CHAPTER ONE:

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

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Accountability and Performance Measurement

To be *accountable* means to be answerable and responsible. Public agencies have an obligation to be accountable to citizens for the investment of public resources. Non-profit and other community agencies are likewise accountable to their supporters and participants for the investment of resources.

Performance measurement is the essential tool for accountability in both government and non-profit programs. Over the past 40 years, performance measurement has expanded from primarily financial accounting to tracking activities, quality, and results. Today, performance measurement documents the inputs, activities and outputs, and outcomes of programs or initiatives.

> **ACCOUNTABILITY**
> enables agencies and organizations to
>
> • Target and track resource allocations
>
> • Operate efficient and effective programs
>
> • Achieve intended outcomes and results

- *Inputs* – *resources, such as money, in-kind, collaborators, staff, and volunteers*

- *Activities and outputs* - *actions and products, such as the number and types of activities, services, and participants*

- *Outcomes for participants* – *results or benefits, such as changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviors, or circumstances*

- *Outcomes for communities* – *results or improvements such as greater collaboration, more resources, and integration of services*

Performance measurement has at least three component systems. First, an *internal controls system* assures managers that administrative and financial procedures meet established standards and that activities and outputs address the intended outcomes. Internal controls systems assure the accuracy of information or data that are gathered in performance measurement. Thus internal controls form the basis for all accountability systems. *Database or other record systems* that track inputs, outputs, and outcomes are a second component of performance measurement. *Performance assessment systems* provide a third component to assess the degree of achievement of intended activities *and* results for clients, participants, or communities.

> **THREE SYSTEMS OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**
>
> • Internal controls
>
> • Database or other records
>
> • Performance assessment

Taken together, these three systems – internal controls, database or other records systems, and performance assessment- help answer questions about inputs, activities and outputs, and outcomes or results. Questions such as:

- **What inputs or resources are used**? Are resources used appropriately and as planned?

- **What are the program activities and outputs**? Whom does the program serve? Is the program reaching the people it set out to reach? What services are offered?

- **What are the outcomes for participants**? How do participants benefit? Do some participants benefit more than others?

- **What are the results for communities**? Do community initiatives result in better environments for families, youth and children?

> *PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT*
>
> *compares*
> *PLANS*
>
> *to actual*
> *ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS, AND OUTCOMES*

Accountability for Results

Today more than ever before, the public, legislators, clients, advocates and others demand "accountability for results." They want to know not only what resources a program invests and what it does; they also want to know its results.

> *ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS*
>
> - *Provides vision*
> - *Improves services*
> - *Enhances decision-making*
> - *Motivates staff, volunteers, and participants*
> - *Supports powerful communication*

For many years, accountability and performance measurement systems have emphasized tracking inputs and activities and outputs. This emphasis has produced information that is critical to both program operations and policy decision-making.

Accountability for results has been highlighted more recently in performance measurement systems. For example, the federal Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1996 requires federal agencies to identify and track results as well as resources, activities, and outputs. Many states, including Oregon, are also expanding the emphasis on results through identification of Benchmarks or milestones against which progress is assessed.

In addition to meeting this external demand, accountability for results has a tremendously positive impact on programs and other initiatives. Accountability for results provides a clear vision to guide planning and

implementation. It also provides information to improve services to families and other participants.

Accountability for results supports decision-making about program revisions and development. When results are emphasized, program staff, volunteers, and participants can see tangible progress. Finally, when outcomes are clear, more powerful communication is possible with the public, legislators, and other funders.

Despite the great value of information about program or initiative results, tracking outcomes is difficult. Most planners, administrators, and service providers are searching for a performance measurement approach that is manageable to use on an ongoing basis and that will measure outcomes in a valid, yet feasible manner.

Identification of outcome indicators or measures that are valid, reliable and feasible to implement is the primary task in assessment of outcomes. *This book is one resource for such outcome measurement.*

Accountability, Evaluation, Research, and Performance Auditing

Performance measurement, program evaluation, research, and performance auditing are *related but not identical processes*. All systematically collect information, all utilize similar measurement approaches, and all seek to inform decision-making.

