimes qualitative. Since businesses exist to earn a profit, they rely largely on financial measures to monitor progress and drive improvement. Governments, however, exist to provide services or benefits to citizens. For them, the traditional financial measures used by business organizations have less relevance for measuring progress and results against their mission. Instead, governments use performance measures. The three purposes of performance measures are to:

- Demonstrate accountability, that is, report to taxpayers and other members of the public the services and benefits the government has produced and the results that have been achieved.
- Improve allocation of resources by informing budget development, enactment and execution, that is, provide the information that elected and appointed officials can use, if they want, for deciding whether and to what extent to fund a government’s programs.
- Drive performance improvement, that is, provide the impetus and insight for monitoring the delivery of services and making adjustments, if necessary, to assure the programs achieve the desired results.

The evolution of performance measures in the federal government is consistent with these three uses. Specifically:

- The CFO Act and Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) provided the foundation for using performance measures to demonstrate accountability. The CFO Act required the government-wide CFO (OMB’s deputy director for management) to establish policies relating to the systematic measurement of performance, and the agency CFOs to maintain systems and controls that provide for the systematic measurement of performance. GPRA required the agencies to issue annual performance reports that set forth the “program performance achieved.”
- In 2002, the Program Assessment Rating Tool was initiated to gather information for each program in the following four areas: program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management and program results, with the emphasis placed on program results. The information was used from 2002 through 2008 to guide formulation of the President’s Budget.
- The current administration believes that in addition to the two previously stated uses, performance measures should also be used to “lead, learn and improve outcomes.” It directed the 24 departments and large agencies covered by the CFO Act to establish a limited number of high-priority performance goals and conduct regular reviews of progress, based on the performance data, to improve performance in the priority areas. The GPRA Modernization Act, enacted in January 2011, makes this process a legislative requirement.

Findings

The following findings about using performance information to drive performance improvement were gleaned from interviews with 17 PIOs or their designees, five program managers and delivery partners (that is, state and local government personnel that deliver federally funded services). These interviews revealed the current status of the data-driven performance review process. They also suggested worthwhile directions to pursue and provided thought-provoking ideas, all of which were considered for the formulation of the recommendations.

The use of performance information to drive performance improvement is rapidly evolving. The findings are based on interviews performed between April and July 2011. The process in many of the agencies is likely to have evolved since then. Also, the interview responses were neither audited nor confirmed. The findings are based primarily on the information provided by the interviewees.
The CFO Act agencies and some of their components report that they are conducting periodic data-driven performance reviews for at least the high-priority performance goals, and in some instances, for additional programs and performance measures.

Some agencies began conducting data-driven, or at least data-informed, reviews for all their programs several years ago. For instance, for seven years, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has been conducting quarterly budget and performance reviews using performance and financial data collected within 30 days of the end of each quarter. The Environmental Protection Agency has been conducting quarterly budget and performance reviews for over a decade. In 2006, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration initiated quarterly Baseline Performance Review meetings to ascertain what is happening in its programs. In the Federal Aviation Administration, the PIO meets with the administrator and his management team monthly and reviews several of the 30 measures used to monitor performance.

Furthermore, some agencies report that the reviews are led by the agency head. These include the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), General Services Administration (GSA) and Social Security Administration (SSA).

The department/agency-level reviews appear to be helping to push the data-driven management review process into the program and mission support components. Pre-meetings with goal leaders acting as the COO enable the goal leaders to hold contributing offices accountable. Holding regional and program managers accountable for results prompts them to look at their measures to ascertain problems and opportunities. Hence, continuous monitoring is already occurring at levels below the headquarters level, and meetings are more frequent than quarterly, particularly if a unit has a robust performance plan and performance data.

GPRA’s focus on the entire agency and all programs necessitated that there be a more limited base from which to start the process of using performance information to drive performance improvement.

The purpose of GPRA is for each agency to establish a strategic plan and annual performance plan containing quantifiable performance goals for each program activity in the agency’s budget. Considering the size of the agencies, many established literally hundreds of performance goals. With this many goals, agency senior management does not have sufficient time to review and drive performance improvement for every goal. The decision to start the data-driven performance review process with just a few high-priority goals was a wise decision.

Leadership and personnel are the primary determinants for improving performance.

Several interviewees stated attention to and use of data-driven performance reviews has varied considerably with different leaders. Some described leaders who are comfortable with data and do not need briefings to determine the questions to ask. Others described leaders who express interest in the process, but do not seem to find the time to attend the meetings. Subordinates recognize the leader’s level of interest and act accordingly.

The biggest users of performance information to drive performance improvement are the COOs and program managers. For the most part, the performance measures they use are output measures (in contrast to outcome measures).

The COOs and program managers are responsible for managing programs and obtaining the desired results. They have the resources, make the decisions, take the actions and are held accountable. Most interviewees stated that the performance measures these individuals use to drive performance improvement are different from what the Office of Management and Budget, both the management side and the budget side, or the public, wants.

Specifically, managers manage with activity and output measures, which reveal what is happening now. OMB’s management side desires outcome data in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programs. OMB’s budget side wants outcome measures and data, and not necessarily the same ones, to justify budget allocations. The public wants outcomes since that is what affects them. However, outcomes tell what has already happened, which is frequently after actions can be taken.

For many reasons, outcomes are rarely feasible for day-to-day management. The desired results are too far in the future. The performance data, even for outcomes that occur presently, frequently take a considerable amount of time to gather. It is often difficult to obtain the Paperwork Reduction Act clearances to collect the necessary information. External factors affect the achievement of the outcomes, as do funds and actions provided by other parties, such as states.

Finally, when OMB pushes too hard on the agencies to provide outcome measures, the agencies begin to view the whole process as another compliance exercise.

On the other hand, OMB has stated that outputs are acceptable where there is appropriate robust evidence demonstrating a link between the outputs and outcomes, or at least well-developed logic showing how progress on the output targets is likely to influence the outcomes and a plan to confirm the logic over a longer term.

OMB asked researchers to ascertain the experience and views with other types of information. The views of the limited number of persons interviewed are as follows:

- The value of customer information depends on the type of program. For instance, there are two types of customer information: customer satisfaction and customer services information. Customer satisfaction information is less meaningful for a regulatory agency whose customers want to limit regulation (although information regarding the understandability of the regulatory process can be very useful).

Second, customer information gathered on a broad national scope can make identifying a truly representaive, not self-selected population a challenge, particularly
with limited resources. Respondents tend to be positive about their experiences, which often puts the results in the high 90s. Hence, customer satisfaction measures frequently have only limited value for helping agencies improve.

Third, the quality of a customer’s, client’s or regulated party’s experience with an agency and the results reflected in objective outcome measures are two distinct dimensions of agency performance. Both are important, but they are not necessarily related.

Finally, the ability to collect data from customers, clients, regulated parties, or other stakeholders is affected by the Paperwork Reduction Act limitations on conducting surveys. Nonetheless, customer satisfaction results can be compared with customer satisfaction results from other agencies providing similar services, and particularly if the other agencies have had a significant growth in customer satisfaction, to learn what to do better.

**Productivity information** is useful for internal management, particularly for production-type programs. However, the program offices frequently have no control over centrally allocated costs, which typically is a major portion of the total costs used to define productivity. Also, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of when the program, and thus the accumulation of costs, begins and ends.

- The value of **sub-unit information** depends on the nature of the program. It is most valuable when collected by the headquarters offices of sub-units trying to accomplish similar objectives. The headquarters office would then look for variations in trends across the different sub-units in order to identify potentially promising practices and/or possible problems.

  Sub-unit information also provides a way to do evaluations “on the cheap.” There are numerous variables in the conduct of many programs. Different regions apply some variables the same and some differently. Analyzing and determining which variables were done differently in regions that had different results tells something about the connection between the program process and program results.

- One major use for **geo-coded information** appears to be to assist with staffing allocations, for example, DOJ’s right-sizing staffing levels at the Southwest border or drug enforcement agents at international locations. It has also been used for analysis by regions, for example, the National Institute of Justice’s study of the impact of DOJ’s task forces on reducing violent crime in high-crime areas. Geo-coding can also show geographic relationships that may affect outcomes, such as the presence of possible pollution sources near a highly contaminated area, or an opportunity to reduce the cost of addressing problems occurring in close proximity rather than one location at a time.

