

STATE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE



STATE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE CONFERENCE

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

JUNE 2007



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonprofit organization that works to revitalize federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Americans need effective government now more than ever. Yet, too often, we don't know how capable, or incapable, our government is until it fails spectacularly as it did in its response to Hurricane Katrina. We need a measurement system for the health of our government that provides greater transparency, or else we are likely to have this experience repeated again and again.

One area where new measurement tools are most needed is the state of our federal civil service. Good government starts with good people. But we currently lack a comprehensive system of metrics to tell us if our government has the right people with the right skills to get the work of the American people done right. One of the few leading measurements of our civil service that does actually exist is cause for great concern: The federal workforce is significantly older than the overall U.S. labor pool. As baby boomers begin to retire in the next few years, our government will face the biggest exodus of experienced talent in history.

In an effort to better understand the health of our civil service, the Partnership for Public Service convened the *State of the Public Service* Conference on June 29-30, 2006. Sponsored and co-hosted by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund at its Pocantico, New York Conference Center, the conference brought together experts from the government, private sector, nonprofit and academic worlds to explore how to create a set of national indicators for the health of the federal workforce.

The Partnership greatly appreciates the support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the commitment of the prestigious group of participants (listed in appendix I) who devoted two days to an intensive discussion of performance metrics in government. The group agreed that such a measurement system is necessary and, most significantly, reached consensus about what the core elements of an indicator system to measure the health of our civil service should be.

After a rich discussion in which the participants responded to a “strawman” proposal, the group concluded that the indicator system should measure six essential “pillars” of an effective government:

1. **The right talent** — Is government getting not only the best people, but also the right talent with the skills and abilities to help agencies achieve their goals?
2. **An engaged workforce** — Is the federal workforce engaged and using its abilities to deliver results?
3. **Strong leadership** — Are senior government leaders inspiring and empowering workers to perform at their best?
4. **Public support** — Does the public support our government and do top job candidates view the federal government as an employer of choice?
5. **Systems and structures** — Is the federal government's infrastructure enabling or inhibiting workers from doing their jobs well?
6. **High performance** — How well are federal workers doing their job of delivering services to the American people, and promoting and implementing policies that strengthen our nation?

In breakout sessions, participants identified possible metrics within each pillar. Some metrics already exist and others need to be created. The group concluded that a preliminary report on the *State of the Public Service*, based largely on existing data, can and should be released in 2008. There was also agreement that for any indicator system to be meaningful, it has to be repeatable over time and overseen by an independent, credible organization with a long-term commitment to the project.

This report summarizes the conference discussions and provides additional background information about indicator systems and the use of metrics in the federal government. The Partnership hopes that the findings and ideas coming out of the forum and captured in this report will serve as the foundation of a new indicator system that will enable federal leaders to manage their workforces proactively, instead of waiting for the next failure to tell us where the problems are.

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you have a car that keeps running out of gas at the worst possible time. Imagine that very same car didn't have a gas gauge to tell you that you had a fuel problem. To put an end to these breakdowns, what would you do? That's easy. You would get a new gas gauge!

In many ways, this scenario parallels the state of our federal government. Over the past few years, our federal government has fallen into a pattern where it doesn't learn how effective, or ineffective, it is until something breaks down. That was true with Enron, Worldcom and the accounting scandals. It was true with Hurricane Katrina. One of the main reasons agencies keep getting blindsided is a lack of meaningful measurements to tell us how healthy, or unhealthy, our federal agencies are. Basically, much of the federal government is a car heading out on a long road trip without a working gas gauge. So what does the federal government need to do? That's easy. Get a gas gauge that works.

The figurative gas gauge proposed in this paper is a comprehensive indicator system to measure the health of our federal government. More specifically, we need a measurement system for the quality of our federal civil service. Why the civil service? Because good government starts with good people. The Government Accountability Office articulated this point succinctly when it wrote, "The people working for government are the most important asset in addressing the emerging challenges facing the nation."

In an effort to make this indicator system for our federal workforce a reality, the Partnership for Public Service convened the *State of the Public Service* Conference on June 29-30, 2006. The event was co-hosted by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund at its Pocantico, New York Conference Center. The conference brought together experts from the government, private sector, nonprofit and academic worlds to explore how to create a set of national indicators for the health of the federal workforce. These indicators must be widely accepted as relevant, outcome-oriented and useful in driving change and shaping policy. An indicator system can, by its very nature, facilitate an increasingly effective, productive and energized federal workforce.

The Partnership greatly appreciates the support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the commitment of the

prestigious group of participants, who devoted the better part of two days engaging in an intensive discussion of performance metrics in government.

This report summarizes the conference discussions and conclusions, including ideas about the greatest challenges facing our civil service, potential metrics and how to move the *State of the Public Service* project forward.

