Performance Budgeting in the United States

by
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This article describes the history of performance management in the United States government, including the Performance Improvement Initiative (PII), the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), and the dedicated Internet site www.ExpectMore.gov.

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1. Introduction

The American taxpayers expect their government to implement programmes that will ensure their national security and provide critical services. Taxpayers deserve to have their money spent wisely to create the maximum benefit. The executive branch of the United States government should be held accountable for programme performance by the American people. For the federal government to be held accountable, the American people must have clear and candid information about each programme's successes and failures.

The United States executive branch is analysing this type of information about weaknesses and strengths of federal programmes and making it available to the public on *www.ExpectMore.gov*. Additionally, in all cases the administration has detailed plans to improve programme performance and is reporting on implementation. This situation has not happened overnight.

2. The history of performance management in the United States government

In 1993, the United States government enacted the Government Performance and Results Act (103 P.L. 62; 107 Stat. 285). For the first time, the law required that agencies craft strategic plans and measure and report performance. As a result of this law, federal agencies are required to consult with stakeholders, including the United States Congress, on their mission statement, their long-term strategic goals and the strategies they will employ to achieve results. Agencies are also required to produce annual performance plans that show how they expect their activities to achieve annual goals and to report at the end of the year on their actual performance.

The Government Performance and Results Act laid a strong foundation for performance management in the federal government. However, numerous weaknesses in the implementation of the Act impeded its progress. Many agency and programme measures were insufficiently outcome-oriented. Neither Congress nor the executive based its decisions on available performance information. Implementation of the Act was more of an exercise than a useful process to inform decision makers about and help improve programme performance.

3. The President's Management Agenda and the Performance Improvement Initiative (formerly the Budget and Performance Integration Initiative)

The federal government's President's Management Agenda includes as one of its government-wide initiatives the Performance Improvement Initiative (PII), which aims to ensure that federal dollars produce maximum results. The initiative was designed to overcome major implementation weaknesses of the Government Performance and Results Act, especially poor-quality goals and insufficient use of performance information in decision making. To accomplish this, federal agencies and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) collaborate to identify which programmes work, which are deficient, and what can be done to improve performance in all cases. At times it is necessary to reallocate

funding from ineffective programmes to more effective ones. This and other decisions about programmes are ultimately made jointly by Congress and the president, but the analysis provided can help the executive and legislative branches make more informed decisions. Other elements of the initiative include measuring programme efficiency using full cost and marginal cost analysis, and generally expanding the use of performance information in decision making.

The Performance Improvement Initiative measures its success in two principal ways:

- **Improved programme performance:** Through the use of performance assessments, programmes will improve their performance every year. This is done by creating and tracking each programme's results. The initiative requires each agency to identify weaknesses in programme management and design and then develop and implement clear, aggressive plans to get more for tax dollars every year.

- **Greater investment in successful programmes:** Overall, scarce resources need to be allocated to higher-performing programmes. Additionally, poorly performing programmes that address a critical need should demonstrate better results. Performance will never be the only factor in decisions about how much funding programmes receive. However, Congress and the president, equipped with information from the Performance Improvement Initiative, can consider performance to a greater degree in their decision making and invest primarily in programmes that provide the greatest return.

Currently, the initiative is making more progress towards the first goal: programmes are becoming more efficient and more effective through implementation of meaningful improvement plans, developed in collaboration with the OMB. Many programmes are demonstrating improved results, for example:

- **Social Security Administration (SSA):** SSA increased agency productivity by 15.5% since 2001 through increased use of information technology and improved business processes. SSA would have required USD 980 million more in 2007 to process the same work if productivity improvements had not been realised.

- **High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA):** The HIDTA programme improved the way it measures success by implementing a system for tracking and analysing performance data. Using this information, more drug trafficking organisations were dismantled for less money. In 2005, 2 183 drug trafficking organisations were dismantled for USD 80 000 each. By 2006, 2 332 were dismantled for USD 76 000 each.

- **Administration on Aging (AoA):** AoA improved its outreach and services to elderly Americans who suffer from disease and disability. In 2006, 18 states improved targeting to those living below the poverty level, serving an additional 80 000 elderly individuals who lived in poverty. Over 345 000 elderly and disabled individuals, who due to their physical conditions would otherwise be living in nursing homes, can continue to live in their own homes and stay connected to their communities. This is an increase of more than 52 200 nursing home-eligible individuals since 2003.