- **Evaluation information** could be useful, but the interviewees’ general opinion is that evaluations have not been terribly useful for driving performance improvement, and particularly in the way they are being performed. Specifically:
  - Evaluations are generally not focused on making performance information more useful.
  - Sources of information and the expertise of the persons who perform the evaluations are uncertain, which can result in unevenness in evaluation results.
  - Too much time is often needed to complete an evaluation.
  - The high costs of evaluations limit the number that can be performed.

Furthermore, evaluations to ascertain whether a program is working or whether it should be changed or terminated are not as useful as evaluations that seek the connection between the outputs the program is producing and the outcomes the program is seeking and hopefully achieving. If an evaluation cannot show a connection between the outputs and outcomes, it is hard to justify continuing to produce the outputs. Thus, useful evaluations would study whether the outputs are indeed contributing to progress on the program’s mission and intended purposes.

- Design information, or information that describes how a program operates, helps build an understanding of the alternative ways to pursue a goal as well as the connection between outputs and outcomes. However, design information is not widely used because the evaluations generally do not show the connection between the outputs and the outcomes, and therefore do not suggest program redesigns that will produce outputs that have a better chance of achieving the desired outcomes. Even when legislation concerning design is being developed, the persons familiar with program design are usually not consulted. Nor are they generally proactive trying to influence legislation. Hence, legislation frequently fails to consider alternative designs.

- The only use mentioned for **human resources data** in driving performance improvement was assessing and modifying staff coverage, particularly during peak times, and ascertaining leave patterns.

**To an almost universal degree, the interviewees expressed comfort with the reliability of the performance data.** The techniques cited for assuring reliability were:

- advising components of verification and validation standards and requirements;
- asking the submitters of data if they did what they were supposed to do;
- reviewing or discussing the data and their verification and validation processes with the programs and components submitting the data;
- common-sense reviews of the data;
- intensive eye-balling (that is, reviewing);
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- looking for departures from trends, anomalies, outliers, etc. and trying to determine the reasons;
- looking at the original sources for data that are suspect;
- comparisons of commentary to the numbers and to previous commentaries;
- comparing with data from external sources;
- performing calculations, cross-checks and other analysis of submitted data, and drilling down if the data do not look right;
- having more people work with and become sufficiently familiar with the data to recognize inaccuracies;
- advising the persons submitting data that the numbers will be checked;
- providing the programs and components discretionary guidance on how to verify and validate the data, that is, providing performance standards of what internal controls need to do rather than prescribing specific controls;
- having the agencies complete a form explaining each type of data they submit, identifying the source, explaining how the data were validated, and identifying any possible shortcomings;
- having the persons responsible for data certify the quality of the data; and
- obtaining periodic reviews of the sources of the data by the inspector general.

Confidentiality of the information could be an issue.

One interviewee suggested that managers could be concerned that the performance data would be subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests or requests by lawmakers.

For the most part, agency performance data are collected with data calls and entered into Excel spreadsheets.

An automated performance information data system would seem to be a must and is desired by virtually all the interviewees but, in most situations, does not exist. The most frequently mentioned reasons for the lack of an automated performance data system are a lack of resources and reluctance to move ahead absent OMB guidance.

Nonetheless, some interviewees mentioned that their agency uses or will be using an automated performance information system. For instance,

- The Department of Energy reported using Performance Measure Manager (PMM), a service under the auspices of the Budget Formulation and Execution Line of Business, for which OMB is the policy lead and the Department of Education is the managing partner. The system was originally developed by the Department of the Treasury.
- DOJ has developed a performance information system titled Justice, Performance, Planning and Reporting System (JPPRS), into which all DOJ personnel can enter performance data. The system can generate reports that assign a red, yellow or green score to performance measures. The priority goals are tracked manually using Excel spreadsheets and performance is noted as “met” or “not met.”
- The Department of State uses a custom-built, automated Planning and Performance System to capture policy narratives, performance data and budget information from all overseas missions and domestic bureaus. The performance information and data collected are in both qualitative, milestone format for some policy areas, and quantitative data for other business areas. The data are used to monitor the status of operations and performance, and inform operational and budget decision-making.
- The Social Security Administration has an automated performance data system with built-in business intelligence and a data mining capability.
- The Federal Aviation Administration originally used a COTS (commercial off-the-shelf software) system, but now has a custom-developed, performance information system from which the PIO can access and view color-coded, real-time results for any of 30 performance measures.
- Some agencies’ interviewees indicated their agencies are initiating the use of Sharepoint, a highly scalable Microsoft web application platform that allows for managing and provisioning of intranet portals, extranets and websites; document management and file management; collaboration spaces; social networking tools; enterprise search; and business intelligence tooling. Examples are HUD and Treasury.

The data-driven performance improvement process is already working. Some examples are:

- DOJ regularly reviews its process for holding hearings for illegal immigrants. The performance information showed that the hearings were not occurring quickly. Justice shifted its resources to conducting hearings for detained illegals rather than non-detained illegals. The percentage of hearings conducted within the desired time frame increased.
- Several years ago, Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) analysts noted that radiation doses were increasing at reactor sites during outages, but there was no corresponding increase in radiological inspection findings. NRC redirected their radiological protection inspection to reactor outage periods when the risk of overexposure was the greatest. This change allowed NRC inspectors to ensure that licensee radiological controls were appropriate for the most risk significant condition.
- One of FAA’s performance measures is the general aviation fatal accident rate. The target was not met in FY 2010. Drill down analysis revealed that experimental aircraft were a major contributor to the poor performance. Further analysis of several years’ data revealed that while experimental aircraft is only a small component of the general aviation community, the users had a high incidence of accidents, especially within the first three months after a sale of the aircraft. FAA added a strategic initiative with specific programs and outreach-increased training, for example- that is performed in conjunction
with the industry partners to begin to reverse the accident rate trend.

• The Health Resources and Services Administration operates a program to place primary care health professionals in underserved areas in return for tuition forgiveness. Following a realization that the data indicated the program was not receiving the expected volume of applications from primary care health professionals, the application guidance, form and ease of use were examined. The information required was dramatically changed, with the end user in mind. This had the dual effect of increasing the number of applicants and accelerating the issuance of awards.

Additional examples of how performance information and data-driven performance reviews have already driven performance improvement are presented in Appendix E.

Recommendations

The interview process and other research generated countless ideas, several of which were quite intriguing. These ideas have been distilled into the following recommendations.

Organizational issues

The frequent leadership changes in political organizations such as the federal departments and agencies make maintaining momentum in the data-driven performance review process a major challenge. If the leader has little interest, the process will go nowhere. Therefore, the first requirement is to assure that there is an interested person who is comfortable with data at the COO level.

Appointment of the Chief Operating Officers

The Inspector General Act was passed in 1978, which resulted in a requirement in 1981 for the appointment of 14 new inspectors general. OMB wanted to assure that the persons appointed to this critical position had the qualifications, experience, expectations and intentions for a position that was viewed as a major contributor to management improvement. For two years, OMB, rather than the Office of Presidential Personnel (OPP), assumed responsibility for establishing qualifications for, identifying, interviewing, vetting, and then recommending to the agency heads and the president the persons to be nominated for the inspector general positions.

The COO position is just as critical to management improvement as the inspector general position. OMB should replicate, at least in part, what was done with the appointment of the new inspectors general in the early 1980s and assure that OPP is aware that driving performance improvement through the “use of strategic and performance planning, measurement, analysis, regular assessment of progress and the use of performance information to improve the results achieved” is part of the deputy agency head’s (or other person who will be the Chief Operating Officer) job, and that OPP advises potential appointees of that responsibility, ascertain the candidates’ abilities and willingness to embrace that role, and recommends persons to the agency head and president accordingly.

Furthermore, the OMB deputy director for management (DDM) is tasked by the CFO Act to facilitate actions by the executive branch to improve the management of federal government operations and provide leadership in management innovation through the adoption of modern management concepts and technologies. (This administration has also designated the person holding the DDM position as the government’s Chief Performance Officer.) Fulfilling those roles requires that the person holding that position be part of the interview and clearance process for persons who will be serving as an agency COO.

If, because of small size or another reason, an agency is not likely to have a COO, then an interest in improving management based on performance data should be included among the selection criteria for the agency head. OPP, or whomever is responsible for the agency head selection, should assure that the appointments are consistent with the criteria.

The Performance Improvement Officers

The COO, particularly if that person is the deputy agency head, will have many responsibilities. The GPRA Modernization Act wisely recognizes that for performance improvement activities, the COO needs to be supported by a person who speaks for the COO and leads the effort. That person is to be designated the Performance Improvement Officer (PIO).

