



RESEARCH REPORT

# Dos and Don'ts

## Tips for Strengthening Your Performance Management Systems

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# Dos and Don'ts: Tips for Strengthening Your Performance Management System


This report identifies numerous weaknesses—and corrective actions—in performance management systems we have observed over many years of working with local, state, and federal government agencies as well as nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations.<sup>1</sup>


Public officials at all levels of government and those who manage nonprofit human service organizations need regular, timely information on how well their services are achieving their objectives. Performance management uses performance information to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public services. But first, managers and their staff members must collect, compile, and interpret that performance information.


This report breaks down performance management into the following five components:

-  **Collecting performance data**

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-  **Analyzing performance data**

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-  **Presenting performance findings**

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-  **Disseminating performance findings**

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-  **Using performance findings**

Each component is essential. If any are not executed well, the performance management effort will greatly suffer. The following sections provide program managers with recommended actions for each component.

As readers will recognize, many of the dos and don'ts can be expressed as either a do or don't, depending how they are framed. We have somewhat arbitrarily chosen which way to frame each recommendation based on what we think is likely a greater challenge to program managers.

We also note that readers will likely know other possible dos and don'ts from their experiences. Readers might want to create their own list to help remind themselves and avoid pitfalls.

Some readers might find it efficient to first review the summarized list of dos and don'ts in the appendix and then read more details about their dos and don'ts of interest in the report text.

## DOS AND DON'TS

# Collecting Performance Data



Performance measurement is the basic ingredient for a program's performance management process. Without relevant, timely, and reasonably accurate performance information, program managers will be flying blind. Performance measurement includes identifying a program's mission goals or objectives, selecting performance indicators, and identifying data collection procedures.

**A-1. Do signal to all staff that performance is a top priority for the program.** A major way to do this is by using the performance data in the various ways listed below in the "Using Performance Analyses" section.

**A-2. Do seek input from stakeholders as part of your process for selecting performance measures to track.** Stakeholders are likely to include

- frontline employees (those who serve your program participants);
- special interest group members;
- elected officials; and, especially,
- participants in each relevant demographic group.

Ask what they think are the important service outcomes (both the outcomes or benefits sought and the negative outcomes they want to avoid). Ask them what distinguishes excellent from merely adequate services. This will help yield an equitable performance measurement system with a big-picture view.

**A-3. Do make sure that mission statements focus on expected benefits.** What benefits or outcomes are sought from the program, and for whom? What negative outcomes does the program seek to avoid or alleviate? Too often, mission statements identify only how benefits will be achieved without clarifying what benefits are sought. Such statements can embed a program's status quo when better service delivery options are possible. Encourage service providers to focus on what is important: the benefits of the program for people it serves.

**A-4. Don't include numerical targets in your mission statements.** Mission statements are qualitative statements expected to endure over time (e.g., “provide meaningful employment opportunities”). In contrast, targets are quantitative values that apply to more immediate time frames (e.g., “helping 1,000 people find employment in the first half of 2022”). Target values are chosen to reflect the time frame’s expected circumstances, such as the expected amount of output and outcomes that can be achieved for the program’s expected budget for a given year.

**A-5. Do include both output and outcome indicators in performance measurement systems.** Select the measurements (both output and outcome measurements) used to track the performance of new programs at an early stage of program development and launch. Defining and sharing these measurements will provide guidance for people in positions of authority in the program about what is expected of them. It will also guide establishment of data systems that support the performance indicators. Distinguish which performance indicators fall into each category. Together, they will provide a comprehensive performance measurement system.

Output counts are important for tracking internal progress. The assumption is that outputs contribute to the benefits the program seeks to provide. However, they do not directly track progress in achieving these benefits. For example, “the number of applications reviewed for a financial benefit during a particular time” is a useful output indicator. The “total amount of money found to be incorrectly disbursed” is an outcome indicator.

**A-6. Do identify and track performance indicators of potential important *unintended* effects that can occur.** For example, a program to add jobs through land development might have important environmental effects (beneficial or adverse). The program should include performance indicators for each such issue.

