What About My Street?
How the City Can Improve Its
Tracking of Service Delivery

OVERVIEW

For the public, government's performance is evaluated close to home: Do public services respond to the needs and desires of a community? What indicators best describe "quality of life" issues? How have government programs affected "my neighborhood" or "my kids"? When reported clearly and concisely, such information promotes accountability in the use of public resources and builds trust between the public and the public sector.

Governments often fail in reporting on their performance in ways that allow the public (or elected officials) to assess if public programs are achieving desired results. This may be due in part to a failure to distinguish between different types of accountability and different types of performance information. For example, public managers may face internal accountability for results, which requires collecting data to help managers track, understand, and improve an agency's operational performance. Public accountability requires, in part, viewing an agency from the citizens' perspective, understanding their expectations, and collecting information that helps the public assess how well government is meeting those expectations.

New York City has had successes in reporting on results that matter to citizens—most notably with the Police Department's Comstat program and the information it generates on crime reduction and safer communities. Last year, the city launched the Capstat program to broaden its dialogue with the public about performance. Loosely based on Comstat, it provides Internet access to selected performance statistics for city agencies. Unfortunately, Capstat does little more than reiterate information in the Mayor's Management Report and tends to focus on efforts—what agencies do on a daily basis—rather than accomplishments.

This Policy Brief looks at how the city is using the Capstat program to promote accountability, and more broadly, at how performance measurement can be used to improve the dialogue between the public and the public sector. IBO offers three ideas for how Capstat can be used to improve transparency and accountability:

• identify and report on results that matter to the public and reflect the way the public sees and uses city services;

• centralize contact information for city programs and services; and

• expand New York City's use of electronic government to allow the public to comment on or rate city services.

Introduction

In August 2001, Mayor Rudy Giuliani launched the Citywide Accountability Program (Capstat). Under Capstat, selected city agencies provide statistics about their performance which are posted on the city's Web site (see http://www.nyc.gov). Modeled loosely on the New York City police department's successful Comstat program, Capstat has the potential to provide New Yorkers with timely and accessible information on government performance—an integral component of any plan for an open and accessible government, as advocated by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in his first State of the City address.

Initial postings on Capstat, however, are disappointing. For many agencies, the data are largely a repeat of operational statistics already published in the Mayor's Management Report (MMR), with a focus on information more useful to internal management than to public accountability for results. Capstat's attempt to give the public some of the same information available to government officials is, in many cases, a mistaken goal. When a goal of performance reporting is to inform the public and increase government accountability, the challenge for the public sector is to present performance information in ways that reflect how the public sees, uses, and benefits from public services. This may be substantively different from the way agency activities and performance are tracked and reported for internal management purposes.

This policy brief looks at how the city is promoting government accountability via the Capstat program, and more broadly looks at performance measurement as a way to improve the way New York City government communicates with citizens about government performance. IBO offers three ideas for how the Capstat Web site might be used as a vehicle for government transparency and accountability:

- identify and report on results that matter to citizens and reflect the way the public sees and uses city services;

- centralize contact information for city programs and services; and

- expand New York City's use of electronic government to allow the public to comment on, or rate, city services.

Comstat & Capstat

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) pioneered a results-focused performance program in the city with its nationally recognized Comstat program. "The philosophical change entailed in this model rested on the belief that police action can affect crime and public safety."[1] Comstat is grounded on a review of selected statistics that are explicitly linked to outcomes for society—such as reduction in crime. In this regard NYPD might compile detailed statistics, charts, maps, and calculate response times and arrest rates to gain insight into the effects of staffing and operational strategies, but always with a focus on their effect on bigger picture results. Moreover, it can be argued that the real benefit of operational statistics is less in the data itself than in the dynamic that occurs around the table between agency managers and executives in defining indicators, analyzing the results, and demanding accountability.