- **Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP):** In 2006 as a part of its "Greening Prisons" initiative, the BOP piloted renewable energy technologies in several prisons and generated savings of USD 1.1 million. As a result, in 2006 and 2007, BOP entered into 18 new national Energy Savings Performance Contracts with energy services companies to generate additional savings.

Agencies are identifying additional actions to improve the performance of each of their programmes. Progress toward the second PII goal of improving resource allocation has been limited, but this year, the administration had more success in terminating some low-performing programmes and targeting those resources to well-performing programmes. In 2008, seven programmes were terminated, saving USD 156 million, and six programmes were reduced, saving USD 1.12 billion. Though no decision is based purely on performance, overall, high-performing programmes received larger funding increases than those that did not perform as well.

4. How the Performance Improvement Initiative works

Several aspects of the PII are designed to maximise programme performance:

- Assess performance with the PART (Program Assessment Rating Tool).
- Publish a scorecard to hold agencies accountable for PART recommendations.
- Broadcast results on a new website, *www.ExpectMore.gov*.
- Implement interagency programme improvement.

4.1. *Comprehensive assessment with the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)*

How does the United States government ensure that programmes are improving every year? First, it assesses how they are performing today. Ninety-six per cent of government programmes have been assessed using the PART (over 1 000 programmes).

4.1.1. *What is the PART and how is it used?*

Agencies and the OMB evaluate a programme's purpose, design, planning, management, results and accountability, in order to determine its overall effectiveness. They then identify programme improvement actions to improve programme results.

Because federal programmes deliver goods and services using different mechanisms, the PART is customised by programme category. The seven PART types are: direct federal; competitive grant; block/formula grant; research and development; capital assets and acquisition; credit; and regulatory. On *www.ExpectMore.gov*, programmes are also grouped by specific programme area (environment, transportation, education, etc.).

Each PART includes 25 basic questions and additional questions tailored to the programme type. These are divided into four sections. The first questions gauge whether a programme's design and purpose are clear and defensible. The second section involves strategic planning, and weighs whether the agency establishes valid annual and long-term goals for its programmes. The third section rates the management of an agency's programme, including financial oversight and programme improvement efforts. The fourth section of questions focuses on the results that programmes can report with accuracy and consistency.

The answers to these questions result in a numerical score for each of the four sections, from 0 to 100 (the latter being the best score). Because reporting a single weighted numerical score could suggest false precision or draw attention away from the very areas most in need of improvement, numerical scores are translated into qualitative ratings. The scores and associated ratings are shown in Table 1.

Regardless of their overall score, programmes that do not have acceptable performance measures or have not yet collected performance data generally receive a rating of "results not demonstrated".

Table 1. **Scores and associated ratings**

Range	Rating
85-100	Effective
70-84	Moderately effective
50-69	Adequate
0-49	Ineffective

PART ratings do not result in automatic decisions about funding. Clearly, over time, funding should be targeted to programmes that can prove that they achieve measurable results. In some cases, a PART rating of "ineffective" or "results not demonstrated" may suggest that greater funding is necessary to overcome identified shortcomings, while a programme rated "effective" may be in line for a funding decrease because it is not a priority or has completed its mission. However, most of the time, an "effective" rating is an indication that the programme is using its funding well and that major changes may not be needed.

4.1.2. A scorecard to hold agencies accountable

More and more agencies are achieving greater results with the help of the habits and discipline established through the Performance Improvement Initiative. These agencies recognise that the PART can be a useful tool for improving performance.

The President's Management Agenda established clear government-wide goals or standards for success (*www.results.gov/agenda/standards.pdf*) for several key business functions, one of which is Performance Improvement. Agencies have developed and are implementing detailed and strong action plans to achieve these goals. Most importantly, agencies are expected to take such action and are held publicly accountable. The standards for success in relation to the PI Initiative are listed below:

● "Senior agency managers meet at least quarterly to examine reports that integrate financial and performance information that covers all major responsibilities of the department. Agency achieves planned improvements in program performance and efficiency in achieving results each year;

● Strategic plans contain a limited number of outcome-oriented goals and objectives. Annual budget and performance documents incorporate measures identified in the PART and focus on the information used in the senior management report described in the first criterion;

● [Agency] Demonstrates that it has performance appraisal and awards systems for all SES [senior executive service] and managers, and more than 60% of the workforce, that effectively: link to agency mission, goals, and outcomes; hold employees accountable for results appropriate for their level of responsibility; differentiate between various levels of performance (*i.e.* multiple performance levels with at least one summary rating above Fully Successful); and provide consequences based on performance. In addition, at a beta site, there is evidence that clear expectations are communicated to employees; rating and awards data demonstrate that managers effectively planned, monitored, developed and appraised employee performance; and the site is ready to link pay to the performance appraisal systems. The agency is working to include all agency employees under such systems;

● [Agency] Reports the full cost of achieving performance goals accurately in budget and performance documents and can accurately estimate the marginal cost of changing performance goals;

● [Agency] Has at least one efficiency measure for all PARTed programs; **AND**

● [Agency] Uses PART evaluations to direct program improvements, and PART ratings and performance information are used consistently to justify funding requests, management actions, and legislative proposals. Less than 10% of agency programs receive a Results Not Demonstrated rating for two years in a row."