**A-7. Do seek outcome data that identify outcomes at an appropriate time *after* the participant leaves the program.** For some outcomes, the only feasible way to track program postservice success is to survey former participants. Finding and surveying former participants, after about one year, can become expensive. However, sooner follow-ups, such as at 3, 6, or 9 months can provide highly useful information. Even if the participant benefits for only a short time, this can be considered to have value.

For some programs, such as many health, education, and environmental programs, longer-term as well as short-term outcomes for individual participants can be assessed using *program administrative records*. These administrative data enable metrics that capture program performance outcomes for individuals at later times. Such familiar data include changes in a

patient's health condition after treatment (such as COVID-19 cases); a student's successful transition across grades; and changes in pollution levels in specific bodies of water.

For participant postservice outcome information, major data-processing technology advances in recent years often enable human service programs, even quite small ones, to follow up with each participant once—at say, 3, 6, 9, or 12 months—after they leave the program. Following up with participants after more than about a year after service is likely not feasible for most programs to obtain reliable data. After that, in-depth studies, such as program evaluations, are likely needed.

- A-8. Do use participant surveys to obtain their perspectives on the quality of their experiences with the program's services as well as the outcomes.** Participant surveys are often the best, if not the only way to obtain such information on the quality of program's services, such as its timeliness, accessibility, and helpfulness. Such indicators as “percentages of participants who had to wait more than X days for service” or “percentage of participants who reported dissatisfaction with the length of time before they received service” can be considered “early” outcomes. Although they do not measure whether participants were helped, timeliness is usually a concern important to participants.
- A-9. Do ask survey respondents to explain their reasons for giving high or low ratings to any of the evaluation questions and provide suggestions for service improvements.** But add these open-ended questions only if you can also arrange for someone to examine the responses and group them into actionable categories that identify problems or suggest ways to improve the program's services. Processing the responses to these open-ended questions will require more effort but is likely well worth it. Even providing only a list of responses to interested staff (while preserving respondents' anonymity) can be useful information.
- A-10. Don't assume that regularly surveying participants is costly.** The questionnaire should be short and easy to complete and reply. The survey process, including summarizing responses, can be administered in a straightforward way with today's technology. And inexpensive computer programs are available that can greatly ease the survey process.
- A-11. Do obtain information for each performance indicator on each participant's demographic characteristics to enable calculation of the outcomes for each performance indicator for each characteristic.** This will ensure special need groups are not left out. This may require translation of surveys for programs working with or affecting people who do not speak English. This is a major procedure for tracking equity concerns.



- A-12. Do emphasize to IT support that only a basic process is needed.** Avoid the bells and whistles that can lead to a costly process.<sup>2</sup> For example, staff can test survey questions on colleagues or friends to save money during the pretest phase.
- A-13. Do track efficiency, but do not settle for *output* efficiency alone. When possible, track *outcome* efficiency, measuring *efficiency in producing outcomes*.** When measured quantitatively, efficiency has typically been measured as “number or units of output produced divided by the cost to produce the outputs.” More meaningful for measuring true efficiency is to measure, when possible, the “number of units of *successful* outcomes divided by the cost.”
- A-14. Do differentiate between aspirational goals and those achievable in a set length of time.** The lure to making overly ambitious goals to drive public sector workers to make their best efforts can backfire. If the people who are responsible for contributing to a goal do not think they can make it a reality, they may put in less effort.
- A-15. Don’t overwhelm your data users with too many measurements but instead provide ready access to added subgroup breakouts when needed.** Public officials, such as legislators and legislative staff, are short on time. If presented with hundreds of measures to wade through, they’re likely to ignore them all. Technology now provides ample opportunities for drilling down from aggregate performance indicators to breakouts of those performance indicators—for example, breakouts of the aggregated outcome indicators by demographic characteristics.
- A-16. Do—when considering a new or modified service delivery approach—consider applying a mini-RCT process to compare the outcomes of the new approach with those of the existing service delivery approach.** This entails randomly assigning participants to serve using either a new approach or the current service approach. This procedure is a stepped-down version of randomized controlled trials that many funders across the nation (such as federal agencies and private foundations) are encouraging for large-scale public services.<sup>3</sup>
- A-17. Do include in the performance management system a way to obtain periodic feedback from participants on the *quality of the program’s service*.** A short questionnaire can be mailed to all, or a sample, of the program’s participants. The questionnaire can ask respondents for their ratings of such basic service-quality characteristics such as service timeliness, accessibility, friendliness, and helpfulness. The survey process could be developed with the help of inexpensive and user-friendly computer software (such as Survey Monkey or Qualtrics). As noted above, the questionnaire can also ask respondents for their reasons for any bad ratings and to suggest improvements to program services.



