Building a High Performance Government

Federal managers have an important obligation to ensure that every dollar spent delivers results for the American people. To accomplish this, high-performing private and public sector organizations implement performance management systems that engage leaders in regularly reviewing progress toward their goals.

Since 2010, the Federal Government has worked to apply effective performance management within and across agencies. Leaders have established clear roles and responsibilities, set ambitious priority goals, personally conducted regular reviews of progress, and taken action based on evidence and on opportunities to coordinate across silos. To further advance these efforts, OMB has worked closely with agency Performance Improvement Officers and other senior agency management officials to develop this guidance for implementing the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, which provides the core statutory foundation for the Federal Performance Framework. As new policies and management initiatives have been introduced, this framework has expanded to accommodate a more integrated and coordinated government-wide management approach aimed at advancing performance improvement and management efforts in agencies, including Enterprise Risk Management in 2016; Program and Project Management and Customer Experience in 2018; and Evaluation and Evidence-building, Sharing Quality Services, and Category Management in 2019.

Clarifying Key Roles and Responsibilities

Perhaps the most important aspect of any effective performance management system is ensuring active leadership engagement. Leadership engagement fosters a high-performance culture that empowers employees at all levels and enables the organization to work across silos to solve problems. In particular, leaders are responsible not just for establishing goals and priorities but also for conducting data-driven reviews that are critical for creating a results-oriented culture, where leaders and staff debate questions that help them find, sustain, and spread promising practices and policies. This guidance describes key roles and responsibilities in performance, program, and risk management for the Agency Head, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Performance Improvement Officer (PIO), Program Management Improvement Officer (PMIO), Goal Leaders, Chief Risk Officer (CRO), Evaluation Officer, the Performance Improvement Council (PIC), and Program Management Policy Council (PMPC).
• **Agency COOs**, who must be Deputy Secretaries or equivalent, provide organizational leadership to improve performance.

• **Agency PIOs**, who must report directly to the COO, are responsible for supporting the agency head and COO in leading efforts to set goals, make results transparent, review progress and make course corrections.

• **Program Management Improvement Officers**, who must report directly to the COO or other equivalent senior agency official responsible for agency program performance, and are responsible for leading efforts to enhance the role and practice of program and project management (P/PM).

• **Chief Risk Officers (CRO)**, or a senior agency official leading an equivalent function, who champion agency-wide efforts to manage risk within the agency and advise senior leaders on the strategically-aligned portfolio view of risks at the agency.

• **Goal Leaders** are officials named by the agency head or COO who are held accountable for leading implementation efforts to achieve a goal. This role includes laying out strategies to achieve the goal, managing execution, regularly reviewing performance, engaging others as needed and correcting course as appropriate.

• **Agency CXOs** are the executives who lead agency management functions, such as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), Chief Acquisition Officer (CAO), Chief Information Officer (CIO), and Chief Data Officer (CDO). Executives leading these management functions work closely with the PIO, agency head and COO to ensure that mission support resources are effectively and efficiently aligned and deployed to achieve the agency mission. This includes such activities as routinely leading efforts to set goals, make results transparent, review progress, and make course corrections as needed to ensure that the agency’s management functions are effective in supporting agency goals and objectives.

• **Evaluation Officers**, who play a leading role in overseeing the agency’s evaluation activities, learning agenda, and information reported to OMB on evidence, as well as collaborating with, shaping, and making contributions to other evidence-building functions within the agency.

• **The Performance Improvement Council (PIC)** is comprised of agency PIOs and OMB and advises on the development of government-wide policies designed to strengthen agency management and facilitate cross-agency learning and cooperation. The PIC is supported by the General Service Administration’s (GSA) Office of Shared Solutions and Performance Improvement (OSSPI) which works with agencies to develop solutions to matters that affect mission activity, management functions and performance, as well as support OMB and Goal Leaders in analyzing progress on Priority Goals.

• **The Program Management Policy Council (PMPC)** is comprised of agency PMIOs and OMB and advises on the development and implementation of policies and strategies for strengthening program and project management within the Federal Government by facilitating cross-agency learning, cooperation, and sharing best practices identified by agencies and private industry.

• **Delivery partners**, the organizations or entities outside a Federal agency that help a Federal agency accomplish its objectives, and are consulted and engaged to support objectives and mission execution.
Engaging Leaders in Goal-Setting and Sharpening Focus on Priorities across Mission, Service, and Stewardship Outcomes

The Administration expects agencies to set a limited number of ambitious goals that encourage innovation and adoption of evidence-based strategies. Agency leaders at all levels of the organization are accountable for choosing goals and indicators wisely and for setting ambitious, yet realistic targets. Wise selection of goals and indicators reflects careful analysis of the characteristics of the problems and opportunities an agency seeks to influence to advance its mission, service, and stewardship objectives.

- **The Director of OMB** sets long-term Cross-Agency Priority Goals every 4 years with annual and quarterly targets.

- **Agency heads** develop Strategic Plans with long-term goals and objectives every 4 years, Agency Priority Goals (APGs) every two years, and performance goals at least annually.

Promoting Increased Use of Performance Information and Other Evidence through Regular Reviews

Frequent data-driven performance reviews give agency leaders a mechanism for focusing an agency on priorities, diagnosing problems, and finding opportunities. Successful reviews include analyzing disaggregated data, learning from past experience, and deciding next steps to increase performance and productivity. Annual assessments of agency progress on strategic objectives can also improve program outcomes and inform longer-term decision making.