Each quarter, agencies receive two ratings. First, they are rated on their status in achieving the overall goals for each initiative. They are then given a red, yellow or green rating to clearly announce their performance. Green status is for success in achieving results in each of the criteria above; yellow is for an intermediate level of performance; and red is for unsatisfactory results.

Second, agency progress toward reaching the PII standards is assessed. The review is on a case-by-case basis against the deliverables and timelines that each agency establishes for itself. This progress is also given a colour rating. Green is given when implementation is proceeding according to plans agreed with the agencies; yellow when there is some slippage or other issues requiring adjustment by the agency in order to achieve the initiative objectives on a timely basis; and red when the initiative is in serious jeopardy. In that case, the agency is unlikely to realise objectives without significant management intervention.

As of 31 March 2008, 17 of 26 agencies had achieved green status on the Performance Improvement Initiative scorecard. These are the:

● Department of Agriculture

● Department of Commerce

● Department of Education

● Department of Energy

● Environmental Protection Agency

● Department of Justice

● Department of Labor

● Department of State

● Department of Transportation

● General Services Administration

● National Aeronautics and Space Administration

● National Science Foundation

● Office of Management and Budget

● Office of Personnel Management

● Small Business Administration

● Smithsonian Institute

● Social Security Administration

The scorecard is an effective accountability tool to ensure that agencies manage the performance of their programmes. Although their scorecard rating is not directly linked to

any consequences, it is quickly understood at the highest levels of the administration as an indicator of an agency's strength or weakness. The government-wide scorecard reporting on individual agency progress is published quarterly at *www.results.gov/agenda/scorecard.html*.

4.1.3. Results on ExpectMore.gov

A new website, *ExpectMore.gov*, was launched in 2006 to provide Americans with candid information about which programmes work, which do not, and what all programmes are doing to become better every year. Until now, Americans only had limited access to information on how their federal government performs. In many cases, it performs well; in some cases, it performs better than the private sector.

The website contains PART summaries for all programmes that have been assessed to date, providing all of the information a concerned citizen would need in order to assess performance. Each assessment includes a brief description of the programme's purpose, its overall rating, some performance highlights and the steps it will take to improve in the future. For those interested in more information, there are links to the detailed assessment as well as to the programme's website. The detailed PART assessment includes answers to questions with explanations and supporting evidence. It also includes performance measures along with current performance information. In addition, there are regular updates on the status of improvement actions to improve performance. These updates appear at least annually, more often if necessary.

A visitor to the site may find, at least initially, that programmes are not performing as well as they should, or that improvement plans are not sufficiently ambitious. This site has helped to change that. A variety of benefits have been accomplished:

- Increased public attention to performance and results.
- Greater scrutiny of agency action (or inaction) to improve programme results:
  ❖ Improvement plans will be transparent.
  ❖ Statements about goals and achievements will be clearer.
- Demand created for better-quality and more timely performance data.

4.1.4. Interagency programme improvement

The administration continues to look for new ways to improve the performance of programmes with similar purpose or design by using the PART to analyse performance across agencies. This cross-cutting analysis can improve co-ordination and communication by getting managers from multiple agencies to agree to a common set of goals and by placing the focus on quantifiable results. It breaks down barriers across the federal, state and local levels so that all are working toward the same goal. Only topics that are expected to yield meaningful results are selected: in 2007 the administration completed cross-cutting analyses of block grant programmes, small business innovation research and credit programmes.

Block grants. One of the tools most commonly used by the federal government is the block grant, especially in the social services area where states and localities are the service providers. Block grants are embraced for their flexibility in meeting local needs, and criticised because accountability for results can be difficult when funds are allocated on the basis of formulas and population counts rather than achievements or needs. In addition, block grants pose performance measurement challenges precisely because they can be used for a wide range of activities. The obstacles to measuring and achieving results

through these programmes are reflected in PART scores: they receive the second lowest average score of the seven PART types; 5% of block grant programmes assessed to date are rated ineffective; and 30% are rated "results not demonstrated".