## Analyzing Performance Data

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What do you do with all this data? If you are serious about performance management, the data are not only for making summaries and scorecards. Here are some dos and don'ts for considerably increasing the value and learning that can come from the data collected. The analyses and resulting comparisons suggested in this section can provide valuable insights into what works and does not work—and for whom.

- B-1. Do identify a staff member who is reasonably adept at (and enjoys) data analysis to examine the performance data, summarize the findings, and identify the highlights for program management.** Few managers will have the time, interest, and background to analyze the data themselves, and performance data are not very useful without meaningful interpretation. Do arrange for a staff analyst to examine the data, using some combination of the steps suggested below, and then to (1) identify and highlight issues and problems that need attention and (2) identify what service delivery practices appear to work well and not so well—and for whom.
- B-2. Do compare the outcome values broken out (disaggregated) by demographic characteristics (such as by age group, race/ethnicity, gender, educational level, and location (such as neighborhood, state, or other geographical location)).** This is of major importance in identifying service equity issues and identifying different service procedures that would boost the outcomes for different demographic groups. Identify and highlight in performance reports unexpected issues indicated by these breakouts. However, recognize that when a group is very small (e.g., fewer than 25 people) the findings will be highly uncertain regarding their applicability to decisions about future performance. (You might need to combine geographic locations or race/ethnicity groups to meet this size criterion.)
- B-3. Do dig into the outcome data and compare outcomes for similar participant groups by different key service characteristics.** For example, different amounts or methods of service delivery might, intentionally or unintentionally, have been used in helping participants. An agency with more than one office that provides similar services would compare outcomes achieved by each office. The breakouts and resulting comparisons can provide valuable insights into what service practices work and do not work—and for whom.

**B-4. Do analyze and compare outcomes by degree of participant difficulty or complexity.** Participants requesting services often have substantially different levels of problems. These different levels are sometimes referred to as participant “risk factors.” The nature and magnitude of these problems can affect the program’s ability to produce beneficial outcomes. If caseloads are not broken out by level of difficulty, this can lead to inaccurate, and unfair, performance assessments. For example, only comparing aggregate outcomes from this year with the prior year could be misleading if the percentages of difficult participants were substantially different between the two years.

Similarly, comparing offices, or individual case workers, only on aggregate success rates could be quite unfair if the mix of incoming participant problems differs substantially. Considering difficulty will likely also reduce the temptation of service providers to overly focus their support on easier-to-help participants to increase their success rates (sometimes called creaming or skimming).

To make such comparisons, guidelines and difficulty or complexity rating scales need to be developed. You will need to identify participant characteristics and problems believed to lead to different success rates. Each incoming service request would be rated as falling into one of a small number of level-of-difficulty or complexity levels, such as not at all complex, mildly complex, somewhat complex, or highly complex. See the Sexual Assault Justice Initiative’s performance management report, volume II (Aequitas, Justice, and Urban 2020), for an example of the development of a process for defining levels of complexity and then relating degree of case complexity to case outcomes (such as for prosecution decisions involving suspects in sexual violence cases).

**B-5. Do compare the performance values over time.** Look for trends that indicate the need for action.

**B-6. Do compare performance values before versus after services to help assess whether changes in service delivery practices have been successful.** The comparisons can provide valuable insights into what service practices work better than others. However, recognize that other factors also could have affected the outcome.