On E-Government as a Means to Reinvent Government

Business has an advantage over government in that it has a singular focus around which you can determine if everyone is doing their job effectively—the bottom line of whether the company is making a profit. In order to figure out the proper measure of accountability in government you have to think a lot harder. It requires a process of asking yourself not only why government exists, but in the case of city government, why certain agencies exist. What is their raison d'etre, what's their purpose, and what is the reason the public wants those agencies? And you have to go through a very difficult and intellectually honest exercise of trying to figure out how to quantify that. ... E-government is giving us the tools…to consistently measure performance and achieve accountability.

-Mayor Rudy Giuliani

"A Conversation with Rudolph W. Giuliani, Mayor, New York City," *The Business of Government*, Pricewaterhouse Coopers Endowment for the Business of Government, Fall 2001, pg 24.

The NYPD's successes in holding managers routinely accountable for operational goals and measured results has been an important advance in New York City governance. Capstat extends this concept more broadly across city government. In this regard Capstat can be an important part of the city's overall management framework. As a vehicle to improve government transparency and help New Yorkers understand and assess government performance, however, Capstat misses the boat.

For a more general audience, there are two key problems with the Capstat Web site. First, it emphasizes measures of effort (outputs)—that is, the products and services supplied by agencies such as workload, the number of clients served, or the number of transactions processed. Instead, Capstat should focus

on results (outcomes) or other service quality information that may help city residents and other users of public services better understand what is achieved by government programs. "Outcomes are not what the program itself did, but the consequences of what the program did."[2]

The difference between reporting on outputs and outcomes, might include, for example:

- number of students in the school system (workload) versus percentage of students achieving a specified skill-level gain in reading (outcome);

- miles of road paved or number of potholes repaired (workload) versus the percentage of lane-miles of road in excellent, good, or fair condition (outcome);

- number of arrests (workload) versus changes in the incidence of crimes or fires, or the percentage of residents rating their neighborhood as safe or very safe (outcomes);

Citizens may also be interested in "intermediate outcomes"— outcomes that are expected to lead or contribute to a desired end result but which are not an end in themselves, such as improved service response times or other service quality characteristics.[3]

 Second, data are often poorly presented for a general audience, making it difficult for readers outside a particular agency to understand or interpret the agency's performance information. For example, acronyms are used and service delivery statistics are aggregated into citywide totals when it is likely that service results vary considerably by borough or neighborhood. In addition, statistics are often reported without comparison to previous months or target levels, without analysis, and without definitions for the indicators themselves.

New York City government has made praise-worthy progress in e-government, using the Internet to increase accessibility and convenience for users of government services. New Yorkers can now pay parking tickets, view restaurant health inspection results, or obtain copies of birth certificates online. The Bloomberg Administration has an opportunity to expand its e-government capacity by making Capstat a one-stop resource for the public to learn about—and perhaps provide input into— how government prioritizes and monitors its operations, and assess its performance.

Why measure performance?

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics."
-Mark Twain

Mark Twain's humorous characterization of statistics reminds us of an age-old problem in using numbers to tell a story: when poorly analyzed or presented, even the best data can obscure or mislead. Even so, for governments trying to understand and report on what they do and what they achieve, they must resort to statistical analyses—explicit measurements of what an agency has done and of how well it has done compared with targets set for it.

New York City is not alone in its attempts to measure and report performance statistics. Governments across the U.S. are developing ways to measure and report on their performance. The impetus for these efforts may vary. Some cities may be concerned about improving accountability to the public by making information about the results of government programs accessible to people outside government. Others may wish to use performance information for internal accountability, increasing the pressure on public sector managers to improve management through, for example, better service delivery or greater cost-efficiency.

The Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) is in the process of developing suggested criteria for state and local governments to use in reporting on performance measures. Recently, GASB held 19 citizen discussion groups as part of their background research (with two of these groups held in New York City). Among their findings:[4]

- participants want to see performance information reported that citizens identify as important, determined by involving citizens in selecting performance measures.

- the most common types of performance information of interest to the participants included results (outcomes), citizen and customer perceptions, and cost-related information (including efficiency and tax burden).