The placement of the PIO in relation to the COO, plus the extent to which he or she has other responsibilities, is strongly indicative of the seriousness with which an agency will use performance information to drive performance improvement. Section 1124(a)(2) of the GPRA Modernization Act states that the PIO shall report directly to the COO. A study performed in 2010 by the Partnership for Public Service and Grant Thornton found that the PIOs frequently reported to someone other than the COO and, “believe they are too low in the organization to play more than a compliance role, and rarely act with the agency’s operating components other than to request information for external reporting purposes.” Although this study was performed prior to passage of the GPRA Modernization Act, our interviews indicate this problem might still exist. Some interviewees reported their agencies are making adjustments to conform the placement and role of the PIO to the Act (Education, Labor and NRC, for example), but there still appear to be situations in which one or more layers exist between the PIO and the COO; or where the PIO’s other duties would seem to permit him or her to devote only a small portion of his or her time to PIO activities.

OMB has indicated that the PIO has three roles.

• Supporting the agency head and COO in leading agency efforts to set goals, review progress and make results transparent.

• Reaching out to other administrative and program offices to improve operational effectiveness and efficiency.

• Helping components and program office leaders understand how to find and promote adoption of effective practices to improve outcomes, responsiveness and efficiency.
Since these roles will require considerable time, in the 24 departments and agencies covered by the CFO Act and in other large agencies and components, the PIO responsibility should be the PIO’s primary responsibility, and preferably, the only responsibility.

There is also the question of whether the PIO should be a political appointee or a career executive. Political appointees supposedly have more clout. They typically are invited to senior management meetings. They enjoy the trust of the other political appointees. Career persons, on the other hand, provide institutional knowledge and memory, have contacts and relationships that can be drawn upon, and offer longevity in the position that political appointees typically do not. (The tenure of a political appointee is typically less than two years.)

Each agency should resolve this issue in the way that will enable it to implement the act in the most effective manner. Each should realize, however, that it can provide a career PIO with the necessary clout by making it known that he or she speaks for the COO.

Moreover, the question can be resolved as provided for in OMB’s Memorandum M-11-17, Delivering on the Accountable Government Initiative and Implementing the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010. This requires that if an agency names a political appointee as the PIO, it should also name a career senior executive as the deputy PIO. This is similar to what the CFO Act required for the presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed (PAS) agency CFOs. The act recognized that improving financial management requires long-term, continuous attention; that the PAS CFOs might not remain in office long enough to see the improvements through to completion; and that a deputy CFO drawn from the career ranks should be appointed in each agency to assure the necessary continuity. This organizational approach has been one of the major contributors to the success of the financial management improvement initiative during the past 20 years, and particularly after changes in administrations when political appointees’ positions are vacant.

Despite the legislative and administrative requirements, there are likely to be instances when an agency does not establish or maintain the organizational framework for using performance information to drive performance improvement. In those instances, OMB’s DDM or associate director for Performance and Personnel Management should not hesitate to contact the agency, remind them of the requirements, and seek the necessary adjustments.

One interviewee from a large Cabinet department reported that a Performance Improvement Council had been established recently within the department. The council is comprised of the PIO for each program agency and several administrative components. One reason for this effort is to obtain participation and buy-in from the program agencies. The group meets monthly and is actively engaged in efforts to improve performance-based management within the department. This effort is similar to the CFO Councils that several departments established to monitor and drive financial management within the department. This agency-level council should be monitored to determine if it is worth replicating.

The Objectives of Federal Performance Management

1. Effective government. Government practices, programs and policies improve the outcomes they are trying to achieve.
2. Efficient, productive government. Once effective practices, programs and policies have been identified, government continually pushes for lower-cost ways to achieve its objectives.
3. Open and transparent government that engages the public. Government operates in an open, transparent way and encourages participation and collaboration.


Expanding Beyond the High-Priority Performance Goals/Agency Priority Goals

The selection of high-priority performance goals and the quarterly reviews of performance for these goals have launched the data-driven performance review process in the 24 agencies covered by the CFO Act. However, the agencies’ missions are broader than the high-priority performance goals/agency priority goals. Indeed, some interviewees stated that the high-priority performance goals were imposed and not necessarily related to the agency’s mission or strategic goals. Hence, it is logical that agencies want to monitor and attempt to improve performance for all their programs. Furthermore, many agencies were already operating a process in which the agency head and/or COOs reviewed program performance periodically using data.

First, the agency’s senior leadership has to decide that the agency will monitor and seek improvement in its programs using the performance information used to manage the programs. It has to make this decision known throughout the agency—every component, every program and every region. Major management changes are virtually impossible to bring about without management support.

Second, the agency’s strategic and annual performance plans should be considered as a logical starting point. The strategic plan defines the agency’s mission, long-term goals and the approaches by which it will monitor its progress in addressing specific national problems, needs or challenges related to its mission. The annual performance plan is a description of the level of performance to be achieved during the year in which the plan is submitted and the next fiscal year. They are less threatening than starting with individual performance goals.

Since an agency will probably have many performance goals, a prioritization process should be established to focus the reviews on those parts or areas of the strategic and performance plans that matter the most. Criteria that could be used for prioritizing are:
TO DRIVE PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

- Is the area critical to the agency’s mission or a major agency initiative?
- Does the area require regular executive focus?
- Is it an area that will encompass multiple years?
- Does the area require cross-organizational cooperation?
- Is the area critical to accomplishment of a strategic plan goal?
- Is the area high-profile or important to the agency’s stakeholders?
- Does the area represent a significant investment?

Another way to prioritize is to focus the reviews based on a desired level of performance, as the Department of the Interior is considering. Specifically, there are three levels of performance. Level 1 is positive; performance is improving and costs are decreasing or remaining level. Level 2 is sustained; performance and costs are moving in the same direction, either upward or downward. Level 3 is challenged; performance is decreasing and costs are increasing. The reviews focus on the Level 3 areas, and Level 2 if there is time. Level 1, positive performance, would be left alone.

**Type of Performance Information**

Since managers are the persons expected to drive performance, the process must be designed to assure that the performance information that is made available to them is information they can use to manage. Obviously it should be quantifiable. That is the essence of data-driven management.

Other attributes of good performance information can be drawn from the pronouncements of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). It states that performance information should be:

- **Relevant.** The information needs to have a close logical relationship to the performance goals. It helps management gain an understanding of the goals and objectives being sought. It provides a basis for determining the levels of accomplishment and can make a difference in the assessment of a problem, condition or event. It relates to the concerns that are important to the users.

- **Understandable.** The performance measures should be readily understandable by any reasonably informed interested person. Understandability also requires that the number of measures used be balanced between conciseness and comprehensiveness. Explanations of the significance of the measure, as well as conditions that may have affected performance, also contribute to understandability.

- **Reliable.** The users have to be comfortable with the data’s reliability. This means that the information should be not just verifiable and free from bias. It should faithfully represent what it purports to represent. It should be derived from systems that produce controlled and verifiable data. Although the interviewees generally expressed comfort with the reliability of the data, steps can be taken to build reliability into the data collection and the data themselves. (See Reliability of the Performance Data Must be Assured on page 13.)

- **Comparable.** Performance measures, when viewed alone, do not provide a basis or context for assessing performance and driving improvement. To have a frame of reference, performance measures should be capable of comparison with prior periods, established targets, similar operations or other benchmarks. They should also be capable of highlighting performance outliers. Abiding by this characteristic could be facilitated by establishing uniform definitions of measures for like programs. This is particularly important for grant-making agencies that want to assure that all grantees performing identical or similar programs have the same definition for performance results.

- **Consistent.** The performance measures should be consistent from period to period to allow management to have a basis for comparing performance over time and gain an understanding of the measures and their meaning. However, they also need to be reviewed regularly and modified or replaced to reflect changing circumstances. Changes in measures and measurement methodology should be identified to avoid users seeing changed results without knowing why.

- **Timely.** The performance information needs to be timely, that is, available soon enough to assess performance and make decisions. There will be times when the complexity of the program and/or the sources of the data make it impossible to obtain precise performance information on a timely basis. In those instances, estimates are acceptable provided they are based on reliable databases and logical assumptions. However, it is probably safer to estimate on the low side.