**B-7. Do compare performance indicator actual values with targets that had been set for individual performance indicators.** Targets are used both as an accountability tool and to motivate program staff. Targets can be based on such factors as budget and staffing considerations; expected changes in service delivery practices; and expected substantial changes in level of

difficulty or complexity of the mix of the incoming participant workload. However, since targets can be set somewhat arbitrarily, and may be missed for a wide variety of reasons, analysts should be cautious about assigning negative meaning to targets that are missed

- B-8. Do consider expressing targets as ranges of values rather than selecting a single number.** This procedure is especially appropriate if considerable uncertainty exists around what the target should be and the implications of not achieving the targets are great. For example, snow levels over the year have major effects on snow removal success. A program could also set variable targets for snow removal times depending on actual snow levels.
- B-9. Do examine *both* the actual values and percentages when reporting performance indicator data.** For example, for comparing success rates between two years or two facilities, tracking success in helping participants improve their condition, reports should normally provide both the number *and* percent of participants that improved. Often, however, only one is provided. Percentages often are more informative than raw numbers. However, also do provide the numbers used to calculate the percentages. This will enable data users to also understand the relative sizes of the number of participants served. For example, in the facility comparison used above, one facility might have a much larger percentage of success in helping participants but serve a much smaller number of participants. This is important information for interpreting performance.
- B-10. Similarly, don't use performance indicator targets that only specify the percentage improvement sought—without also identifying the performance level starting point.** For example, the target “Reduce waiting time for service by 10 percent” is not adequate. The base starting point level is also needed (e.g., “Reduce response time to calls by 10 percent, from 20 days to 18 days”). This is important information data users should have.
- B-11. Do, in surveys of participants, examine participants' reasons for giving any poor ratings.** As suggested earlier, if your survey questionnaire asks respondents to explain negative responses to any service characteristic (such as the service's timeliness, accessibility, and if you felt respected) do ask the staff analyst to examine those responses. The analyst should examine and summarize the responses. Such information can identify specific problems needing correction.
- B-12. Do invite participants to suggest service improvements.** If your participant survey questionnaire asks respondents “What suggestions do you have for improving the services you

received?” then ask the staff analyst to examine and summarize the responses. This important feedback on service quality can help you improve it.

- B-13. Don't ask leading questions in participant surveys.** Careful construction of questions will help root out implicit biases and lead to far more useful, credible data.
- B-14. Don't overemphasize rankings as a substitute for examining ratings—when comparing organization units.** Rankings, including percentiles, are tempting and seem to be a favorite format for the media and for motivating staff. However, rankings cover up the distances between performances of organizations. An organization could have very good outcomes but be among the lowest ranking organizations. Similarly, an organization's performance on an indicator might be very good, but there will always be a top (for bragging rights) and bottom (for criticizing) when rankings are used. Provide the data on the actual performance levels along with the ratings.
- B-15. Don't use “number or percentage of targets met” as a significant performance indicator.** It can be highly tempting to add easy-to-meet performance indicators to look better.

## DOS AND DON'TS

# Presenting Performance Findings



- C-1. Do provide information identifying other departments, agencies, or programs contributing to achievement of a given result.** Results often depend on various governmental players rather than the efforts of a single governmental unit. If the impression is left that performance measurement outcomes are solely created by one agency, users of the measurements may be misled about how results have been achieved and who is accountable.
- C-2. Do identify any significant ways in which the data collection has changed over time.** Otherwise, users may be misled by year-to-year changes that are not attributable to real-world improvements or declines but simply changes in the way the data have been created.
- C-3. Do clearly define each performance indicator. Both the data collectors and data users should be able to understand what is being measured.** For example, fire departments, can measure response time from the moment the call comes in until trucks arrive at the scene, or alternately they can provide the same measure beginning the moment the trucks leave the station. In education, much debate has occurred over the years in how to define school graduation rates. It is good practice to provide thorough definitions that are readily accessible.

