

Validation of Performance Measures

Introduction

Data accuracy, collection, and monitoring is an important aspect of implementing the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA).

In 1999, the Department made significant progress in improving its data collection, verification, and validation strategies. Interior bureaus have improved their performance measures and the Department has developed an internal reporting and tracking system and improved oversight of performance management activities. While progress has been made, the Department realizes that more work needs to be done to further improve the Department's performance data and systems. Interior is currently developing new self-assessment tools and approaches to improve our data systems.

As the Department developed its strategic plans and annual performance plans, the focus was on constructing the goals and measures that are appropriate for Interior programs, are outcome oriented, and produce measurable results. As these initial plans were prepared, Interior bureaus and offices had considerable discretion to develop the necessary means to verify and validate the performance measures, data, and data collection systems. Our bureaus and offices developed a variety of approaches to determining the accuracy and reliability of performance data. Information collection and reporting systems were developed to accommodate the specific types of data and mission information needs of each bureau. For example, some bureaus developed and re-engineered physical data monitoring systems and electronic databases to capture and record data that is necessary for GPRA reporting and provides critical information for decisionmakers. Data captured at the field level in many instances was recorded

electronically on laptop computers for easy downloading and verification at the regional and national levels. This allowed for data discrepancies to be more easily identified and resolved between regional and field personnel.

Quarterly Data Reporting

In 1999, the Department developed a quarterly data reporting system to track progress in achieving GPRA goals. Interior bureaus are required to electronically submit performance data on a quarterly basis to the Department. The data is then reviewed and entered into a central database containing all Department and bureau performance data. The quarterly submittal schedule provides the ability to measure progress towards individual performance goals throughout the annual performance planning period. The database is presently being upgraded to allow bureaus to provide updates through the Internet. Departmental managers will also be able to access performance information more easily through this new system.

Self Assessments

The Department is developing new tools to help improve the accuracy and reliability of performance information. The Department has developed a verification and validation matrix for use by Interior bureaus and offices as a self-assessment tool to evaluate the controls in place for determining the accuracy and reliability of the performance information. The matrix involves a five-tiered process to determine the accuracy of reporting the data; data standards and definitions; management checks and reviews; system integrity; and, system security. As the majority of the data is collected by the bureaus at the field level, the matrix additionally helps define and track the data

collection and reporting process by identifying the primary data sources and gathering efforts; data entry; how the data is aggregated and reported; and how that data is to be utilized for GPRA and other documents.

Program Evaluations

Program evaluations are an important tool in analyzing the effectiveness and efficiency of our programs and evaluating whether they are meeting their intended objectives. Interior programs are evaluated through a variety of means, including performance audits, financial audits, management control reviews, and external reviews from Congress, OMB, and other organizations such as the National Academy of Public Administration and the National Academy of Science. We use self-assessments to verify that performance information and measurement systems are accurate and supportive of our strategic direction and goals. Data collection and reporting systems processes are reviewed and improved through the use of customer and internal surveys.

Interior also relies on outside reviews and audits of our strategic planning and performance management processes by the

General Accounting Office (GAO) and the Office of Inspector General (OIG). GAO has conducted several reviews of Interior’s strategic plans and annual performance plans as well as more specific reviews of individual bureau GPRA implementation efforts. These reviews have been very helpful in identifying best practices and focusing departmental attention on areas needing improvement. For example, GAO’s report “National Park Service—Efforts to Link Resources to Results Suggest Insights for Other Agencies” (GAO/AIMD-98-113) commended the Park Service’s approach of combining a bureauwide plan with individual plans for each park unit, while recognizing the difficulty that many bureaus, including the Park Service, have had in linking performance goals to budget and accounting systems. In its 2000 Audit Plan, the OIG has identified performance measures that are related to the areas or programs being examined. The OIG plans to incorporate analyses of performance measures as a part of their ongoing audit processes.

The table below (*Figure 17*) provides examples of selected current or planned program evaluations and performance audits and how they relate to Interior’s five broad mission goals.

Figure 17

Selected Examples of Program Evaluations		
Program Evaluations	Methodology and Purpose	Dept Goal Number
Fire management program	General program evaluation by team.	1
Small Operator Assistance Program (SOAP) grants	Questionnaire to states with SOAP grants to determine proper program administration.	1
Quality recreation at Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) sites	Office of Inspector General audit on whether BOR maintained facilities in accordance with departmental and bureau requirements.	2
Grazing permit renewals	Team evaluation of progress toward meeting congressional mandate on permit renewal.	3
Follow-up audit of Royalty Management Program	Office of Inspector General audit to determine whether the Minerals Management Service implemented recommendations in prior OIG audit reports on controls for automated information systems.	3
Hydrologic hazards	An external review of the program by the National Research Council.	4
Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center	An Office of Inspector General audit of U.S. Geological Survey support for the U.S. Corps of Engineers.	4
Native American technical assistance program	Internal program evaluation of technical assistance and other accomplishments.	5
Indian Direct Payments Program	An internal, alternative management control review.	5