Timeliness also means measuring results frequently. Limiting the collection and review of performance data to annually, or even quarterly, reduces the opportunities to make performance improvements and increases the risk of continuing ineffective programs that are not likely to accomplish their goals. Performance data is most effective when it is collected continuously.

The foregoing applies to all performance measures. However, the characteristic that is most important for performance measures that are to be used to drive performance improvement is that they be **actionable**. Actionable means that the measure is able to point to whether corrective actions are needed and that decisions that hopefully will affect behavior and/or outcomes can be made from the information; or that points to promising practices that others might want to use to lead to better results in other areas. In short, actionable performance measures trigger focused follow-up questions that lead to the discovery of causal factors that need to be prevented or promoted.

Activity measures and output measures are actionable and should be the type of measures that the COOs and P1Os use to seek performance improvement. However, the activity measures and output measures must link to the expected outcomes. The measures should not be selected just because the data are readily available. There should be appropriate robust evidence demonstrating a link between the outputs and outcomes, or at least well-developed logic
showing how progress on the output targets is likely to influence the outcomes and a plan to confirm the logic over a longer term. Finally, the activity and output measures should not bind the agency to only the approach associated with the activity or output measure. Other approaches should be considered, even if they require different measures.

The interviewees recognize that OMB needs outcome information to fulfill its oversight responsibility. The agencies therefore should provide OMB with outcome measures to the extent they can. Since OMB will probably ask for output measures as well, the agencies should provide output measures in order to make OMB comfortable, in other words, a balanced basket of measures. OMB, however, should be careful using output measures in its discussions with agencies to avoid the appearance and the actuality of micro-managing the agencies.

Finally, targets are frequently used with performance measures. Targets, whether they are for absolute levels of performance or for rates of performance improvement, should be established only after determining the current performance level, that is, the baseline and the benchmarks that will be used for comparisons. Targets can be set high since they stimulate innovation and achieving even close to the target probably means that more has been achieved than would have been otherwise. Also, OMB has been clear that failure to meet a target is not, per se, a problem, provided the managers continue to drive progress by determining why the agency’s actions did not work and then developing and implementing plans to accomplish the goals based on that knowledge.

Data collection efforts should be integrated into the normal, everyday operations of the staff.

The data to be used to drive performance improvement should be the data used to operate the programs day-to-day (while enabling personnel to keep the intended outcomes in mind). Otherwise, people will consider this process a compliance exercise and avoid participating. A good example is a geo-coded customer satisfaction polling kiosk that SSA may install at local offices. The data would be immediately and automatically transmitted wirelessly to headquarters for monitoring the staff-customer interface and evaluating whether additional training and/or staffing is desired at that location.

The ideal is for performance data to be collected in the field, automatically transferred to headquarters, and then accumulated in an automated performance information system. The system should also provide for transfer of the data to OMB and posting to performance.gov, where it can be made available, in whole or in part, to the public.

Most agencies do not have such a system and are likely to continue to collect and accumulate performance data with periodic data calls and Excel spreadsheets. To avoid a continuation of this costly, inefficient and slow process, OMB should foster the development of a prototype system at one of the agencies. Assuming the prototype is successful, the agency could become a shared service center that would operate the system for other agencies. A concern was raised that the differences in performance measures among agencies precludes having all agencies use a common performance information system residing at a shared service center. This same concern was raised for financial management systems—that the agencies are different and have different financial information needs. Nonetheless, financial management shared service centers were established, agencies transitioned their accounting operations to the centers, and the process appears to be working effectively.

A good automated performance information system would also encompass business intelligence techniques and algorithms that provide for analysis of the data. Examples are the abilities to look simultaneously at multiple data sets and spot the impacts of one on the other, highlight outliers, integrate with map-based geo-coded data, drill-down and roll-up, signal variances from expected performance and the extent of the variance, etc.

Since the measures, and thus the analysis of the data, differ among the agencies, it would be more difficult to standardize the business intelligence and analysis parts of the system. The recommendation, therefore, is to break this effort into two parts: 1) development of a standard performance data accumulation and reporting system, and 2) providing for each agency to develop and append its own business intelligence and analysis module that is appropriate for its own performance measures and data. This is no different than the requirement that all agencies use the U. S. Standard General Ledger (SGL) to record and accumulate financial data, but they are then permitted to build on the SGL to provide for accounts unique to the agency.

Considering the projected budget reductions, it could be difficult to obtain the funds to develop an automated performance information system at this time. In actuality, the improvements in program delivery, and the potential cost reductions resulting from having information about which programs are not working, will greatly exceed the costs of developing the system. Furthermore, the cost of developing a system to collect and maintain the performance data could be reduced by building on one of the existing automated performance information systems that include business intelligence techniques. SSA’s system is evidently an example. There are probably others. Also, certain large cities and states have been gathering performance data for a range of government services for many years and probably rely on automated systems. New York City is an example.

If an agency does not use an automated performance information system to collect the performance information, it should at least assure that the collection of data is consistent with a template. One agency suggested the following for the template:

- Definition of the measure, including how the data are computed and the method for setting targets.
- Explanation of why the measure was chosen.
- The public benefit associated with the measure.
- Identification of external partners.
Reliability of the Performance Data Must be Assured

The collected data has to be analyzed. Although data subject to analysis needs to be reliable, performance data are currently collected without many structured processes to assure the data’s reliability. The users say they are comfortable with the reliability, which enables this informal approach to be acceptable.

Because of the informal manner in which data reliability is assured, it would be wise to build into the performance data collection process various steps to prevent the accumulation and use of improper or inaccurate data. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report issued in 1999 identifies several such steps grouped into four categories.11 They are:

• Foster Organizational Commitment and Capacity for Data Quality.
  • Communicate support for quality data.
  • Review organizational capacities and procedures for data collection and use.
  • Facilitate agency-wide coordination and cooperation.
  • Assign clear responsibilities for various aspects of the data.
  • Adopt mechanisms that encourage objectivity and independence in collecting and managing data.
  • Provide responsible staff with training and guidance for needed skills and knowledge.

• Assess the Quality of Existing Data.
  • Build data quality assessment into normal work processes, including ongoing reviews and inspections.
  • Use software checks and edits of data on computer systems and review their implementation.
  • Use feedback from data users and other stakeholders.
  • Compare with other sources of similar data or program evaluations.
  • Obtain verification by independent parties, including the Office of Inspector General.

• Respond to Data Limitations.
  • Adjust or supplement problematic data.
  • Use multiple data sources, with offsetting strengths and limitations.
  • Improve the measure by using another source or new methods of measurement.

• Build Quality Into the Development of Performance Data.
  • Use prior research or analysis to identify data elements that adequately represent the performance to be measured.
  • Gain agreement among internal and external stakeholders about a set of measures that are valid for their intended uses.
  • Plan, document and implement the details of the data collection and reporting systems.
  • Provide training and quality control supervision for all staff who collect and enter data, especially at local levels.
  • Provide feedback to data collectors on types of errors found by data checks.
  • Use analytic methods and transformations appropriate for the data type and measure being reported.

The goal is to have data that is sufficiently reliable to support performance management decisions. This is not the same level of data quality needed for other purposes, such as scientific use.

Collecting Performance Data is One Activity; Analyzing the Data is Another

Effective data-driven performance reviews require advance analysis of the data. Moreover, the people who perform the analysis need to be qualified. They need skills in analysis and knowledge of the programs/activities being analyzed.

One issue is: What is the best background for the analysts? People who know the program, for example from the agency’s budget office or the programs, or people working for the COO? Persons whose sole responsibility and experience is working in the COO’s office probably do not have an extensive knowledge of the programs and activities, although they can bring another perspective to the analysis. People from the budget office typically have the knowledge of the programs and activities to be effective analysts, particularly if they can apply those skills into more than simply seeking cost savings. The question will be how to get them involved in the data-driven performance review process.

Another issue is that the analysis and reviews should have a focus. If everything is expected to be examined, then the reviews become a compliance exercise. There could be value in OMB preparing a list of questions for analysts and managers to ask as they look at the data. Examples are:

• What is going on right now? What does the nature of the data show?
• How does the data tie to the agency’s mission and/or program’s goals?
• Where is there progress? Why is there progress? What can be learned for others?
• What are the targets, milestones and other benchmarks? Were this quarter’s targets and milestones met?
A more extensive list of potential questions to use for the analysis is provided in Appendix F.

A third issue is having not just the right data, but also the right amount of data. Too much data can hinder the most skilled of analysts from doing their job, even if they have the benefit of automated analytical tools. Being selective in what data are collected and used can strengthen the analysis, and particularly for agencies that do not have automated performance data systems.