- C-4. Do provide information on the *extent of uncertainty* of any important findings reported.** This includes such concerns as the reliability of data sources; incomplete data coverage; low response rates for data collection procedures that seek feedback from participants; gaps in coverage of administrative data; and unclear or changes in definitions of important data elements. The reports should indicate, even if only qualitatively, the implications of these limitations and encourage caution when interpreting findings.
- C-5. Don't report differences as statistically significant without also providing information on the size of the difference.** The size of difference can be important for decision making. For example, report not only that the drop in the number of participants helped was statistically significant, but also that the difference dropped from 640 to 630 participants helped. The difference could be statistically significant, but some may not believe the 10 fewer individuals helped is a large enough difference to warrant action.
- C-6. Do ensure performance reports are clear, understandable, and meaningful.** This applies whether the report is only for internal use or also used for external reporting. Do use color, mapping software, and interactive data displays. However, don't overdo it. Too much color and information crammed into one page can make comprehension difficult and frustrating for readers. Performance reports may need to be tailored, at least somewhat, for different audiences.
- Use plain English in explaining your findings. If legislators, advocacy groups, and the general public are confronted with inside jargon, they won't likely use the work.
- C-7. Do recognize and report the limitations of the performance data, especially outcome data.** As with the scores of any sport and the bottom-line profits of a private business, outcome data provide a snapshot of a particular period for the indicators measured. That data, however, do not tell *why* the outcomes occurred. Many factors outside program managers' control can affect outcomes. For example, economic conditions, unusual weather conditions, employee issues, unexpected technology developments, and unexpected participant actions can affect outcomes and be beyond the agency's control.
- C-8. Do provide explanatory notes in performance reports sharing the performance data, especially for the important findings, both for major negative and positive findings.** Otherwise, if an outcome level is poorer than expected, higher-level officials, the media, and citizens can be quick to blame the program officials. This can make program managers

defensive, resulting in the temptation to hide or manipulate the data, as well as hampering efforts to seek the causes.

- C-9. **Don't hide bad news.** Instead, as noted above, include any reasonable explanatory information. Also, do identify plans to correct the problem.
- C-10. **Do tell stories that illustrate data's meaning and importance.** Numbers alone will only communicate effectively to readers who enter a document with curiosity. Real-world anecdotes will engage a far larger audience.

But don't tell stories unless they can be supported by data. It can be very easy to offer up a single isolated incident to prove a point. But singular reliance on such anecdotes can easily mislead readers.

- C-11. **Don't cherry-pick the most favorable results for publication to hype your results.** People can easily have a general idea of how well their government is delivering specific results. When published, if data run contrary to their personal experiences, it will lose credibility.
- C-12. **Do use infographics.** They can be helpful in communicating your message. But make sure that, in trying to make information attractive, it doesn't become misleading. For example, ensure infographics do not oversimplify results so they are not accurate. Additionally, make sure any images used do not reinforce stereotypes about programs or their participants.
- C-13. **Do include data time frames in performance reports.** A performance report with data captured a year ago may still have validity, but it can be misleading. It could be one year old and still useful or ten years old and pretty much worthless. For survey data, the period during which the interviews were conducted or cell phone data were collected helps determine the age.
- C-14. **Do provide explanations if some performance measurement information is currently unavailable.** Many performance reports are sprinkled with "NA" to indicate when information is not available. If data are missing, explain why. Similarly, if the agency plans to collect the needed data, indicate briefly when the data are expected to become available.