- participants placed emphasis on measures that described "quality of life" and "impact on the lives of the citizenry."

- participants want geographic disaggregation. "As some participants put it, citizens want to know how things affect 'my neighborhood' or 'my kids.'"

- participants want context for performance information. That may be in the form of comparative context (against goals, targets, standards, best practices, prior performance, between

different neighborhoods or operating units, or even compared with other jurisdictions), or with supporting narrative that explains the data and gives a fuller picture of what the data are trying to describe.

• using multiple approaches to communicate with citizens about performance, including printed information, Internet, public forums, and the media.

Most of the information New York City provides on government performance, such as the Mayor's Management Report and Capstat, focus on internal accountability. This is achieved by collecting detailed statistics largely focused on what agencies do on a daily basis (number of customers served, response times, caseloads, numbers of children enrolled in schools). While such measures of effort are important for ongoing management, they tell us little about results.

Public accountability for results is, arguably, the cornerstone of good government. The GASB study underscores the notion that the public, as well as government officials, needs timely and appropriate information about the results of government programs in order to evaluate whether or not public policies, and the tax dollars used to carry out those policies, achieve their intended results. Moreover, outcome-based performance reporting recognizes that elected officials need information about results to inform the budget process and aid in long-term financial and operational planning by linking results to political objectives.

Performance measurement can be used as a resource for disentangling the many factors that contribute to different results and help public employees and the public better understand their shared responsibility of effecting outcomes. It can provide a factual basis for stakeholders to assess and debate whether the best use is being made of resources and how much progress has been made toward achieving the goals of a program. Moreover, the process of articulating outcomes can be an important tool for clarifying or hypothesizing about the causal relationship between the actions of the program and the expected outcomes for society.

Think Baseball ...

If all this talk of good government and management consulting jargon is a little too abstract, think of in terms of a baseball team. Performance measurement is as important a tool for government as it is to any kind of business—even sports teams. Harry Hatry, a leading expert on public sector management, uses the following analogy to explain why we need to measure performance:[5]

The manager of a baseball team needs to keep track of the running score of a game or series to assess what adjustments are needed for the team to win and to know how well the team is performing compared to other teams. This is also true for managers in public and private sector businesses. Performance measurement is the tool businesses use to keep track of the score.

In baseball a set of rules defines the elements of the game and how the game is scored. The question for business or government is to determine what elements make up its running score. How do we know if we are winning? How do we know if we are getting what we are paying for?

In the private sector, the score (outcome) is usually measured in terms of profits or market share. Without profits as a bottom-line, a challenge for the public sector manager—and the general public—is to define success for government programs.

The public sector has generally used a combination of inputs and outputs as a way to keep and report the score. Inputs include, for example, resources available such as the number of employees and operating costs. Outputs are the activities carried out with those resources—for example, number of children enrolled in school, percent of taxes collected, number of tickets issued, or the number of forms processed.

In baseball, the inputs and outputs are equivalent to statistics such as the number of players, their salaries, and performance statistics on individual players or number of runs per inning. Hatry reminds us that while this is important information for managers, such indicators do not tell us whether the team is winning or if it is doing better or worse than in previous weeks or seasons. "In sports," Hatry goes on to say, "the measure of success for team members and fans alike is who wins." Businesses and governments need the same kind of information: inputs identify resources, outputs tell about activities, and outcomes tell about results.

Capstat: Accountable to Whom?

The goal of Capstat is unclear. In launching Capstat, Mayor Giuliani described the program as providing timely updates and posting of statistical indicators for the public to review and to gauge the performance and effectiveness of each of the agencies. "This program," he notes, "furthers this administration's goal of creating a more transparent form of government that is widely accessible to the general public." On the other hand, the Web site describes the program as helping agency managers track, understand, and improve their operational performance.

