



GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Lessons Learned for the Next Administration on Using Performance Information to Improve Results

Highlights of [GAO-08-1026T](#), a testimony to the Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services and International Security, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past 15 years, legislative and executive branch reform efforts have attempted to shift the focus of federal government management from a preoccupation with activities to the results or outcomes of those activities. Based on over a decade of work in this area, GAO has found a transformation in the capacity of the federal government to manage for results, including an infrastructure of outcome-oriented strategic plans, performance measures, and accountability reporting that provides a solid foundation for improving the performance of federal programs. However, agencies have made less progress in getting their managers' to use performance information in their decision making.

GAO was asked to testify on the preliminary results of ongoing work looking at (1) trends in federal managers' use of performance information to manage, both governmentwide and at the agency level; (2) how agencies can encourage greater use of performance information to improve results; and (3) lessons learned from prior management reforms for the next administration. Our statement is based on prior GAO reports and surveys we conducted in 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007. For the results of our 2007 survey, see e-supplement [GAO-08-1036SP](#). GAO will be issuing a report at a later date that will explore the use of performance results in management decision making at selected agencies.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1026T](#). For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6806 or steinhardt@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

According to GAO surveys, since 1997 significantly more federal managers report having performance measures for the programs they manage. However, despite having more performance measures available, federal managers' reported use of performance information in management decision making has not changed significantly, as shown below.

Percentage of Federal Managers Who Reported Using Information Obtained from Performance Measurement for Various Management Activities to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent



Source: GAO.

Notes: Percentages are based on those respondents answering on the extent scale.

^aThere is a statistically significant difference between 1997 and 2007 surveys.

^bThis question was not asked in 1997.

For the collection of performance information to be considered more than meaningless paperwork exercises, it must be useful to and used by federal decision makers at all levels—including Congress. To reach this state, GAO believes that the next administration should promote three key practices that we have identified in our work over the last 10 years: (1) demonstrate leadership commitment to results-oriented management; (2) develop a clear “line of sight” linking individual performance with organizational results; and (3) build agency capacity to collect and use performance information. In addition to encouraging agencies to employ these practices, the next administration should: (1) adopt a more strategic and crosscutting approach to overseeing governmentwide performance; (2) improve the relevance of performance information to Congress; and (3) build agency confidence in assessments for use in decision making.