## Disseminating Performance Findings

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- D-1. Do provide regular reports (scorecards) on the findings and disseminate them to all interested staff and public officials, including frontline workers.** This is intended to encourage staff to “keep their eyes on the prize” and focus on the bottom line, or what the program seeks to accomplish.
- D-2. Do make the latest data on the performance indicators readily accessible to program managers throughout the year.** As issues arise during the year, the latest performance data should be available to managers to use in addressing those issues. The date the data were last collected will vary depending on the performance indicator and its data collection procedure.
- D-3. Do provide summaries and highlights to report audiences after each performance report is produced. Protect participant confidentiality.** For participant surveys, if resources permit, provide a cleaned-up, but otherwise verbatim, list of the open-ended responses, edited to preserve anonymity. For example, you should correct obvious typos and redact any personally identifiable information. Exclude unclear or inappropriate responses, such as responses that did not respond to the question asked.
- D-4. Do ask a staff data analyst to highlight the findings of interest.** This becomes particularly valuable as the amount of performance information expands. Use various data visualization approaches, such as the popular three traffic light colors, to identify performance data that have improved from the previous reporting period or that represent progress, or lack thereof, toward achieving a performance indicator’s target.
- D-5. Do hold regular “How Are We Doing?” performance reviews with staff, using the findings from the performance measurement data as a starting point for those meetings.** During those sessions, discuss progress; identify problems and issues raised by the information; explore ways to alleviate problems; and begin developing an action plan. At future meetings, discuss progress, or lack thereof, on actions identified at earlier performance-review meetings as well as future actions needed.<sup>4</sup>
- D-6. Do share findings with the press.** One common complaint is that performance information only gets attention when negative. That can only be counteracted with a proactive approach. One



key to getting attention in the press is to provide information that runs contrary to common assumptions.

## DOS AND DON'TS



# Using Performance Findings

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- E-1. Do use performance measurement data as a major service learning and improvement tool.** Do use the performance data to identify, on a regular and continuous basis, where problems and issues exist and to track results after service delivery procedures have been changed. Too often, performance measurement information has been used primarily as an accountability tool without also focusing on ways to improve service delivery. A major step is to disaggregate outcome data, as discussed above, by demographic and service characteristics—to help identify where, and for whom, good or bad outcomes have been occurring. This is a key element in addressing equity and inclusion issues.
- E-2. Do unleash the full power of performance data, not only through regularly published reports, but also at other opportunities throughout the year.** Use the performance measurement process to help address issues as they arise. This will enable decisions to be made with the latest available performance data. It will also enable program managers to obtain performance information tailored more closely to the particular issue at hand. For example, complaints may have been made about the program’s service in a particular neighborhood. If relevant performance data are already being collected by the performance measurement system on individual neighborhoods, the program manager and service delivery team can be much better informed about the issue.
- E-3. Do follow up regularly with program managers and staff members to discuss performance results.** At those meetings compliment good performance and seek explanations for unexpectedly poor and high levels of performance. For example, hires or staff losses, new leadership, unexpected losses or gains of a major local employer, natural disasters, power outages, and so on might have significantly affected the outcomes that occurred.
- E-4. Don’t use performance measurements as a “gotcha” exercise.** This has been a problem with various “PerformanceStat” systems in which individuals are held publicly accountable for the results. Accountability is important, but when people fear being humiliated for their results, they’re less inclined to take healthy risks. And they may be more inclined to fudge the data to avoid retribution.

**E-5. Do train people at all levels in an organization on how to use performance measurements and what they mean.** This will help to build buy-in for the indicators. It will also help people on the front lines feel part of a whole team geared to generating positive results and help ensure consistent understanding of what they are trying to accomplish.

**E-6. Don't assume the program caused notable changes in the outcomes.** Discuss possible alternate causes. For important issues raised by the data, do provide a process for seeking explanations. Programs and participants are likely to be exposed to many other experiences and services during their participation in the program that may cause or contribute to outcomes.

**E-7. Do use performance information to motivate employees and contractors to improve outcomes even if the rewards are only nonmonetary recognition rewards.** However, don't overemphasize incentives for reaching program targets. Sometimes incentives can lead to gameplaying with performance indicator results, especially when tied to improved funding or pay-for-performance plans. Do not establish a reward process that includes strong monetary incentives or other strong penalties without also including provisions for protecting against data manipulation.

If monetary rewards are contemplated, consider the possibility of group or team awards for success rather than, or in addition to, individual awards. Look out for unintended incentives or disincentives that may occur if the level of penalties creates too much pressure or if the performance information is perceived as incomplete or inaccurate. Solicit suggestions from employees and contractors for improving the performance management system.

