



State of the Public Service A Partnership for Public Service Initiative

The Problem

It is often said that you can't manage what you don't measure. We have found that the federal government lacks a proven system of indicators to determine if federal agencies have the right people with the right skills to do our nation's work. The Partnership for Public Service's *State of the Public Service* initiative intends to address that lack and build on the principle that clear workforce metrics can guide governmental and agency-specific action, assess results, and improve agency performance.

The Challenge

Measuring performance isn't new to the federal government. In the past decade alone, federal agencies have seen the passage or implementation of several important data collection/metrics systems (the Government Performance and Results Act in 1993, the Office of Management and Budget's Performance and Accountability Rating Tool in 2002, the President's Management Agenda in 2001, and the Office of Personnel Management's Human Capital Accountability and Assessment Framework in 2007).

While each of these federal initiatives has particular strengths, problems with the design and implementation have kept them from delivering on the promise to help improve the measurement, accountability and performance of federal programs. The lessons learned from these efforts are instructive in developing our approach to the *State of the Public Service*.

Why haven't they worked?

- Agencies have rarely been included either in developing or helping to improve these measurement efforts. Rather, each of these efforts has been externally owned and driven. As a result, critical stakeholders within agencies and in Congress feel that their voices were not heard and their interests were not considered.
- A related difficulty for many agencies is the perception that centrally developed measurement initiatives tend to be "one size fits all" and therefore inflexible regarding the special circumstances and needs of particular agencies. Large agencies and small agencies, regulatory and non-regulatory, single-mission and multiple-mission agencies are not interchangeable and agency managers quickly lose confidence in measures when they see that those measures are not sensitive to the realities of their day-to-day operations.
- These initiatives have overlooked the essential link between highly technical measures and results that can also be communicated in ways that are meaningful to the public. An emphasis on making federal data meaningful to the public by linking it to outcome/performance measures is important because it creates an additional lever for change.
- There has also been a general failure among those heading federal measurement efforts to effectively build on existing data and connect it to newer initiatives. This has led to two additional problems. First, it is difficult to develop a holistic picture of federal agency performance when the measures collected for one effort are not readily accessible or integrated with those of others. Second, with many agencies already strapped for resources, they simply don't have the staff required to support multiple, unrelated measurement efforts.
- None of these efforts has connected the dots from resource management to mission accomplishment. Instead, the federal government continues to operate in compartments without recognizing the critical linkages between people and performance. As a result, actions in one area that might drive positive change in another are not seen or understood.



The Answer: *The State of the Public Service Project*

Improving government performance starts with good information. There is ample evidence that the use of indicator systems – both at local and state levels in the U.S. and at the national level in many countries – can make a positive difference. Results include enhanced collaboration, better-informed decision making and greater accountability to citizens.

The *State of the Public Service* initiative will include:

1. Focused annual reports on the health and capacity of the federal workforce;
2. A Web site that serves as a clearinghouse for federal workforce data. The Center will facilitate wide communication of SOPS data and support change in agencies through training, workshops and consulting work. It will also bring together policy makers, academics, federal managers, journalists and the public—those interested in good government—to help build community and share knowledge; and
3. Programs that apply SOPS findings to improve federal performance and public opinion. Examples include pilot projects, legislative initiatives, training, in-depth reports with actionable conclusions, and surveys of the public to engage diverse stakeholders. Such programs will be used to inform research, test recommendations in the field and develop workable solutions to help our government improve results.

At the heart of this effort is a need to create lasting change that enables the federal government to perform better over time and serve the public more effectively. To these ends, the project's main goals are to:

- Measure/track the quality and capacity of the federal workforce;
- Give agencies better tools to attract and develop top-level talent and keep high performers from leaving;
- Help improve workforce planning – the process of identifying workforce strengths and weaknesses and then addressing the weaknesses;
- Help build communities of interest across government and beyond to share knowledge, advocate for change and carry change forward;
- Elevate public dialogue and understanding about the importance of good government and the need for government to attract, develop and retain the talented people it needs to perform effectively; and
- Help document the links between federal human capital and government performance.



What *State of the Public Service* Will Measure and Why

Based on the consensus of thought leaders convened by the Partnership, the *State of the Public Service* initiative will focus on the following six critical areas for ensuring an effective workforce contributing to an effective government:

1. *Right talent.* Government must attract the best and brightest and also match employee skills and abilities with specific agency missions and goals;
2. *An engaged workforce.* Hiring top talent into government is critical but is not enough to deliver results. Talented people must be engaged and empowered to use their talent;
3. *Strong leadership.* As one thought leader said, “You can have the best people in the world but you have to have good leadership.” This is an area where research shows that the public sector lags well behind the private sector;
4. *Effective systems and structures.* Even the most talented and highly-motivated people cannot succeed if the systems and structures they operate within prevent them from being effective;
5. *Public support.* Broad public support for effective government service will not only encourage talented people to serve, but will also drive policymaker interest. If constituents demand effective government, lawmakers will spend more time promoting constructive solutions; and
6. *High performance.* The ultimate measure of our federal workforce is how well people do their jobs delivering services to the American public and implementing policies that strengthen our nation. This is undoubtedly the most important area to measure, but also the most difficult.

Taken together, the first four areas comprise a core set of workforce factors that can substantially affect the level of performance within agencies and government wide. The two remaining areas are essential for additional reasons. *Public support* represents government’s connection to the people it serves while *high performance* is the result government should regularly strive for—the culmination of a well-managed workforce in action

We have seen through our previous work and through the growing attention to results and the actions it has spurred among federal agencies, what the Partnership can achieve through innovative ideas, rigorous analysis, and strategic collaboration. Our takeaways from that work – especially from our *Best Places to Work* project – support our expectations for the *State of the Public Service* by demonstrating that:

- The public is hungry for information about government performance;
- Clear data that compare federal agency performance can focus the attention of agency decision makers, leaders and federal employees—all of whom are important change agents—and help gather broad support for change;
- Independently collected and analyzed information has strong credibility; and
- Federal agencies want outside help to improve and learn.