Program evaluation, research and performance auditing are in-depth examinations focused on establishing causality (Hatry, 1997). Each seeks to answer the question "why" and to prove that the outcomes of an intervention are in all probability the direct result of that intervention.

Program evaluation and research involve complicated experimental designs, random assignment to various program conditions, multiple assessment, and sophisticated statistical analysis.

Performance auditing systematically examines fiscal and management procedures compared to professional standards in order to make operational and policy recommendations.

Performance measurement examines the extent to which planned activities, outputs, and results were achieved. Compared to research,

> **CHARACTERISTICS OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**
>
> - *non-experimental designs*
>
> - *inclusion of all or most participants*
>
> - *use of measures that inform service delivery and demonstrate results*
>
> - *ongoing operation as part of every day management*

evaluation and performance auditing, performance measurement is less concerned with establishing causality. Rather than invest resources to disentangle factors that may contribute to achieving outcomes, performance measurement seeks to establish only that the intended activities, outputs, and results of an effort were achieved (Hatry, 1997).

Often what is called *self-evaluation* closely resembles performance measurement. Both approaches seek valid, feasible ways to tracking what a program or initiative does and its success in achieving planned results.

A PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT EXAMPLE

A teen parent program planned to invest $10,000 in a one-year effort to provide school-based childcare and parent education to 30 new adolescent mothers and their babies.

The desired results were academic progress among the young mothers, more positive parent-child interactions, normal development among the babies, and infants access to early intervention services if needed.

Effective performance measurement compared these plans with what actually happened when the program was implemented.

INPUTS

- *Was $10,000 invested in the planned activities?*

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

- *Were 30 mothers and their babies served with parent education and childcare?*

OUTCOMES

- *Did the mothers demonstrate academic progress as indicated by their regular school attendance, grades, courses completed, credits earned? (see Chapter 8)*

- *Did the mothers demonstrate positive interaction patterns with their babies as indicated by an observation rating scale and self-report of behavior? (see Chapter 5)*

- *Did the babies make normal developmental progress as indicated by the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)and well-baby check-ups? (see Chapter 6)*

- *Did all the babies who were not making normal developmental progress receive needed early intervention and health services? (see Chapter 6)*

Once internal controls and record keeping systems are in place, the next step in performance measurement is the creation of a ***logic model*** for a program or initiative. A logic model provides a graphic representation of how an intervention operates to produce specific effects through a complex chain of events.

Intended inputs, activities and outputs, intermediate outcomes, and final outcomes of a program or other initiative are all part of the specified chain of events. The utility of a logic model lies in describing a sufficiently detailed chain of events so that measures can be identified for each step in the chain. In this manner, programs can specify what they are accountable for (Plantz, Greenway, & Hendricks, 1997).

Strong logic models build upon findings from earlier research and program evaluation. Using research and evaluation to inform logic models helps to ensure that activities include best practices and other standards of qualities and are proven to lead to the desired results or outcomes. Realistic results and outcomes can be targeted and assessed in reliable and valid ways.

Research and evaluation findings cannot, however, dictate logic models. Local assets and needs must be addressed in logic models and the "ownership" of logic models by local communities and staff is essential.

> ### *LOGIC MODELS*
>
> - *Graphically show the chain of events that lead to the desired results*
>
> - *Identify planned inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes to be measured*
>
> - *Are based on best practices and activities proven to lead to desired results*
>
> - *Are understood and "owned" by staff and local communities*

Chapter 2, Principles of Performance Measurement, outlines the essential guideposts for implementing an effective and manageable performance measurement system. Chapter 3, and all subsequent chapters, focus on tracking outcomes or results.

> ### *REMEMBER THESE STEPS**
>
> - ***Step 1****: Internal controls are in place*
>
> - ***Step 2****: Read chapters 1-2 for principles of performance measurement*
>
> - ***Step 3****: Create a logic model that specifies activities, outputs and outcomes*
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> - ***Step 4****: Read chapter 3 and other relevant chapters for possible measurement approaches*
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> - ***Step 5****: Choose measures that fit your outcomes*
>
> - ***Step 6****: Select a measurement approach that is "do-able" given your time and resources*
>
> **see Preface, page P-10*