- The OMB Director and Performance Improvement Council run quarterly reviews on Cross-Agency Priority Goals.

- Agency heads and OMB conduct annual strategic reviews of progress on outcomes and cross-cutting efforts, considering the entire body of both qualitative and quantitative evidence and guided by the agency’s Learning Agenda which describes their plan for building evidence to address agency priority questions. These reviews integrate evidence and evaluation across silos including enterprise risk management and program and project management.

- Agency COOs, along with key personnel from components or other agencies, run at least quarterly data-driven reviews of Agency Priority Goals, to better understand challenges, factors affecting change, and the costs of delivery.

- Agency leaders and CXOs run frequent data-driven reviews focusing on the health of the workforce (HRStat) and other management functions (e.g., AcqStat, TechStat, PortfolioStat, Evaluation Capacity Assessments etc.) to drive improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of agency management, and in a manner that complements Agency COO reviews to drive progress on achieving agency goals and objectives.

Improving Usefulness of Program Information through Reporting Modernization

A central website, Performance.gov, makes finding and consuming performance information easier for the public, the Congress, delivery partners, agency employees, and other stakeholders. This has the potential to improve public understanding about what Federal programs do and how programs link to budget, performance, and other information. Performance.gov is the central website that serves as the public window to Federal goals and performance in key areas of focus that reflect Administration policy objectives and management priorities. Reporting on performance in these areas include:
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- Descriptions of Cross-Agency Priority Goals established to drive progress in implementing the President’s Management Agenda (PMA), including associated indicators, targets, action plans, goal leaders, and contributing programs.

- OMB and agencies’ quarterly updates of progress on Priority Goals.

- Agency Strategic Plans, Evidence-Building Plans (i.e., Learning Agenda), Annual Performance Plans, Annual Evaluation Plans, and Annual Performance Reports.

- Other key management priorities and initiatives of the Administration.

The Performance Management Cycle

As important as it is to sustain a strong performance culture through the practices described in the guidance, it is equally important to have reliable and effective processes which support continuous improvement and opportunities for capacity building. The description below gives an overview of the Federal Performance Management Cycle.

- **Planning.** Strategic Plans present the long-term objectives an agency hopes to accomplish at the beginning of each new term of an Administration, describing general and long-term goals the agency aims to achieve, what actions the agency will take in coordinating resources to realize those goals, and how the agency will address challenges or risks that hinder progress. Annual Performance Plans communicate the agency’s strategic objectives and performance goals with other elements of the agency’s budget request, detailing how goals will be achieved, identifying priorities among the goals, and explaining actions to monitor progress. Agencies identify objectives in the three areas identified below, and while they are presented separately for discussion, in practice the establishment of mission and service objectives will often overlap.

  - **Mission.** The core functions and activities of Federal agencies that are reflected in statutory requirements or leadership priorities and which serve to drive their efforts in addressing pressing and relevant national problems, needs, and challenges.

  - **Service.** The activities that reflect the interaction(s) between individual citizens or businesses and Federal agencies in providing a direct service on behalf of the Federal Government, and which is core to the mission of the agency.

  - **Stewardship.** The responsibilities of Federal agencies to provide appropriate safeguards in executing mission and service related activities effectively and efficiently, including minimizing instances of waste, fraud, and abuse.

Additionally, evidence-building activities and planning requirements established by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (i.e., “Evidence Act”) serve to complement and strengthen agency performance improvement initiatives and implementation strategies to achieve goals and objectives reflected in agency Strategic and Performance Plans. An integrated part of agency Strategic Plans, Evidence-Building Plans (i.e., Learning Agendas) are developed concurrent with the Strategic Plan to outline the agency’s systematic approach to addressing the most pressing policy, programmatic, and regulatory questions related to the agency’s long-term goals and objectives. Annual Evaluation Plans describe the evaluation and evidence-building activities the agency plans to conduct related to its longer-term Evidence-Building Plan (i.e., Learning Agenda).
• **Evidence, Evaluation, Analysis, and Review.** From the strategic goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan, as well as the longer-term research questions agencies seek to answer as part of their Evidence-Building Plans (i.e., Learning Agendas), agencies establish internal management processes to set and monitor the performance of strategic objectives, portfolios of programs, Agency Priority Goals, and performance goals that are focused on mission, service, and stewardship outcomes, and appropriate performance indicators that can be used to assess progress in those areas.

  - **Agencies use quarterly data-driven reviews** as a tool for management to focus on targeted, short-term progress to make changes to implementation strategies as needed to advance goal accomplishment.

  - **Agencies use annual strategic reviews**, which incorporate portfolio reviews of programs and updates to ERM risk profiles along with evaluation and evidence-building activities as a tool for management to assess progress toward longer-term objectives and ensure major programs are being managed effectively.

• **Reporting.** Finally, agencies report quarterly progress updates on Agency Priority Goals to Performance.gov, and summarize the full years’ past performance in their Annual Performance Reports. These communicate publicly to external stakeholders about progress and help inform the development of the next Strategic Plan, which includes a section for an Evidence-Building Plan (i.e., Learning Agenda), as well as Annual Performance Plans and Evaluation Plans.