The characteristics that distinguish high-performing block grant programmes from low-performing ones are:

- Top management commitment to managing for results.
- Strong, outcome-oriented performance measures and goals used by management and grantees.
- Performance information that is relevant, transparent and accessible, so that management and grantees can easily find out what works and replicate it.
- Programme performance is incorporated into managers' and employees' performance appraisals.

The goal of this "cross-cutting" analysis was to share block grant best practices across agencies. During 2007, the PI Initiative led a seminar where multiple agencies learned lessons about performance measurement, accountability, data collection and reporting for block grants.

All block grant programmes integrated what they learned from this work into strong improvement plans that ensure that:

- grantees and subgrantees commit to outcome-oriented goals;
- data on whether those goals are achieved are collected and made public;
- information about proven interventions and how to implement them is shared widely.

The long-term impact of this work will become clear over the coming years, through monitoring of the ability of these programmes to create better outcomes for the citizens they serve.

Small business innovation research (SBIR). The SBIR programme, established in 1982, sets aside 2.5% of government research and development contract and grant funding to allow small businesses to find innovative solutions to government challenges. The goal of the programme is to assist small businesses in undertaking and obtaining the benefits of research and development, while assisting the funding agencies to realise their mission. In 2007, approximately USD 2 billion was spent in SBIR programmes.

All federal agencies with R&D budgets above USD 100 million per year must publish a list of technical topics that they would like to support, after which small businesses are encouraged to submit research funding proposals addressing opportunities in those areas. First, agencies investigate the feasibility of a project and, if it is deemed promising, funding is provided for research and development. Awards are generally limited to about USD 1 million per project. Agencies monitor the progress of the selected projects and report key data annually to the Small Business Administration.

The SBIR Team carries out the following activities:

- Conducting an evaluation to assess the programme's impact.
- Focusing on improving programme administration and determining if legislative reform is needed.
- Developing common long-term and annual measures.
- Developing a database that tracks commercialisation and sales in a consistent manner.

Credit programmes. The federal government is one of the world's largest lenders. At the end of 2003, the government held a financial asset portfolio of nearly USD 1.5 trillion, including direct loans, loan guarantees, defaulted loans and non-credit debt owed to agencies. Many agencies lack the data, processes or overall understanding of the credit life cycle (origination, loan servicing/lender monitoring, liquidation and debt collection) needed to effectively assist intended borrowers, while also proactively reducing errors, risk and cost to the government. Some credit programme PART scores reflect these fundamental inefficiencies.

The PI Initiative identified the "back office" function of the five largest credit agencies (Agriculture, Education, Housing and Urban Development, the Small Business Administration and the Veterans Administration) and the Treasury as an appropriate target for analysis. The Deputy Director for Management created a council to address improvements in these functions. The Federal Credit Council convened its first meeting in March 2005. Initiatives of the Council will improve management functions and are estimated to reduce delinquent debt by up to USD 10 billion, in addition to allowing substantial savings on the front end in the form of reduced administrative and subsidy expenses.

In order to create accountability, the PI Initiative expanded the President's Management Agenda scorecard to include a set of standards for credit programme management. The criteria for red, yellow and green status relate to:

● loan origination;

● servicing and/or lender monitoring;

● debt collection.

The first scorecard was published in 2006, with subsequent quarterly scorecard reports describing individual agencies' milestones for addressing weaknesses.

Many agencies lack the systems and data to conduct regular analysis consistent with minimum private sector standards, resulting in larger losses to the government. For example, institution of early warning systems to identify high-risk borrowers and provide targeted intervention at agencies currently without such systems could reduce defaults substantially, given the size of agency portfolios. The Federal Credit Council is working to improve compliance with the provision of the Debt Collection Improvement Act that bars certain borrowers through increased reporting to, and use of, private credit bureaus. This approach permits better identification of delinquent federal debtors and avoids extending additional credit to poor credit risks. Savings to the government are expected to be up to USD 100 million per year.

The Council has substantially completed the Sharing Lender Performance Data portal, which allows comparison across agencies of lenders' default and delinquency rates, as well as other portfolio data. The result will be better decisions to approve lender participation in programmes, provide benchmarks for ranking lenders, and possibly provide an additional monitoring tool to reduce borrower defaults through early action.

