

SECTION 250—AGENCY PRIORITY GOALS

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Summary of Changes

New section content has been taken and updated from OMB [Memorandum-11-31](#)

Establishes planning guidance for development of new Agency Priority Goals for the FY 2015 Budget

250.1 To which agencies does this section apply?

The GPRA Modernization Act requires the 24 Federal agencies covered by the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act 1990 to submit Agency Priority Goal (APG) information to OMB and to review progress on the APGs at least on a quarterly basis. The GPRA Modernization Act gives the OMB Director discretion to determine which agencies need or do not need to set Priority Goals.

While non-CFO Act agencies and agency components are not required to set Agency Priority Goals, OMB encourages all agencies to follow the practice of prioritizing the goals they have in their strategic

and annual plans and to adopt the measurement and management practices that are established for the Priority Goals. These practices include organization leaders and other managers frequently reviewing progress on specific priorities to figure out how to improve performance and resolve problems.

250.2 What is an Agency Priority Goal?

An Agency Priority Goal (APG) supports improvements in near-term outcomes, customer service, or efficiencies, and advances progress toward longer-term, outcome-focused strategic goals and objectives in the agency's Strategic Plan. It is a near-term result or achievement that leadership wants to accomplish within approximately 24 months that relies predominantly on agency execution to be accomplished, not new legislation or additional funding. Agency Priority Goals reflect the top implementation-focused, performance improvement priorities of agency leadership and the Administration, and therefore do not reflect the full scope of the agency mission.

The need to identify Agency Priority Goals stimulates conversations and requires decisions about agency priorities, trade-offs, measurement, evidence, strategies, timing, and those responsible for leading implementation efforts. At least quarterly reviews of progress on Agency Priority Goals led by agency leaders are intended to keep all levels of the organization focused on the goals and ensure that sufficient time, resources, and attention are allotted to addressing specific problems or opportunities related to the goal.

The identification of a limited number of Agency Priority Goals does not mean that other agency goals are unimportant. Agencies may have important goals in their Strategic Plans or performance plans as well as legislative and policy priorities. They may also have other priorities that do not lend themselves well to specific, measurable, near-term targets. Agencies should consider all agency goals and activities on a spectrum of priority levels and allocate resources and management attention accordingly.

250.3 What primary criteria must agencies use in their setting Agency Priority Goals?

Agency Priority Goals must:

1. Advance priorities for agency leadership and the Administration;
2. Rely predominantly on strong agency execution to be accomplished, not new legislation or additional funding;
 - Align with the resource levels proposed in the President's Budget (or as appropriated by Congress)
3. Support improvements in near-term outcomes, customer service, or efficiencies, and advance progress toward longer-term outcome-focused goals in the agency's Strategic Plan;
 - The submission to OMB demonstrates how the Agency Priority Goal supports a strategic objective included in the agency Strategic Plan
 - The goal statement clearly identifies the problem or opportunity the agency is trying to address and is framed in a way that can be easily understood by the public
4. Be able to discern if the goal has been achieved by the end of the 24-month period;
 - The Agency Priority Goal has indicators and quarterly milestones to track progress
 - The goal statement has a clear completion date, target, and indicator(s) (which can be measured or marked by a milestone to gauge progress)
5. Be ambitious yet achievable within the 24 month period.

OMB encourages agencies to develop clear and concise goal statements that will drive and easily communicate performance improvement throughout the agency and to external audiences. However, if an agency strongly believes that multiple targets in the goal statement are integral to achieving the goal or an alternative form performance goal is warranted, the agency should discuss with OMB.

250.4 What additional criteria should agencies consider when developing Agency Priority Goals?

Agencies should consider several additional criteria when developing Agency Priority Goals:

- Objectives set forth in the President’s State of the Union Address and Executive Orders;
- The views and priorities of Congress and other stakeholders;
- Whether quarterly, data-driven or milestone-checking reviews are likely to speed progress on the goal;
- Areas where cross-component or cross-agency coordination is needed to improve outcomes;
- Potential to improve understanding of the agency’s impact on people or communities;
- Potential to improve efficiencies by:
 - Maintaining a level of performance at a lower cost
 - Improving performance levels at a lower cost
 - Improving performance levels at the same cost
 - Improving performance levels to a greater degree than costs are increased;
- Potential to reduce unnecessary overlap and duplication.