**Holding Data-Driven Performance Reviews**

Data-driven performance reviews are apparently being held in most CFO Act agencies for the high-priority performance goals. The process should be continued and extended to the agencies’ strategic goals/programs. The threat of a meeting to discuss performance with the COO, in and of itself, drives improvement. The meetings also provide the impetus and experience needed to expand data-driven performance reviews to broader suites of performance measures.

The reviews should be limited to a few goals and/or programs. The purpose should be to identify where and why problems exist and have to be solved. Time should not be consumed trying to generate the solutions. Nor should the COO or PIO get into the programs’ operations. The focus should be on improving results, that is, on the programs’ outcomes and outputs, and not on assigning blame. To that extent, caution should be exercised in adopting ranking or scoring formats, such as red, yellow and green, at this point in the process. They can be viewed as judgmental and detract from the informational value of the review meetings.

A template for the meetings, including an estimate of the percent of time to be spent on each item, would be helpful. Suggested components are:

- Follow-up of matters from the prior meeting-15 percent.
- Discussion of what is happening with the program(s), incorporating data-30 percent.
- Discussion of specific opportunities for improvement-35 percent.
- Prioritization of the action items-15 percent.

The organization and presentation of the data and information for the meetings are as important as the content. In this fast-paced world, the time needed to read narrative should be minimized. Presentations should be simple, straightforward and to the point. Charts, tables and graphs are an easy and effective way to convey information. Assumptions should be documented and identified with the data. Exceptions should be readily apparent.

A balance has to be struck in deciding how many people attend the meeting. An extensive number of people will help expand the process, but will inhibit discussion.

More important is the attendees’ participation in the meeting. The more the attendees participate, the more they will be committed to performance improvement, both for their programs and for the data-driven performance review process. Questions should be posed directly to the program personnel at the meetings, and the suggestion made that the best way to get the answers is to initiate similar data-driven performance review processes in their own organizations. The participants should be encouraged to talk with each other, not with the COO and/or PIO.

Another important consideration is establishing the scope of the desired performance improvement and staying within the scope. Nothing derails a performance improvement effort quicker than a steadily expanding scope. Thus, the discussion should be guided by the following questions: “What does success look like when we are done?” “How will everyone know and agree that the desired results have been achieved?” Expansions or diminishments of scope should be the result of a conscious decision that includes reworking the goals and measures.

Finally, there must be organized and relentless follow-up subsequent to the meetings to assure the agreed-upon actions are taken and progress toward expected results is achieved. The PIO or his/her designee should take notes during the meeting, identifying specifically the action items (for example, the need for additional information, development of a new strategy, adoption of a new measure), the responsible persons and the expected time frames. Progress on the action items should be assiduously monitored by the PIO. On the other hand, performance improvement is a fluid process that does not necessarily follow a straight line. If new insights are gained as the agreed-upon actions are taken, they should be factored into the process and appropriate course corrections made. As indicated above, part of each data review meeting should be devoted to a review of the prior meeting’s action items.

**Evaluations**

This administration is committed to restoring program evaluations. The President’s FY 2011 Budget requested $100 million for agencies to conduct new evaluations (albeit it was not necessarily made available). OMB issued guidance to agencies explaining how they may request additional funding to conduct evaluations.

As indicated, evaluations are performed to ascertain if a program is contributing to the accomplishment of a desired outcome, and if it is not, to provide the support to cease spending scarce resources. It would seem equally important to devote attention and funds to ascertain if the activities pursued and the outputs produced are what enables the outcomes to be accomplished, and if not, identify other outputs that have a closer cause and effect relationship and/or consider other ways to accomplish the outcomes.

To improve the quality of the evaluations, OMB should consider issuing guidance addressing evaluation standards, desired degrees of rigor, frequencies, reasonable cost, etc.

**Training**

The GPRA Modernization Act recognizes the importance of providing training based on the skills and competencies required to develop goals, evaluate programs, and analyze and use performance information for the purpose of
improving government efficiency and effectiveness. It assigns to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), in consultation with the PIC, the responsibility to identify those skills and competencies, and for OPM to then “work with each agency…to incorporate the key skills into training for relevant employees at each agency.”

This statute is clear as to who should identify the skills and competencies (OPM, in consultation with the PIC), but not who should develop the training. OPM typically does not develop training. Having each agency separately develop its own training would be a wasteful duplication of work, plus provide little assurance that the training is comprehensive, meaningful and of high quality. The most desirable approach would be for the PIC staff to develop the training under the direction of OMB and the PIC. The focus of the training should be the skills and competencies needed to analyze performance information so that it can be used to drive performance improvement, that is, what the analysts should be doing and how they should be doing it. The training materials should then be made available to the agencies that would offer the courses using their own personnel as instructors.

Some agencies have reported that they have initiated training for their performance improvement staff. For example, the Department of Defense developed training for its own organization and, in partnership with the Performance Improvement Council, opened its training to all federal agencies. A survey and inventory of the training the agencies are currently providing would be helpful.

Moreover, training should not be limited to the analysis and use of performance information to improve efficiency and effectiveness. That is a process. To be heard, performance analysts need to know what the programs are trying to accomplish and why. This information is typically not conveyed in formal classroom training, but analysts can acquire the understanding in such ways as visiting the program sites and obtaining briefings from the program personnel, attending conferences attended by the program personnel, and/or reading their publications.

How OMB Can Help the Process Move Quicker and With More Certitude

With OMB not issuing the definitive memorandum for implementing the GPRA Modernization Act until seven months after the act was signed, agencies reported both a need for clear guidance from OMB, plus the frequent receipt of conflicting messages from the management and budget sides of OMB. A possible model for remedying this lack of clarity is the one used to drive financial systems improvement in agencies in the early 1990s.

Specifically, the management side established the policies for agency financial systems and the processes for driving agency financial management improvement (for example, improved internal control, adherence to systems standards, audited financial statements). The management side then briefed the Resource Management Officers (RMO) to enable them to obtain an understanding of the policies and processes. The RMOs, with support from the management side, reviewed the agencies’ practices and plans and were the ones who sought needed improvements. In other words, the RMOs were the prime, if not sole, contact with the agencies regarding financial systems. The management side had limited contact with the agencies. Agency shortcomings, that is, departures from prescribed policies or practices, were transmitted by the management side to the RMOs rather than to the agency. Management side concerns about the RMOs’ lack of participation in the process were brought to the attention of the DDM for resolution.

A similar model for OMB participation in using performance information to drive performance improvement is for the management side to define the policies and requirements with approval of the DDM; management side educates the RMOs on the requirements; RMOs review materials against requirements and advise agencies of shortcomings; management side provides a resource to the RMOs; management side occasionally spot checks the agencies’ work and brings departures from policy to the RMOs’ attention; the DDM resolves conflicts that arise.

Also, the GPRA Modernization Act has authorized the administrator of the General Services Administration to provide administrative and other support to the PIC, and the heads of agencies with PIOs serving on the PIC to detail up to two persons to serve as staff to the PIC. Hence, as of the end of FY 2011, the number of PIC staff is approximately five, supplemented by details from other agencies, and the number could grow further. These individuals could serve, as is already happening, as a partner in support of the RMOs and agencies. This would entail such things as acquainting the RMOs with how to look at goals, and particularly the difference between output and outcome goals, and how program performance can be advanced. The OMB management side would then be free to focus on developing the policies and guidance and organizing the quarterly performance reviews at the government-wide level.

Extending the Process and Assuring its Continuation

The real value of data-driven performance reviews will be obtained when the performance management process is institutionalized and used to monitor and manage all programs of an agency and in all geographic areas (regions and states). The GPRA Modernization Act will help achieve this worthwhile end. The requirements for quarterly data-driven performance reviews of an agency’s high-priority performance goals (now titled agency performance goals) are now in law.

To extend the data-driven performance review process beyond the high-priority performance goals/agency performance goals will first require that the participants in the process see its benefits. They must believe that using data to manage programs makes sense. This comes from establishing a recognition within program offices of the value of establishing meaningful performance goals to guide their efforts; and, to maximize performance, an appreciation for looking at and using data continuously, not just for performance review meetings.
A second piece would be to have the infrastructure and incentives in place. Infrastructure would include such things as establishing data-driven performance reviews as a permanent process within the agency; establishing the data collection as a routine process, rather than through data calls; establishing an analytical capacity in the program agencies as well as in the central offices; and building reports and dashboards that recap the performance achievements into the culture.