**E-8. Do connect with other agencies to tackle complex issues involving multiple agencies and programs. Enable performance data sharing across agencies while protecting confidentiality.** Modern information technology is increasingly enabling such efforts.

**E-9. Do provide training, technical assistance, and/or mentoring to managers and their staff members in accessing, interpreting, and using performance information.** Remember, the purpose is program improvement—informing practice, producing desired outcomes, and participant satisfaction.

For organizations that give grants to nonprofit organizations, funders should provide training and technical assistance in how grantees can collect and use such performance information using low-cost data collection procedures.

- E-10. Do reply to queries about findings, even if they are critical in nature.** If it turns out that a query challenges findings in a way that could raise some doubts, it's worth acknowledging that. Trust and credibility grow when room for doubt is acknowledged.
- E-11. Do periodically review the performance measurement process and update it as needed.** Is it tracking the right things? Are the performance data and the data collection procedures producing data of sufficient quality? Is the information of sufficient value to justify a measurement's added cost? Are the performance findings clearly presented? Has the information gotten to all those who can use the information?

## Summary

Program managers and other public officials make many decisions daily on how to best manage performance, from collecting information and analysis to presenting and disseminating the information to actually using the data to implement findings and improve outcomes. By incorporating these dos and don'ts in their practices, managers can build on the experience of many practitioners before them and work toward better, more useful, performance management systems that lead to better outcomes.

# Appendix

## DOS AND DON'TS



## Collecting Performance Data

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- A-1. Do signal to all staff that performance is a top priority for the program.
- A-2. Do seek input from stakeholders as part of your process for selecting the performance measures to track.
- A-3. Do make sure mission statements focus on the expected benefits.
- A-4. Don't include numerical targets in your mission statements.
- A-5. Do include both output and outcome indicators in performance measurement systems.
- A-6. Do identify and track performance indicators of potential important *unintended effects* that can occur.
- A-7. Do seek outcome data that identify outcomes at an appropriate time *after* the participant leaves the program.
- A-8. Do use participant surveys to obtain their perspectives on the quality of their experiences with the program's services as well as the outcomes.
- A-9. Do ask survey respondents to explain their reasons for giving high or low ratings to any of the evaluation questions and provide suggestions for service improvements.
- A-10. Don't assume that regularly surveying participants is costly.
- A-11. Do obtain information for each performance indicator on each participant's demographic characteristics to enable calculation of the outcomes for each performance indicator for each characteristic.
- A-12. Do emphasize to IT support that only a basic process is needed.
- A-13. Do track efficiency, but do not settle for *output* efficiency alone.
- A-14. Do differentiate between aspirational goals and those achievable in a set length of time.

- A-15. Don't overwhelm your data users with too many measurements but instead provide ready access to added subgroup breakouts when needed.
- A-16. Do—when considering a new or modified service delivery approach—consider applying a mini-RCT process to compare the outcomes of the new approach with those of the existing service delivery approach.
- A-17. Do include in the performance management system a way to obtain periodic feedback from the program's participants on the quality of the program's service.

#### DOS AND DON'TS

## Analyzing Performance Data

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- B-1. Do identify a staff member who is reasonably adept at (and enjoys) data analysis to examine the performance data, summarize the findings, and identify the highlights for program management.
- B-2. Do compare the outcome values broken out (disaggregated) by *demographic characteristics* (e.g., by age group, race/ethnicity, gender, education level, and location—such as neighborhood, state, or other geographical location).
- B-3. Do dig into the outcome data and compare outcomes for similar participant groups by different *key service characteristics*.
- B-4. Do analyze and compare outcomes by degree of participant difficulty/complexity.
- B-5. Do compare the performance values *over time*.
- B-6. Do compare performance values *before versus after* services to help assess whether changes in service delivery practices have been successful.
- B-7. Do compare performance indicator actual values with *targets* that have been set for individual performance indicators.
- B-8. Do consider expressing targets as ranges of values rather than selecting a single number.
- B-9. Do examine *both* the actual values and percentages when reporting performance indicator data.