Now is the time to undertake the *State of the Public Service* effort. Not only does a civil service without a measurement system make about as much sense as a car without a gas gauge, but an unprecedented number of experienced federal workers will soon retire. This presents an enormous challenge — but is also a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalize our federal service. We need to build this indicator system now so that our federal policymakers can make the informed decisions necessary to build a federal service that the public deserves and the times demand.

OVERVIEW OF THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

As an entry-point to this discussion on revitalizing our government service, it is important to understand the general makeup of the current federal workforce.

As of December 2006, the federal government employed 1.85 million civil servants. A good example of the U.S. government's importance in the national labor market is illustrated in a 2004 study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers of the nation's top ten entry-level employers. Four of the top ten were government agencies: The Federal Bureau of Investigation ranked third, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services fourth, the Social Security Administration sixth and U.S. Customs and Border Protection tenth. Companies such as Lockheed Martin and Boeing, which work closely with government, also ranked in the top ten.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, more than four out of five federal employees (86 percent) actually work *outside* the Washington, D.C. area. The biggest concentrations of federal jobs outside of the capital are in Norfolk-Newport News, Virginia; Baltimore; Philadelphia; Atlanta and San Diego. The states with the most federal jobs are California, Virginia, Texas, Maryland and Florida.

Federal employees work in 15 cabinet-level agencies; 20 large independent agencies (defined as having more than 1,000 employees); and 41 small agencies (fewer than 1,000 employees). The departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs employ the largest number of permanent civilian federal workers — 611,395 and 211,365, respectively.

As in the private sector, the federal workforce is getting older. However, the problem is more acute in the federal government. Nearly 60 percent of federal employees are over age 45, compared to 40 percent in the private sector. The graying federal workforce is also an imbalanced workforce. Whereas three-fifths of civil servants are age 45 or older, only three percent of the federal workforce is 25 or younger.

The federal workforce is diverse racially and ethnically. Sixty-nine percent of federal workers are white; seventeen percent are African-American, seven percent are Hispanic, five percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and two percent are Native American.

The federal workforce is also highly skilled, and the average federal salary is \$62,000. Eighty-nine percent is white collar. Eleven percent of the federal workforce is also composed of managers and supervisors. Twenty-two percent of federal employees have “veteran’s preference.”

Despite some of the federal government’s successes, it still faces major challenges. Although the United States population continues to grow, the federal workforce has increased by only 88,000 employees since September of 2001. There were 234,000 new hires to the federal government in 2005, but only 30 percent of them joined the full-time permanent workforce. These additions were offset by the 232,000 employees who left the federal government in 2005, with 90,000 quitting and 62,000 retiring. Almost half of those who left government were full-time permanent employees. More attrition is sure to come, as it is currently projected that the looming retirement wave will peak around 2010.

THE VALUE OF AN INDICATOR SYSTEM TO PROMOTE AN EFFECTIVE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

This report’s introduction highlights how government sometimes fails, with Hurricane Katrina as one critical example, without warning. However, that situation is just one example of why we need an indicator system to identify where we need to take action to improve the performance of the federal government workforce, and the federal government itself.

Another compelling reason is the old adage that “what gets measured, gets changed, and what doesn’t, remains the same” still holds true. And when it comes to the federal workforce, not enough gets fully measured, and too many problems remain unchanged. As New York University’s Paul Light put it, “The ultimate measure of the health of the federal civil service is whether its employer cares enough to conduct more than the occasional cursory checkup. By that measure the federal workforce is not healthy at all.”

There is not a total lack of information about the federal government’s human capital needs. There is actually plenty of data available on the federal workforce, but this information is not systematically organized, evaluated and disseminated in a meaningful way to all of the key audiences. An indicator system for our federal workforce is the logical solution to this problem.

The value of indicator systems as effective tools to drive reform has been widely documented. In November 2004, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a comprehensive report on the use of indicator systems at the national, state and local levels. The report outlines how indicator systems have been instrumental in driving improvements in areas such as the economy, education, health and the environment.

More specifically, the report details a number of ways in which indicator systems appear to be driving change.

Enhancing collaboration

Indicator systems have helped break down detrimental barriers between organizations. In Chicago, authority over the region’s transportation policy was fragmented among multiple state and local entities. After an indicator system quantified the area’s current and projected traffic congestion problems and the need for holistic solutions, a multi-jurisdictional task force was created that has transformed transportation planning in the region, helping to establish a more coherent regional system.

Promoting accountability to drive action

Indicator systems are used to assess whether or not organizations are achieving stated goals and to highlight instances where progress is not being made. The European Union (EU) measures and compares how well member nations meet certain economic, environmental and social goals. After the EU reported that Spain was lagging other countries in its efforts to reduce social disparities among men and women, Spanish officials implemented

new policies to help raise employment rates among women.