Having an infrastructure also entails including individual performance measures related to managing with performance data and periodic performance reviews in the personal performance agreements for executives, managers and other personnel. OPM is currently revising the Senior Executive Service Performance Appraisal System. The accomplishment of measurable outcomes aligned with the organization’s Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan is included in the latest revision. Adding the analysis and use of data to drive performance improvement in the Performance Appraisal System would also help to assure that managers continue to operate in that manner.

An example of an incentive is recognition and rewards for adopting the data-driven performance review process.

A third element would be to employ succession planning and training for the data-driven performance review process. This will assure that the people who follow the current managers understand and are comfortable using the process.

A final powerful force for continuation of the process would be to secure ongoing congressional interest. Although Congress typically focuses on negative performance, support might be gained by having the Performance Improvement Council furnish a sympathetic senator or representative with a steady stream of portrayals of agencies’ performance improvements resulting from data-driven performance reviews. This technique is not new. It was used by Sen. Ted Kaufmann (D-DE) in 2009-2010 to enhance the image of federal employees. Sen. Kaufmann periodically obtained stories about exemplary federal employees from the Partnership for Public Service and presented the stories on the Senate floor, where they were picked up by both the Congressional Record and the media. In a similar vein, a major contributor to the initial congressional support for the inspector general program was a twice-yearly report on the accomplishments of the entire IG community by OMB and the President’s Council for Integrity and Efficiency, predecessor to the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency.

Conclusion

Performance measures have been part of the government lexicon for years. For the most part, they have been used to inform the public about what the government has done. To a lesser degree, they have been used to support budget requests. The Obama administration has wisely realized that the most powerful use for performance measures is to improve government performance. It has taken several steps to initiate a process for using performance information to drive performance improvement. Several agencies have also taken steps, and the results reveal that the process can indeed achieve improvements, at least in selected priority areas.

The challenge is to expand the use of performance information to drive performance improvement deeper into the agencies, across all programs and, most important, beyond changes in personnel, and particularly changes in administrations. This challenge can be met and overcome. The considerations, recommendations and other information discussed in this report provide a road map.
Appendix A: Synopsis of Legislative, Regulatory and Administrative Requirements

Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990

The Chief Financial Officers Act is the first of numerous laws passed, starting in 1990, to improve financial and other management in the federal government. Among other things, it established the deputy director for management position to be placed in the Office of Management and Budget and required that he/she provide for managerial systems such as the systematic measurement of performance. It also established a chief financial officer in each of the 24 departments and largest agencies and required that they develop and maintain systems in their agencies, which provide for the systematic measurement of performance.

OMB Bulletin 91-15, Form and Content of Agency Financial Statements

This was the first directive from OMB pertaining to the audited financial statements to be issued annually by the agencies. It required the statements to include an overview, which presents the agency’s mission, organization and measures for its most significant performance results. The purpose was to improve the meaningfulness of the financial statements by accompanying them with information about what the agencies accomplished with the financial resources.

Government Performance and Results Act of 1993

This act is intended, among other things, to improve federal program effectiveness and public accountability by promoting a new focus on results. It requires agencies to prepare strategic plans, annual performance plans and annual performance reports. The annual performance report must set forth the measurable performance indicators established in the agency performance plan, along with the actual program performance achieved compared with the performance goals expressed in the plan for that fiscal year.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)

PART was initiated in 2002 by the George W. Bush administration. The program encompassed the use of a diagnostic tool and a consistent approach to evaluate every federal program at least once every five years. The purpose was to inform the process for formulating the president’s budget by gathering information on four broad topics (program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management and program results) with emphasis placed on program results. PART successfully stimulated the demand for program results information. However, it lacked the elements necessary for achieving real improvements in program management and results.

Executive Order 13450: Improving Government Program Performance, November 13, 2007

This is an Executive Order issued by the Bush administration. It requires that each department and agency identify a limited number of high-priority performance goals. Also required was that a lead person be identified for each goal; and that the performance outcomes for the goals be quantifiable, measurable in a timely fashion and capable of clear evaluation. The memorandum also states that there would be regular reviews of the progress the agencies are making to improve performance in the priority areas.

OMB Memorandum M-10-24-Performance Improvement Guidance: Management Responsibilities and Government Performance and Results Act Documents, June 25, 2010

This memorandum confirmed that the administration was transitioning from a planning and reporting approach focused primarily on the supply of performance information to three performance improvement strategies that place greater emphasis on:

- Using performance information to lead, learn and improve outcomes;
- Communicating performance coherently and concisely for better results and transparency; and
- Strengthening problem-solving networks, inside and outside government, to improve outcomes and performance management practices.

The memorandum states that one objective would be the establishment of constructive performance review processes in agencies that are sustained over time. Also, senior agency leaders are expected to hold goal-focused, data-driven performance reviews at least once every quarter to review progress on their priority goals and to assure that follow-up steps are taken to increase the likelihood of achieving better outcomes and higher productivity. Discussions during those meetings are to be guided by analyses of performance and related data and evaluation findings relevant to the goals being discussed. The meetings themselves are to focus on progress toward desired outcomes, explore the reasons why variations between performance targets and actual outcomes occurred, and prompt quick adjustments to agency strategies and action when needed. Leaders of small and independent agencies and major bureaus are also advised to hold quarterly reviews of their progress in achieving...
outcomes. In other words, they are to follow the principles of the administration’s high-priority performance goal effort.

**OMB Memorandum for the Senior Executive Service—
The Accountable Government Initiative—an Update on our Performance Management Agenda, September 14, 2010**

This is a review of the Obama administration’s approach to performance management. It notes the largest agencies’ identification of a small number of near-term, outcome-focused goals and the intention to expand the process to the smaller and independent agencies and major bureaus. It also refers to the selection of a senior goal leader for each priority goal and their development of action plans containing defined targets and quarterly milestones, the analysis of performance data, quarterly data-driven performance reviews to drive progress toward the goals, and quarterly updates by the agencies to OMB and the public on progress, problems and planned actions.

It also expresses a commitment to building an evaluation infrastructure comprising of including a $100 million request in the FY 2011 budget request for agencies to conduct evaluations, the issuance of guidance to agencies for requesting funding for evaluations, allocating funding to agencies that voluntarily demonstrate how their FY 2012 funding priorities are subject to rigorous evaluation, and working with agencies to improve and coordinate the use of existing evaluation resources.

**GPRA Modernization Act of 2010**

This statute, passed January 4, 2011, is an update of the Government Performance and Results Act. The new act is intended to increase the use of performance information in program decision-making by defining a governance structure to oversee performance; providing for a better connection among plans, programs and performance information; and requiring more frequent reporting and reviews. The portions of the act that would support the use of performance information to drive performance improvement are the establishment of a chief operating officer in each agency who would be responsible for improving the agency’s management and performance, and the designation of a performance improvement officer in each agency who would advise and support the agency head and chief operating officer on performance management and improvement; the establishment of governmentwide priority goals for which progress would be reviewed at least quarterly; and requirements that each agency post an update of its performance on the Internet and that OMB establish a single website reporting progress on the federal government’s and the agencies’ priority goals.

In addition, the act puts into legislation the previous administrative requirements for agencies to establish high-level priority performance goals, designate a leader for each goal and conduct quarterly reviews of progress achieved, led by the chief operating officer and supported by the performance improvement officer; and it established a government-wide Performance Improvement Council to be chaired by OMB’s deputy director for management. The act provides that each agency with performance improvement officers serving on the council shall provide up to two personnel authorizations to staff the council.

**FY 2012 President’s Budget, February 2011**

The President’s FY 2012 Budget reiterated the three performance management strategies first mentioned in the President’s FY 2011 Budget (using performance information to lead, learn and improve outcomes; communicating performance coherently and concisely; and strengthening problem-solving networks); as well as the various elements in the strategies (agencies’ identification of small numbers of high-priority performance goals, selection of a senior accountable official for each goal; development of action plans with quarterly targets and milestones; quarterly goal-focused, data-driven performance reviews). Also described was how OMB complements the agency reviews by holding regular, data-driven performance reviews on the priority goals. For the future, the budget stated that OMB and the Performance Improvement Council will launch a community of practice to strengthen agency capacity to prepare for and run effective internal results reviews; plus implement the newly enacted GPRA Modernization Act.