Community and economic development programmes. The federal government spends more than USD 16 billion annually to support local economic and community development. In 2004, agencies and the OMB participated in a cross-cutting review of the 35 federal programmes that make up this effort. Based on PART analyses, input from agencies and other programme information, the team identified common problems that reduced the

effectiveness of this federal spending. The team concluded that the programmes, taken together, were duplicative, not well-targeted, and in many cases lacked clear goals and a system to measure community progress and evaluate programme impacts.

The budget for 2006 proposed to consolidate 18 of the programmes (which spend about USD 4.8 billion) in a new Strengthening America's Communities Initiative. For 2007, the administration re-proposed programme consolidation, this time in the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Commerce. The consolidation was to be accompanied by three major reforms to make more effective use of these resources by: *i)* better targeting funds to places that lack the means to create conditions for economic progress; *ii)* consolidating overlapping and/or ineffective programmes into flexible grants that include rewards for community progress and results; and *iii)* co-ordinating the full set of federal economic and community development programmes within a common framework of goals, standards and outcome measures. While the proposal was not enacted by Congress, the programmes now share common goals and collaborate to achieve them.

5. Results

As mentioned in Section 3 above, the PI Initiative gauges its success according to two measures:

- improved programme performance;
- greater investment in successful programmes.

There has been a good deal of success in achieving the goals of the first measure. The PI Initiative has caused agencies to think more systematically about how they measure and improve programme performance. Though there are many factors that impact programme performance, it is clear that the initiative has framed the discussion around results. Agencies have developed ways to measure their efficiency so that they can figure out how to do more with Americans' tax dollars.

The year 2007 was the fourth year that the PART was used to: *i)* assess programme performance; *ii)* make recommendations to improve programme performance; and *iii)* help link performance to budget decisions. To date the executive branch has assessed 1 004 programmes which represent approximately 96% of the federal budget. In 2008, it will use the PART to assess the performance and management of most of the remaining federal programmes. Alternative methods and timelines for assessment are being considered for programmes with limited impact and for large activities where it is difficult to determine an appropriate unit of analysis.

With the help of the PART, programme performance and transparency have improved. There has been a substantial increase in the total number of programmes rated effective, moderately effective or adequate. This increase came from both reassessments and newly PARTed programmes. Figure 1 shows the percentage of programmes by ratings category.

The improvement can be attributed to the fact that programme assessments use clear and consistent standards of success and to the commitment of programmes to do what is necessary to achieve them. This demonstrates that the PI Initiative is succeeding in focusing agencies' attention on programme performance. For example:

- 89% of programmes established or clarified their long-term and annual performance goals to focus on the outcomes that are important to the American people.
- 82% of programmes are achieving their performance goals.

Figure 5. **Programme ratings are improving**

Cumulative programme results by ratings category (2002-07)
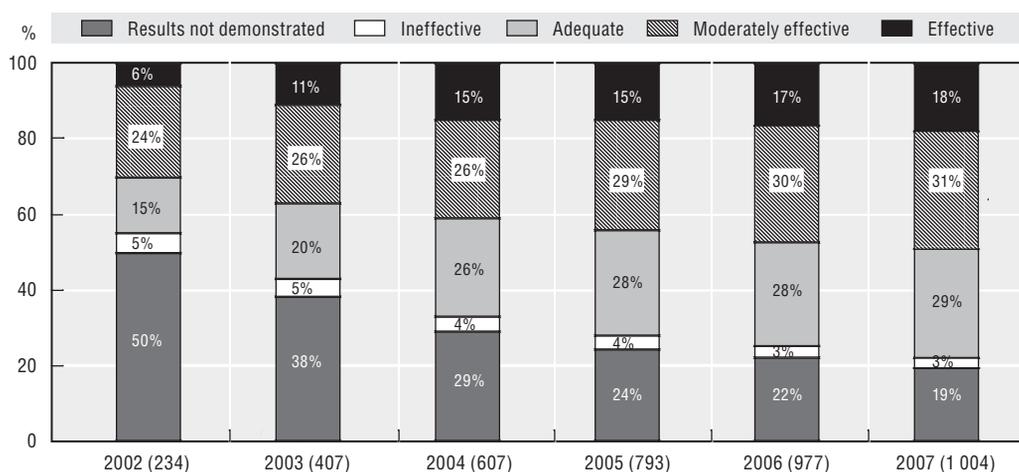
- 73% of programmes are measuring their efficiency, a relatively new activity for government programmes.
- 70% of programmes are improving efficiency annually, producing more value per dollar spent.
- 55% of programmes that were initially unable to demonstrate results have improved their overall performance rating.

