

HOW USING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION CAN HELP YOU

Performance information, especially outcome information, provides information about the results the state is obtaining for the activities it undertakes and for the funds it spends. The information provides a major accountability tool. Perhaps even more important, it provides basic information to help improve what the state is doing for its citizens.

"Budget fads come and go, but accountability never goes out of style."

— Rep. Jerry Luke LeBlanc, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Louisiana

More specifically, here is what legislating for results can do for you:

In Hearings:

- Enable legislators to ask state agencies the right questions about their responsibilities—about both past performance and expected future results.
- Encourage program management to recognize the need to focus on results and the program's accountability for results.
- Indicate that the legislature is serious about considering service outcomes.
- Provide useful information about state programs that can be communicated easily and clearly to constituents.
- Enable legislators to ask meaningful questions about politically sensitive programs without being misinterpreted as opposition. For example, a legislator might ask, "Has the domestic violence program actually helped reduce domestic violence? From what level to what improved level?" rather than simply asking whether the program's provision of shelter to victimized women is less important than direct prevention activities.

To Help Make Appropriation and Policy Decisions:

- Help identify areas for potential budget reductions, increases or reallocations, including identifying the estimated consequences of such changes.
- Provide a clearer link between appropriations and actual services provided.

- Identify programs and agencies that are seeking similar outcomes, thereby drawing such inter-relationships to the legislature's attention. Such situations create a need for coordination and sorting out the activities and responsibilities. Common goals and responsibilities then can be addressed.
- Improve oversight of state programs and policies.

To Provide Knowledge to Inform Policy Development and Improve Communication with Constituents:

- Provide objective evidence on outcomes of agency activities that inform the political debate.
- Assist legislators to develop policies by providing objective information about current conditions.
- Enhance state strategic planning efforts by encouraging a long-term focus on results (i.e., outcomes of government efforts).
- Provide legislators with objective information with which to address constituents' questions and concerns.
- Provide information directly related to constituent concerns (citizen-focused outcomes), enabling improved constituent service and increasing citizen confidence that the legislature is addressing citizen concerns.

To Change the Approach to Service Delivery:

- Push state employees to focus on the goals and desired outcomes of their programs.
- Make clear which programs work and which ones do not.
- Improve decisions about whether to "privatize" a service or return a privatized service to state administration by providing information about both the past quality and the costs of the service.

What Performance Information Cannot Do:

- Tell you exactly the contribution of the state agency activity to the outcomes that occur. Legislative actions such as those described in briefs 7, 9 and 10 can provide explanations (reasons) for high or low levels of performance. However, performance information by itself cannot identify which factors caused the outcomes that occurred and to what extent each factor contributed.
- Similarly, performance information seldom identifies specific actions that are needed to correct problems. The performance information, however, can provide useful clues about what needs to be done and where.