Informing decision-making

Both public and private organizations use indicator systems to make better-informed policy decisions. The Boston Indicators Project is providing data used extensively by local foundations and government to inform spending decisions. For example, based on needs identified by the Boston project, a foundation awarded a major grant to improve housing in Boston's Roxbury section.

While government officials are increasingly using indicator systems, it appears that no government has fully implemented a comprehensive set of measurements for its civilian workforce. Considering that an effective workforce is the most important ingredient of an effective government, this is not only surprising, but it is increasingly unacceptable.

CORE PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING THE INDICATOR SYSTEM

It is important at the outset to establish the core defining principles for this indicator system. The Partnership believes that there are five core principles that must apply to any effective indicator system to measure the health of our federal civil service.

Independent

A core motivation of an indicator system is to create a consistent set of metrics that will be maintained over time. An independent system will send a strong message that indicators will not expire at the end of any four-year-term. Engaging credible, independent partners will also enhance the indicator system's credibility with the general public.

Understandable

One of the primary goals of the *State of the Public Service* project is to engage key stakeholders on the issue of federal workforce revitalization. To do so, the indicator system will need to be compiled and presented in a way that is easily understandable by all potential audiences and, in particular, by the general public. This principle is particularly salient considering that a great deal of information about the health of our civil service is already available, but its impact has been limited because it is used primarily, if not exclusively, by internal audiences.

Repeatable

Longitudinal data ultimately tells stakeholders which way the arrow is moving and drives change. Ensuring that the indicators are repeatable over time will provide longitudinal data and a mechanism for holding people accountable for results. It will also distinguish this project from previous efforts. One of the goals of this project is to create a *State of the Public Service* report to be released in 2008. This report is intended to be the most comprehensive report card to date on the health of our civil service. But, follow-up research must also systemically and periodically update these results, or the report will suffer the same fate of previous efforts, most notably the Volcker Commission of 1989 and its 2003 follow up, both of which only briefly drew attention to the "silent crisis" in our federal workforce.

Comparable

Much of the data available about the federal workforce lacks meaning because it lacks context. To identify the unique challenges facing the federal workforce, indicators must be comparable to past government performance, the private sector and foreign governments.

Consequential

It's not enough to generate data that people understand. For the indicator system to be meaningful, people also need to understand why it matters. The indicator system will have to draw clear connections between the workforce characteristics being measured and the quality of the services being provided to the American people. Making and reinforcing this connection in the minds of the public will be a powerful tool for driving reform and sustaining attention on this topic.

THE STATE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE CONFERENCE: DECIDING WHAT TO MEASURE

On June 29-30, 2006, more than twenty experts representing the government, private sector, nonprofit, philanthropic and academic worlds (see list of participants in appendix I) joined together at the Rockefeller Brother Fund's Pocantico, NY Conference Center for the *State of the Public Service* Conference. The Partnership decided that the best approach was to focus on two fundamental questions:

1. What are the core elements of an indicator system that will measure the health of our civil service?
2. What are the next steps to build it?

The conference began with a plenary session to answer the first question. The lead-in to that discussion was a debate about what an effective civil service looks like. To fuel ideas, the Partnership also submitted a “strawman” indicator system for the group to analyze and discuss. The plenary session continued until the group reached consensus on the six core “pillars” of an effective civil service and the key items a *State of the Public Service* indicator system should measure. Those six pillars:

1. **The right talent** — Is government getting not only the best people, but also the right talent with the skills and abilities to help agencies achieve their goals?
2. **An engaged workforce** — Is the federal workforce engaged and using its abilities to deliver results?
3. **Strong leadership** — Are senior government leaders inspiring and empowering workers to perform at their best?
4. **Public support** — Does the public support our government and do top job candidates view the federal government as an employer of choice?
5. **Systems and structures** — Is the federal government's infrastructure enabling or inhibiting workers from doing their jobs well?
6. **High performance** — How well are federal workers doing their job of delivering services to the American people, and promoting and implementing policies that strengthen our nation?

Once consensus was reached on the pillars, participants split into two smaller groups for breakout sessions. At the first breakout session, conferees discussed what we would want to know within each pillar. During the

second breakout session, they were asked to drill deeper and suggest specific metrics. After each of the two breakout sessions, the groups reported back to the larger body.

The conference closed with a plenary discussion about the next steps for the project.

The following is a summary of what participants said at the conference and their recommendations on each of the six pillars.

WHAT DOES AN EFFECTIVE FEDERAL WORKFORCE LOOK LIKE?