Unfortunately, there has not been a similar level of accomplishment in the second measure, greater investment in successful programmes.

Though congressional use of performance information has been limited, most in the Congress are aware of the PART. This topic was discussed extensively in recent debates in the Senate. Senator Wayne Allard introduced an amendment to cut funding for programmes funded in the Labor, HHS, and Education 2008 Appropriations Bill rated as "ineffective" by 10% across the board. In advocating his amendment, Senator Allard said:

> These assessments represent the combined wisdom of career officials. This is not a political process. These are objective evaluations done by career officials at agencies and OMB, and are based on evidence of that program's performance. While a program's overall rating should not be the sole determinant of funding, Congress should prioritize funding programs that perform well. Ineffective programs in particular should be scrutinized to determine whether the resources they use could be better spent elsewhere and whether their goals could be achieved through other means.

Senator Allard brought warranted focus on programmes that are not performing as they should. In arguing against the amendment, Senator Tom Harkin said:

> The Program Assessment Rating Tool … is intended to help assess the management and performance of individual programs. So it is not just a question of whether the program works, it also evaluates whether Congress has designed the program in a clear manner and whether federal agencies do a good job managing the program.

Both Senators went on to have a substantive debate about how programmes were performing and how to get them to perform better. And soon thereafter, in arguing for his own amendment, Senator John Cornyn said:

The Office of Management and Budget has recently reviewed over a thousand programs. As this chart indicates, upon a review of 1 016 federal government programs, they have concluded that 22% of those programs rated either as ineffective or they are unable to determine whether they are effective. In other words, they are unable to find evidence that they are effective. They have not conclusively determined them as ineffective, but they have concluded that 22% of the federal government programs are either ineffective or the results are not demonstrated. Anybody who is interested anywhere in the world – certainly in the United States – can look at the information on this *ExpectMore.gov* website and inform themselves, as I am sure they would want to, about what the federal government is doing and not doing on their behalf.

This debate on Senator Allard's amendment was an important one. It shows increasing attention to the objective rating of programme performance.

The topic of congressional interest in PART was discussed extensively in a report issued in 2007 by the Government Accountability Office. GAO recommends that the OMB solicit congressional views on the performance issues and programme areas most in need of review and the most useful performance data and the presentation of those data, and select PART reassessments and cross-cutting reviews based on factors including the relative priorities, costs and risks associated with clusters of related programmes, and reflective of congressional input (see GAO, 2004).

6. Next steps

While major progress has come from this renewed focus on results, barriers to improvement remain. The PI Initiative has identified several activities to improve programme effectiveness over the coming year:

● Ensure that programme goals are adequate and improvement plans are aggressive and result in improved performance: Review of all completed PARTs and programme goals, as well as rigorous follow-up on recommendations from the PART, will accelerate improvements in the performance of federal programmes. This will ensure that the hard work done through the PART produces performance and management improvements. Additionally, implementation of improvement must be tracked and reported.

● Appoint agency performance improvement officers: To ensure successful implementation of the new policy of the federal government embodied in Executive Order 13450 to spend taxpayer dollars effectively, and more effectively each year, each agency will appoint performance improvement officers. Performance Improvement Officers are responsible for co-ordinating the performance improvement activities of their agencies, including:

❖ developing and improving the agency's strategic plans, annual performance plans, and annual performance reports, as well as ensuring the use of such information in agency budget justifications;

❖ ensuring that programme goals are aggressive, realistic, and accurately measured;

❖ regularly convening agency programme management personnel to assess and improve programme performance and efficiency; and

❖ assisting the head of the agency in the development and use within the agency of performance measures in personnel performance appraisals, particularly those of programme managers, to ensure real accountability for greater effectiveness.

● Expand cross-cutting analyses: Use the PART to facilitate cross-cutting analysis where there is a higher return than approaching programmes individually. The goal of these efforts is to increase efficiency and save dollars, building on the success of previous cross-cutting analyses. Congressional guidance will be a factor in choosing topics for the next group of cross-cutting analyses.

● Maximise *ExpectMore.gov* impact: The federal government should be accountable to the public for its performance. This web-based tool provides candid information on how programmes are performing and what they are doing to improve. The Performance Improvement Initiative will work to increase the reach and impact of this valuable information to improve programme performance and accountability for results.

Reference

GAO (Government Accountability Office) (2004), *Performance Budgeting: Observations on the Use of OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool for the Fiscal Year 2004 Budget*, GAO-04-174, 30 January, Government Accountability Office, Washington DC.