**OMB Memorandum M-11-17-Delivering on the Accountable Government Initiative and Implementing the GPRA Modernization Act on 2010, April 14, 2011**

A memorandum was sent to all departments and agencies requiring confirmation of the name of the agency chief operating officer by May 2, 2011; the name of the performance improvement officer who must be a senior executive reporting directly to the chief operating officer by June 1, 2011 (and if the performance improvement officer is a political appointee, the name of a career senior executive who will serve as the deputy performance improvement officer); and the initiation of data-driven progress reviews, led by the agency head or chief operating officer and supported by the performance improvement officer, by June 30, 2011.

**Executive Order 13576-Delivering an Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government, June 13, 2011**

This Executive Order reinforces the intentions of the GPRA Modernization Act and previous OMB memoranda by stating that the federal chief performance officer shall work with agencies to ensure that each area identified as critical to performance improvement has robust performance metrics in place, and that these metrics are frequently analyzed and reviewed by agency leadership. Also, that each agency’s chief operating officer shall be designated as the senior accountable official responsible for leading the agency’s performance and management reform efforts, and shall be accountable for conducting frequent data-driven performance reviews of agency progress toward the goals the agency head identifies as the top near-term priorities.
To Drive Performance Improvement

OMB Memorandum 11-31-Delivering an Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government, August 17, 2011

A memorandum was sent to all departments and agencies defining the roles and responsibilities of the performance leaders (chief operating officers, performance improvement officers, goal leaders and the Performance Improvement Council); describing how OMB will develop an Annual Report on Performance Progress drawing upon information in the agencies’ annual performance reports; providing directions for the establishment, submission and monitoring of performance for the agency priority goals; and explaining what is entailed in the federal priority goals.

Appendix B: Methodology

The research project was based primarily on interviews conducted with persons who are involved at some level with the use of performance information to drive performance improvement. This use of performance information was established as a government-wide program during the past two years and is rapidly evolving.

The project began with a meeting at the Office of Management and Budget, the purpose of which was to review the project’s objective, scope and methodology and to identify the types of persons to be interviewed. A draft interview guide was then prepared and reviewed with OMB. To avoid the risk that the interviewees would avoid providing responses that were inconsistent with OMB’s requirements, the guide did not pose questions directly about the subject. Rather, questions were developed around the subject with the intention to get the interviewees talking about the subject. (The interview guide is presented in Appendix C.)

Interviews were conducted with persons in 24 departments and agencies: 17 performance improvement officers or their designees, five program managers, and two local government-based delivery partners for a program for which the program manager was interviewed. (The list of interviewees is in Appendix D.) The interviews were conducted between late April 2011 and early July 2011.

The interview guide was sent to the interviewees prior to the interview so they could understand what was to be discussed. Some interviewees took the liberty of completing the guide in writing prior to the interview and providing the filled-in guide at the interview.

Most of the interviews lasted an hour and a half; a few a bit less. Several interviewees provided written documents, such as the recently developed strategic plan. The interview notes were synopsized immediately after the meeting and a copy sent to the interviewee. Many interviewees provided corrections and elaborations.

Following the interviews with the performance improvement officers, program managers and delivery partners, an interview was held with OMB’s associate director for Performance and Personnel Management. The purpose was to address issues and discuss suggestions raised during the previous interviews.

The final step was to extract materials from the interviews and prepare a draft report.

The draft was sent to the interviewees, OMB representatives, the director of the Performance Improvement Council staff, and three other individuals familiar with the use of performance information to drive performance improvement for comments and suggestions. Eleven of the interviewees, OMB, the director of the Performance Improvement Council staff, and the three others provided further input. The draft report was modified and the final report produced.
Appendix C: Interview Guide*

There are three primary purposes for performance information: demonstrate accountability, allocate resources, and drive performance improvement and results.

Who have you identified as the key users for the performance information needed to fulfill the third purpose, drive performance improvement and results?

Why have they been chosen as the key users?

Was any specific process used to identify these key users?

What kind of performance information do you believe these key users need?

What are your views on the importance of:

- Information that reveals accomplishment of the mission, e.g., outputs, outcomes.
- Design information, i.e., information that reveals whether the design of a program will enable it to do what it is supposed to do.
- Stakeholder information to ascertain customer satisfaction.
- Sub-unit comparisons that enable identification of the outliers, both good and bad.
- Productivity information.
- Geo-coded data.
- Results of evaluations.
- HR data re engaged personnel, hires, training, quality of people. This might be fundamental.

Are there any characteristics that you think are necessary for the performance information, e.g., simple, clear, actionable, reliable?

How is the performance information obtained—regularly collected or through data calls?

If the agency is moving from data calls to regular collection, why?

What is done to assure the reliability of the performance information?

What are your thoughts about obtaining information from external sources, particularly to check reliability?

What are your thoughts about the need for the information to be organized?

In what form do you believe the users should receive the information?

Is that how the agency plans to provide it?

Does the agency have and use an automated performance information database?

How was it developed?

How is the performance information analyzed?

Who does this analysis?

To what extent have interactive reporting platforms, e.g., websites, social media, been considered?

Which ones?

Why?

How will they be used?

How do you envision the users will use the performance information?

What work, if any, will the agency have to do to accommodate these expected uses?

What program within the agency do you think is already effectively providing/using performance information to drive performance improvement and results?

If so, what have been the results?

If not, why not?

What decisions, if any, have been made as a result of receiving the information?

Are there specific examples of where performance information was used to drive performance improvement?

What less than desirable results were being shown by the data?

How was the program delivery changed?

What happened with the results?

What could be done to assure the use of performance information to drive performance improvement deeper within your agency?

In other agencies in the government?

After changes in the agency’s leadership, or the administration?

Would it be worthwhile to talk with a program manager?

What is his/her name and contact information?

Would you alert him/her to my wanting to speak with him/her?

Are there any other comments?

*The interview guide was modified slightly for the program managers and delivery partners.
Appendix D: Interviewees

The interviews provided considerable thought-provoking information from which the report has been developed. Following is list of interviewees who spoke about the status of the data-driven performance review process in their agencies, suggested worthwhile directions to pursue and provided additional interesting ideas.

Performance Improvement Officers (or their designees)

Department of Commerce
Stephen Shapiro, Senior Program Analyst, Office of the Deputy Secretary

Department of Education
Thomas Skelly,** Acting Chief Financial Officer
Carol Cichowski, Division Director
Thomas Corwin, Division Director

Department of Energy
Jay Hoffman,* Director, Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation

Department of Health and Human Services
Andrew Baldus,* Division Director, Budget Policy, Execution and Review
Jennifer Fiedelholtz, Branch Chief, Budget and Performance Coordination Branch

Department of Housing and Urban Development
Patricia R. Bush, Division Director, Agency Performance Management

Department of the Interior
Richard Beck, Ph.D.,* Director, Planning and Performance Management

Department of Justice
Jolene Lauria-Sullens,* Deputy Assistant Attorney General and Controller/Performance Improvement Officer
Jill Meldon, Assistant Director, Planning and Performance Group

Department of Labor
David Frederickson,** Acting Director, Center for Program Planning and Results

Department of State
Sid Kaplan, CGFM,* Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Resource Management, Office of Strategic and Performance Planning

Department of the Treasury
Kevin Donahue, Special Advisor, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Management/Chief Financial Officer

Department of Veterans Affairs
Dan Tucker, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget

Environmental Protection Agency
Maryann Froehlich,* Deputy Chief Financial Officer/Deputy Performance Improvement Officer

Kathleen O’Brien, Director, Office of Planning, Analysis and Accountability, Office of the Chief Financial Officer

General Services Administration
Holly Donnelly, Director, Performance Management Division

National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Jessica Southwell, Branch Chief, Strategic Planning and Program Analysis, OCFO/Strategic Investments Division
Cynthia Lodge, Director, OCFO/Strategic Investments Division

Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Jim Dyer,** Chief Financial Officer
Nader Mamish, Assistant for Operations/Performance Improvement Officer, Office of the Executive Director for Operations
Mindy Landau, Deputy Assistant for Operations, Office of the Executive Director for Operations
Olga Kasaskeris, Executive Technical Assistant, Office of the Executive Director for Operations

Small Business Administration
Tim Gribben, Director of Performance Management

Social Security Administration
Ron Raborg,* Deputy Commissioner for Quality Performance, Data Quality Officer, Performance Improvement Officer
Robin Sabatino, Senior Advisor to the Deputy Commissioner

Program Managers

Federal Aviation Administration
Toni Trombecky,* Manager, Strategic Planning Division

Food and Drug Administration
Malcolm J. Bertoni, Assistant Commissioner for Planning
Timothy Kiang, Director, Planning Staff, Office of Policy and Planning

Health Resources and Services Administration
Rebecca H. Spitzgo, Associate Administrator, Bureau of Clinician Recruitment and Service

HOME Program
Cliff Taffett, General Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Community Planning and Development

Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation
Wilmer Graham, Director, Strategic Planning

Delivery Partners

Arlington County, VA
Nickie Modater, CDBG and CSBG Financial Manager, Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development
Marie Randall, Development Specialist, Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development
Appendix E: Additional Examples of Program Improvements Resulting from Data-Driven Performance Reviews

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing’s (BEP) data showed that the printing quality of $100 notes decreased with the production of a newly designed bill, due in part to quality problems identified by the Federal Reserve. BEP’s analysis determined that the rejections were due to creasing of the paper during printing. The performance reviews provided executive-level support in implementing quality enhancements and fostered a clear, consistent focus on improvement. Several corrective actions were taken, such as adjusting the paper used in production and redesigning the quality control process to capture the creased papers. Data are being used to track the results of the corrective actions.