The failure to provide consistently useful information to the public via Capstat may in part be due to a failure of the program to recognize that these are two different goals. They require different approaches to assembling and presenting performance information. A review of the information provided in Capstat suggests it is tailored toward internal operational issues, with little focus on creating a performance dialogue accessible to the public.

For example, the Department of Consumer Affairs' (DCA) Capstat data suggest that the department is accountable for the number of violations issued and inspections carried out in a given month. DCA's broader public purposes, however, include protecting consumers against deceptive and illegal trade practices, resolving consumer complaints, licensing and regulating thousands of businesses, and educating businesses and the public about consumer issues. While such operational statistics may reflect essential activities that contribute to its public purposes, there is no information to help readers make this link. Moreover, these monthly statistics are without a context to help the public assess whether the result is good or bad, without comparisons to target levels or previous months results (each month is provided as a separate document), and without linking particular workload indicators to broader measures of goal achievement, operational or cost efficiency, or service quality.

The parks department Capstat data is more user friendly—measures are presented in charts with monthly totals over the past year, as well as some outcome-related data on cleanliness of parks. However, the data on parks conditions are provided in a citywide aggregate without breakdowns at the park or borough level. Who is the target of accountability for the current Capstat information—surely not the users of neighborhood parks who learn nothing about their own parks from these data?

The GASB survey mentioned above highlighted the relevance of neighborhood-level performance information in order to allow city residents to better understand how city programs and services affect their neighborhoods, their families. In the example of the parks department, transparency and accountability would be enhanced if, for example, a city resident could call up a local park from a map and get the most recent ratings for that park. City residents might wish to see maps that track and pinpoint crime in parks, or complaints about graffiti or sanitation issues.

It would also be helpful to have information about the department's survey instruments—what is considered clean? How is it measured? In this regard, city parks and playgrounds

are maintained by a number of city agencies—for example, NYPD for crime and Department of Transportation for lights and roadwork. Most citizens do not distinguish between agencies in evaluating the condition of a local park. Performance reporting should reflect a cross-cutting set of indicators that draw from all the relevant city agencies.

Baltimore and Chicago use their cities' Web pages to allow the public to view current performance information for neighborhood areas, or in some cases even street by street, for selected city services. The City of Baltimore has applied the NYPD's Comstat program to a wide variety of city services and publishes "pin maps" (used to map and track data such as crime or complaints) on the city's Web page. An example of the pin map for sanitation complaints is provided in Appendix 1. The Chicago Police Department operates "Citizen ICAM", which allows the public to query the Department's database of reported crime by street, police precinct, or school (see Appendix 2).

Even the NYPD's much lauded Compstat database suffers from poor presentation, requiring citizens to know police precinct numbers in order to find information about their local area or other parts of the city. Providing a map where users could simply click on an area of the city to get local statistics (rather than a list of precincts) would significantly enhance accessibility for most citizens.

In large part, the agency data provided in Capstat offers only operational statistics without benefit of the link to outcomes, or any context or analysis that might help the reader understand how operational statistics link to specific outcomes. While the NYPD's experience has shown that the discipline of collecting data and reporting on selected operational statistics can be of great benefit to agency managers, but without the added dimension of links to outcomes and explanation of the analysis they offer little to the public.

Results that Matter to Citizens

> *"In the case of the police department, we discovered the right measure of success. It is not the number of arrests that police officers make; it is whether or not crime has been reduced. This is different from evaluating results based on the number of arrests made and leads to different strategies. It leads to different choices. Ultimately, it is understanding the public's expectations for a police department and complying with them."[6]*
> *-Mayor Rudy Giuliani*

The Mayor's remarks about the NYPD highlight the difference

between measuring effort and measuring results. New York City has been successful in articulating and reporting on results that matter to citizens. The sanitation scorecard (street cleanliness ratings), information on crime reduction and safer communities, and park cleanliness ratings (when reported at the local level) all explicitly focus on results that matter to citizens. Of these measures, only crime reduction statistics are currently published on Capstat.