- B-10.** Similarly, don't use performance indicator targets that only specify the percentage improvement sought—without also identifying the performance level starting point.
- B-11.** Do, in surveys of participants, examine participants' reasons for giving any poor ratings on surveys.
- B-12.** Do invite participants to suggest service improvements.
- B-13.** Don't ask leading questions in participant surveys.
- B-14.** Don't overemphasize rankings as a substitute for examining ratings—when comparing organization units.
- B-15.** Don't use "number or percentage of targets met" as a significant performance indicator.

#### DOS AND DON'TS

## Presenting Performance Findings

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- C-1.** Do provide information identifying other departments, agencies, or programs contributing to achievement of a given result.
- C-2.** Do identify any significant ways in which the data collection has changed over time.
- C-3.** Do clearly define each performance indicator. Both the data collectors and data users should be able to understand what is being measured.
- C-4.** Do provide information on the *extent of uncertainty* of any important findings reported.
- C-5.** Don't report differences as statistically significant without also providing information on the size of the difference.
- C-6.** Do make sure performance reports are clear, understandable, and meaningful.
- C-7.** Do recognize and report the limitations of the performance data, especially outcome data.
- C-8.** Do provide explanatory notes in performance reports sharing the performance data, especially for the important findings, both for major negative and positive findings.
- C-9.** Don't hide bad news.
- C-10.** Do tell stories that illustrate the data's meaning and importance.

- C-11. Don't cherry-pick the most favorable results for publication to hype your results.
- C-12. Do use infographics.
- C-13. Do include data time frames in performance reports.
- C-14. Do provide explanations if some performance measurement information is currently unavailable.

#### DOS AND DON'TS



## Disseminating Performance Findings

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- D-1. Do provide regular reports (scorecards) on the findings and disseminate them to all interested staff and public officials, including frontline workers.
- D-2. Do make the latest data on performance indicators readily accessible to program managers throughout the year.
- D-3. Do provide summaries and highlights to report audiences after each performance report is produced. Protect participant confidentiality.
- D-4. Do ask a staff data analyst to highlight the findings of interest.
- D-5. Do hold regular "How Are We Doing?" performance reviews with staff, using the findings from the performance measurement data as a starting point for those meetings.
- D-6. Do share findings with the press.

#### DOS AND DON'TS



## Using Performance Findings

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- E-1. Do use performance measurement data as a major service learning and improvement tool.
- E-2. Do unleash the full power of performance data, not only through regularly published reports, but also at other opportunities throughout the year.
- E-3. Do follow up regularly with program managers and staff members to discuss performance results.
- E-4. Don't use performance measurements as a "gotcha" exercise.

- E-5.** Do train people at all levels in an organization about how to use performance measurements and what they mean.
- E-6.** Don't assume that the program caused notable changes in the outcomes.
- E-7.** Do use performance information to motivate employees and contractors to improve outcomes, even if the rewards are only nonmonetary recognition rewards.
- E-8.** Do connect with other agencies to tackle complex issues involving multiple agencies and programs. Enable data sharing across agencies while protecting confidentiality.
- E-9.** Do provide training, technical assistance, and/or mentoring to managers and their staff members in accessing, interpreting, and using performance information.
- E-10.** Do reply to queries about findings, even if they are critical in nature.
- E-11.** Do review periodically the performance measurement process and update it as needed.



# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is a companion piece to the more in-depth Urban Institute report that discusses program managers' roles in various types of evaluation: see Hatry (2020).
- <sup>2</sup> For information on low-cost community participant surveys see "The National Community Survey Frequently Asked Questions," Polco, accessed October 12, 2021, <https://info.polco.us/en/knowledge/>; and Stone and Hatry (2003).
- <sup>3</sup> This mini RCT—its application and limitations—are discussed further in Hatry (2020).
- <sup>4</sup> See Hatry and Davies (2011) for more details on procedures for these meetings.

# References

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