250.5 Do all Agency Priority Goals have to address outcomes?

Agency Priority Goals should support improved outcomes which can include the quality of agency interactions with the public, improvements in the effectiveness or efficiency of agency operations or the achievement of the agency’s long-term goals described in its Strategic Plan. When output goals are used, the agency must have appropriately robust evidence demonstrating a link between the output and the outcome goal or well-developed logic showing how progress on the output targets is likely to influence the outcomes, with a plan to confirm the logic over the longer term.

250.6 For what purpose will OMB review selection of the Agency Priority Goals?

OMB will review proposed Agency Priority Goals by the criteria outlined above, as well as for submission completeness, quality, and the ambitiousness of the target. Ultimately, Agency Priority Goals should reflect the priorities of the agency’s senior leaders and the Administration, informed by the views of Congress and other stakeholders.

250.7 How many Agency Priority Goals should agencies have?

Agencies should identify between 2 and 8 Agency Priority Goals. When determining the number of goals, each agency should consider:

- Agency size and scope; and

- Input, as appropriate, from congressional authorizers and appropriators, OMB, White House policy councils, program and management leadership, delivery partners, the public, and other key stakeholders.

250.8 What time period do Agency Priority Goals span?

The Agency Priority Goals are two year goals, although they can contribute to longer-term goals. [Indicators](#) used to track progress against the goals should cover the full fiscal year to the extent possible, and quarterly indicators and/or milestones will follow the fiscal year quarters. Agencies may choose monthly indicators and milestones, if preferred. Agency Priority Goals for FY 2012 and 2013 were published along with the FY 2013 President’s Budget in February 2012.

250.9 What is the relationship of Agency Priority Goals to the agency Strategic Plan, Annual Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report?

Agency Priority Goals are a subset of an agency’s [performance goals](#) and should be those that represent the highest implementation priorities of the agency leader and the Administration and are not dependent on new legislation or new funding to accomplish within a 24-month period. In most cases, Agency Priority Goals will directly contribute to the advancement of at least one [strategic objective](#).

Agency Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans should reflect agency priorities, including incorporation of the Agency Priority Goals. Agencies should discuss progress made in the Annual Performance Report. (See section [210.14](#) for details).

250.10 What happens to the old Agency Priority Goals after the two-year performance period has ended and a new set of Agency Priority Goals is established?

The current FY 2012-2013 Agency Priority Goals will be archived at the end of FY 2013. Agencies may want to continue to track progress on ‘retired’ Agency Priority Goals and related indicators as part of their Annual Performance Report.

In some cases, agencies may choose to set a new target for a previous Agency Priority Goal after an initial two-year performance cycle has been completed. When setting new Agency Priority Goals, agencies may opt to reset, reframe, or maintain an existing goal if needed.

250.11 What is the relationship between Agency Priority Goals and the FY 2013 President’s Budget or the FY 2014 President’s Budget?

The process for determining, reviewing, and executing Agency Priority Goals complements the budget process. FY 2012-2013 Agency Priority Goal development was linked to the FY 2013 budget submission process, and agencies were asked to align targets with the resource levels proposed in the FY 2012 President’s Budget (or as appropriated by Congress) and the FY 2013 President’s Budget. If Congress enacts a FY 2013 resource level that differs significantly from the FY 2013 President’s Budget, agencies may elect to align FY 2013 targets with FY 2013 enacted levels. To ensure ongoing alignment with Administration budget policy, some targets may need to be revised during the 2014 budget process, following annual appropriations, or after the enactment of significant authorizations.

However, agencies should choose Priority Goals that rely predominantly on implementation and do not require new legislative authority or significant additional funding. This does not preclude the agency from selecting a Priority Goal in an area for which the agency is also requesting additional funding; however the success of the goal should not depend on new funding. Agencies can pursue goals that require new legislation or funding, but those goals should be reflected in the strategic and Annual Performance Plans

and such requests should be made through normal legislative and budget channels. While the FY 2012-2013 Agency Priority Goal second-year targets will be reviewed as part of the FY 2014 budget process, programs supporting Priority Goals are not specifically protected during the FY 2014 budget deliberations.

250.12 What Agency Priority Goal information will be made public?

Information on the FY 2012-2013 Priority Goals was published concurrent with the FY 2013 President's Budget in February 2012. Beginning this fall, the information will be expanded to include the goal's strategies, indicators, contributing programs, external factors, and description of congressional consultation. In addition, a progress update, next steps, and future will be published each quarter. (See section [210.14](#) for more detail).