There is a demand—if not a hunger—for reliable, non-partisan and objective information about the results, achievements, and improvements in government programs. We find evidence for this interest in the wide range of public interest groups, such as the Straphanger's Campaign, which seek to inform the public in the absence of clear, concise, and meaningful performance information from the agencies themselves. The federal government's National Performance Review and the Government Performance and Results Act received broad public support for their attempts to assess government performance from the perspectives of citizens, customers, and value-for-money.

An Opportunity for the Bloomberg Administration

"As elected officials, we must remind ourselves that we are here to serve all of the people, not just those who voted for us. That's why we are doing everything possible to create "Openness in Government."

-Mayor Bloomberg, State of the City address

The challenge for the new administration in communicating with citizens about government performance is to go beyond collecting and reporting on individual statistics about what agencies do, to instead measuring and reporting on what agencies achieve. In his State of City address, the Mayor took an important step in this direction by announcing that his administration will overhaul the Mayor's Management Report. "After 25 years, this report has grown to over 1,000 pages—three volumes—with more than 4,000 statistical indicators. The sheer size alone of this document makes it difficult for anyone to use," said the Mayor. "The Mayor's Management Report should be easy to use and accessible electronically. Simply put, it must provide a way to open up management of our city services to citizens, civic groups and public officials."

As the city struggles with balancing its budget and the budget cutbacks and program tradeoffs that will result, it is more important than ever to articulate government priorities through performance goals and giving citizens a shared stake in the results. In doing so, performance measurement can be used to improve the dialogue between New Yorkers and city government about the future of city services, and for ensuring transparency and accountability in the management and delivery of those services. Ideally, assessing the results of city services would not be a one-way street, but one which includes input from both the administration and citizens around a common set of expectations.

The Capstat Web site offers the potential to open a dialogue with the public about performance. In this regard, changes in three areas would improve the Capstat Web site as a vehicle for enhancing transparency and public accountability for government performance:

- identify and report on results that matter to New Yorkers, and convey that information in a timely, clear, concise, and accessible format.

- complement the Mayor's proposed 311 city telephone center by using Capstat to provide centralized phone, fax, and e-mail contact information for city programs and services, such as for managers in central offices and local administrators in boroughs who can answer questions and resolve complaints.

- develop interactive features for citizens that might include, for example, taking suggestions and observations about customer service or more generally about city quality of life indicators (street and park cleanliness, graffiti, trash collection), and to collect and report on citizen/user ratings for city services.

Public demand for better information about results is merely the front piece of a demand for transparency and accountability from government. Good government suggests that programs produced with public funds that are expected to produce particular outcomes must track those outcomes and allow public employees, elected officials and the public to use that information to debate and improve the way city services are provided.

Written by Christine Lidbury

End notes

[1] Dennis C. Smith and William J. Bratton, "Performance Management in New York City: Compstat and the Revolution in Police Management," page 459, in *Quicker, Better, Cheaper: Managing Performance in American Government*," Dall W. Forsythe, editor, The Rockefeller Institute Press, New York, 2001.
[2] Harry P. Hatry, "What Types of Performance Information Should be Tracked?" page 21, in *Quicker, Better, Cheaper: Managing Performance in American Government*," Dall W. Forsythe, editor, The Rockefeller Institute Press, New York, 2001.
[3] For a more detailed definitions and description of the different types of performance indicators, see: Harry P. Hatry, *Performance Measurement: Getting Results*, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C., 1999.
[4] For the complete GASB report, see, *Report on the GASB Citizen Discussion Groups on Performance Reporting*, Nov. 2001, http://accounting.rutgers.edu/raw/seagov/pmg/index.html.
[5] Harry P. Hatry, *Performance Measurement: Getting Results*, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C., 1999.
[6] Excerpted from "Making America's Cities Great Places to Live," a keynote address delivered at the Livable Cities Conference and reprinted by the Manhattan Institute, *Civic Bulletin*, No 17, April 1999 (the full text of this address is available online at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cb_17.htm)