To maximize the number of Superfund site constructions completed, the Environmental Protection Agency’s work was concentrated on the easy-to-clean sites. Changing the measure to remedial projects completed resulted in moving the focus to cleaning the difficult sites as well as the easy sites.

The data showed that the length of time some Food and Drug Administration centers were taking to establish advisory committees consistent with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) requirements exceeded targets or other centers’ times. The poorer performing centers looked at the best practices and realized that they were using technical persons part time to establish the committees, while centers using the best practices were using FACA specialists, working jointly with technical persons, to establish the committees. They adopted the best practices and their numbers improved.

The General Services Administration’s metrics for the leasing program were reviewed, with the intent of identifying which regions were not doing well and could do better. This led to a review of the lower-level measures, such as instances of space not vacated at the end of a lease. Focusing on those matters enabled regions’ overall performance, and eventually the agency’s performance, to improve.

The primary measure the U.S. Mint used to monitor the success of its program to sell non-monetary coins was number of accounts. This measure, which did not distinguish whether or not how active the accounts were, drove the Mint to target all potential consumers directly. In other words, the measure weighed equally an account with an order for a single coin and an account with many coin orders. Since the focus on number of accounts was not the best indicator to drive sales, the measure was changed to total sales volume. This change may encourage the Mint to adjust its marketing
strategy to emphasize the volume of sales driven by its most active accounts, and the efficiency of its outreach efforts.

The Patent and Trademark Office looked at its backlog and pendency data. This motivated a number of actions, such as a focus on clearing the oldest pending patent applications; and development of the prospective “hot lanes” in which, for a higher fee, an examination will be expedited.

The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation’s constituents write in to ascertain the level of benefits they will receive. Surveys showed that the constituents felt they were not getting timely, accurate information. PBGC decided to develop a tool that would permit constituents to calculate the amounts themselves.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) performance data showed that it was taking nine months for applicants in HUBZones to hear from SBA. The staff looked to identify the bottlenecks and found there were miscommunications with the field offices getting information to headquarters; three different IT systems into which the data had to be input; and personnel were not being reassigned to clear bottlenecks. Corrective steps were taken. The wait time has been reduced to three months.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) noted a decreasing satisfaction rate on the use of its 800 number. Research showed that once the caller reached a service representative, the customers were expressing the same level of satisfaction as those who were receiving walk-in service. This led to a conclusion that the problem was at the front end of the call-in, specifically with the automated routing process. The process was changed and the customer satisfaction with the 800 call has started to increase.

SSA found in its ongoing Payment Quality Reviews that the SSI program had a high improper payment rate. It worked with a private sector organization that owns the bank routing numbers to verify the actual amounts in recipients’ bank accounts, plus identify unreported bank accounts. Although the data has not yet shown a decrease in improper payments, they likely will and SSA will expand the process to conduct reviews to locate recipients’ non-home properties.

The Department of Veterans Affairs data showed that patient wait time is too high. The data were broken down geographically, and then by clinical purpose. Solutions such as opening new treatment points, hiring additional staff, or contracting out particular services were then considered and implemented.

Appendix F: Suggested Questions for the Analysis of Performance Data

The heart of data-driven performance reviews is the analysis of the performance data. Effective analysis requires seeking the answers to specific, probing queries.

Following is a list of the type of queries that should be sought once the data are available. Obviously not every question need or should be asked. Nor need they be asked as is. Questions should be tailored to fit the program under review and the data. Furthermore, the responses might lead to the framing of other questions not listed here:

- What is going on right now? What does the nature of the data show?
- How credible is the data? Are there gaps or missing data?
- How does the data tie to the agency’s mission and/or program’s goals?
- Where is there progress? Why is there progress? What can be learned for others?
- What are the targets, milestones and other benchmarks? Were this quarter’s targets and milestones met? How does the performance compare to the other benchmarks? What is the reason for any differences?
- What are the performance trends? What do they suggest? What is the likelihood of meeting the planned level of performance?
- Has the direction of the performance trends changed or have other variations occurred?
- When did the direction of the performance trends change or the other variations occur?
- Why did the trends change or variations occur? What happened at the time of the change or variation?
- Will the change or variation make a difference? Does it indicate a promising practice or problem needing greater attention?
- What has happened or is happening external to the program that is affecting or can affect performance?
- Are there mismatches between the direction of the outputs and the direction of the outcomes? Between the direction of the outputs and the direction of the costs?
- Are other relevant organizations and program activities contributing as planned?
- What would happen if the goals and/or priorities are varied?
- What would happen if the program delivery approaches are varied? Will it make a difference?
- What might be considered?
  - New strategies for achieving the targets?
  - New metrics for measuring performance?
• Additional technical assistance or training of agency personnel?
• Greater cross-agency coordination?
• Connecting the goal leader or staff with others working on similar issue?
• Improved state/local partner coordination or alignment?
• Increased executive attention from the agency and/or OMB?
• Greater coordination across the Executive Office of the President?
• OMB action to expedite government-wide processes and approvals?
• Executive Order or OMB guidance?
• Legislative action to remove a barrier?
• Improved administrative support (IT, HR, procurement, etc.)?
• Engaging experts to better understand the causes and drivers affecting progress and/or offer possible solutions?
• Other?
• What are the cost implications of the possible alternatives approaches?
• Is it possible to switch funds from a program with a significant available balance to a program with a potentially insufficient available balance? Would there be benefit in making the transfer?
• How urgent is the action needed?

Appendix G: Bibliography and Helpful References


Concepts Statement No. 2 of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board on Concepts Related to Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting, Governmental Accounting Standards Board, Norwalk, CT, April 1994


SEA Performance Information, The Governmental Accounting Standards Board’s Suggested Guidelines for Voluntary Reporting, Governmental Accounting Standards Board, Norwalk, CT, 2010
End Notes

1. The GPRA Modernization Act uses the name agency priority goal rather than high priority performance goal. This report, which covers what occurred both prior and subsequent to passage of the Act, uses both terms, as appropriate.

2. There are several types of performance measures, for example, input measures, output measures, outcome measures. Some performance measures incorporate financial data, for example, efficiency measures, cost-effectiveness measures. In that context, financial information is very relevant.

3. The Program Analysis Rating Tool (PART) program, to a large extent, entailed OMB repeatedly asking agencies for outcome measures and data that demonstrated results. The interviewees’ comments regarding the types of measures OMB wants versus what the agency needs to manage could reflect views held over from their involvement in the PART process. It could also reflect that OMB is asking the agencies to improve the quality of their outcome measures to better reflect the intended results.

4. On June 15, 2011, OMB issued Memorandum M-11-26 to address this constraint. Pursuant to the Memorandum, agencies can apply to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs to participate in a fast track process under which information collection activities that focus on the awareness, understanding, attitudes, preferences or experiences of customers or other stakeholders in order to improve existing or future services, products or communications materials can be considered approved unless notified otherwise by OMB within five days.

5. GPRA Modernization Act, Section 1123(b)(1).
7. Chief Financial Officer Act, Section 503(b)(5)(B).
12. GPRA Modernization Act, Section 1125, Sections 12(a) and (c).
13. GPRA Modernization Act, Sections 1124(b)(3)(A) & (B).
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