250.13 Are agencies required to include specific quantitative targets within the Agency Priority Goal statement?

A quantitative [target](#) within a goal statement (e.g.; how much of what by when, possibly narrowing by indicating where and/or for whom) is strongly encouraged, as it helps the organization focus on specific actions needed to achieve the goal. However, [alternative form](#) or qualitative goal statements may be appropriate in certain cases. Such alternative form goal statements may be supported by milestones that make it possible to assess if progress is being made or, in other circumstances, progress across a suite of [indicators](#). Agencies are encouraged to include baseline data in the goal statement (e.g., reduce by 10 percent from a 2010 level of baseline), although goals for which data collection will be initiated but for which the data are not yet available are acceptable, provided dates for initiating or continuing data collection are set as milestones.

250.14 Do all Agency Priority Goals (APGs) have to relate to a Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goal?

No. In order for the Federal Government to make progress towards its [Cross-Agency Priority Goals](#), some agencies will have goals that contribute to the CAP Goal, but not all Agency Priority Goals will directly contribute to a CAP Goal.

250.15 When should agencies begin developing new Agency Priority Goals?

OMB, agencies, the [Performance Improvement Council](#) and relevant policy councils established Agency and Cross-Agency Priority Goals with the FY 2013 President's Budget. Agencies will be required to establish a new set of FY 2014-2015 Agency Priority Goals during the development of the FY 2015 President's Budget.

Agencies will be expected to submit to OMB and the PIC the agency's initial draft Priority Goal issue areas in early summer 2013 to enable communication during goal development and in context of the agency's new draft Strategic Plan. Agencies will define the Agency Priority Goals as part of the FY 2015 budget process and should include the draft goals in the agency's Annual Performance Plan draft submission in September 2013. Most Agency Priority Goals will be finalized with the budget passback and appeals process before they are published in February 2014. While most Agency Priority Goals should be finalized along with passback, some may be affected by decisions made throughout the budget process. Therefore, some Agency Priority Goals may not be finalized until the publication of the FY 2015 President's Budget.

250.16 How much external stakeholder engagement is expected in Agency Priority Goals development?

Agencies are encouraged to consult with Congress, OMB and both Federal and non-Federal stakeholders early in the process, beginning in early summer 2013, and discuss possible goal areas before goals are finalized concurrent with the President's Budget. Agencies should consider stakeholder perspectives when formulating their goals. If stakeholder engagement is a significant barrier, this should be noted. Agencies should keep in mind the importance of engaging stakeholders who will be critical to the success of agency efforts, such as bureaus, employees, and delivery partners.

250.17 How should agencies engage Congress in the Agency Priority Goals development process?

Agencies should work with their legislative affairs offices to determine the best ways to consult with Congress on their Priority Goal areas, in advance of defining Agency Priority Goals with OMB. Agencies should consult with Congress, obtaining both majority and minority views from the appropriate authorizing, appropriations, and oversight committees, on Priority Goal issue areas, prior to submitting defined draft goals to OMB in September 2013, but should consult with the OMB examiner while planning for the timing of congressional outreach. Agencies may find it easiest to start discussions about the next set of Agency Priority Goals in the context of providing Congress an update on progress on the current set of APGs.

250.18 Can Agency Priority Goals be changed after they have been approved and published? If so, by what criteria and process?

In general, after they have been approved and published Agency Priority Goals should only be changed in exceptional circumstances. The possibility of missing a target is not a justification for a goal change. Possible justifications for a change include:

- The agency wants to make the goal more ambitious;
- The original goal included an error;
- Intervening events have had a significant impact on the agency's ability to accomplish the goal; or
- Enacted appropriations significantly changed the amount of funding available from levels projected during the goal setting process.

Proposed changes must be submitted in writing from the agency goal leader with the approval of the agency's Chief Operating Officer and Performance Improvement Officer. The goal change request will be directed to the OMB Chief Performance Office/Deputy Director for Management, the OMB Associate Director for Performance and Personnel Management and the relevant OMB Program Associate Director. Copies should be provided to the relevant OMB Deputy Associate Director(s), Branch Chief(s) and performance@omb.eop.gov. The letter should explain why the goal change is needed, what has changed since the goal was published concurrent with the President's Budget, why it is necessary to make the change and how the change will be explained to the public. Agencies will also have to post a short summary of the reasoning for a goal change on Performance.gov.

250.19 What information will be published on the FY 2012-2013 Agency Priority Goals?

In the fall of 2012, Performance.gov will be updated to reflect information required on Agency Priority Goals according to the GPRA Modernization Act. See section 210.14 for content that will be published on Performance.gov. Agencies will report progress to OMB on each APG six weeks after the end of each quarter, covering the period of the most recent quarter closed. See section [200.22](#) for expected publication timeframes; this will be supplemented by a Technical Users Guide with more detail for Performance.gov.