If the ultimate goal is to create a highly effective federal civil service, it is important to define just what that means. In the opening plenary session, conferees were asked to offer their definition of a high-quality workforce. There was broad consensus that an effective government workforce is motivated by the public good, not security or a stable paycheck; motivated to use its discretionary energy toward job-related activities; given the tools to do its job well; and trusted by the people and the leaders it serves.

The Pocantico conferees stressed that government also needs to be flatter, more results-oriented and more accountable. Participants agreed that the work of the federal government will continue to require higher and higher skill levels. Currently, three out of every four federal employees are knowledge workers, and this proportion will increase. This knowledge-based workforce means that it is more important than ever to have talented people in government.

Federal employees, like employees in all sectors, must be technically competent. They must also demonstrate other qualities — they must be committed, creative, credible, caring, resourceful, responsive, and results-oriented.

However, public service is also about a deeper set of values and motivations. In a sense, the common good is government's bottom line. And, the federal government needs to tap into these values to attract, engage and retain talent. One interesting issue raised by a participant was the prospect that some form of mandatory public service was necessary to get the American people thinking about “we” and not “me.” The speaker stressed that this doesn't mean just government service alone, but could include working at a non-governmental organization, serving in the military or becoming a teacher.

One participant described an effective workforce as one where employees are willing to devote their “discretionary energy” to their work in the federal government. However, this energy has to be directed toward achieving their agencies’ missions and goals. When the interests of employees and management overlap, the result is consensus on achieving goals.

At one participant’s agency, recruiters try to assess motivation and interest by asking candidates how they measure success and what they want in a job. If there is alignment, there is commitment.

And that’s where leadership comes in. As one conference participant put it, “You can have the best people in the world but you have to have good leadership and organizational structure.” There is a serious leadership problem in government — many are promoted because of technical expertise, whether or not they have the skills to lead. One conference participant also cautioned against confusing management with leadership. Leadership is setting the agenda; management is guiding to get things done. Critical attributes for leadership include courage, integrity and the commitment to be responsible stewards.

In addition to good leadership, the right organizational culture, systems and structures must be in place to build and maintain a good workforce. In a healthy culture, where people are invested and empowered, anything is possible. Effective organizations must also have systems and structures that enable, and encourage, good performers to succeed.

Of course, any discussion of the workforce must also consider how to attract, engage and retain younger workers, the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. The current conventional wisdom is that many young people won’t stay anywhere longer than three years. However, if we give talented young people the right tools, make work rewarding, and provide good leadership, they will stay longer. In fact, the federal government does offer mobility and advancement opportunities that can attract and keep talented younger workers. To take advantage of these opportunities, according to one conference participant, we need a public service whose “borders are more open.”

Finally, federal employers shouldn’t overlook the mundane — a nice place to work, and necessary tools including access to technology. Simple things make a difference and can have long-term benefits.

As one observer concluded at the conference, “The federal government is always going to be able to fill vacancies. The more important question is whether we can fill them with talented and committed people with the skills we need.”

MEASURING THE HEALTH OF THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE — THE SIX PILLARS

With these concepts in mind, conference participants identified six essential “pillars” of effective government that should be measured by a *State of the Public Service* indicator system. As the conference deliberations show, there are many potential indicators to support each pillar. Despite the variety of possible measures, conference attendees strongly agreed that the indicators must lead to action. That means, among other things, that for each indicator we need to identify who is accountable and what the standard (benchmark) is for success.

The following section summarizes what conferees suggested we need to know regarding each pillar and their ideas for measurement. It also contains relevant information contained in the pre-conference report.

THE RIGHT TALENT

GOAL

GOVERNMENT HAS THE RIGHT PEOPLE — FROM TOP TO BOTTOM — WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS TO GET THE JOB DONE

Attracting highly-qualified people to public service is important, but even more crucial is understanding the extent that an employee is well-matched to his or her job. A Nobel Prize laureate (and the U.S. government has produced surprisingly many) may be distinguished in a specific field, but still fail miserably at being a manager. A key challenge is to identify data that, directly or indirectly, would help assess this person/job match.

The breakout session identified a number of things we would like to know that could help to determine if government has the right talent.

For instance, an understanding of the flow of talent coming into government from outside sectors could prove very useful. More specifically, it would be helpful to know how much is coming into government and from where that talent is coming. The flow of talent from outside government was described as the “market test” for the attractiveness of government jobs. In addition, a profile of the people who are leaving government would reveal the sources of government’s retention challenges.

A building block of any attempt to measure if government has the right talent would be an analysis of the current talent stock. This analysis should focus extra

attention on identifying high performers and how well they retain these workers. Special emphasis should be also placed on the quality of the workforce in critical occupations, such as foreign language translators. This review would help to reveal the talent gaps in the current workforce.

On a related point, constantly refreshing projections of future hiring demands and future talent gaps would enable government to be more proactive, rather than reactive in its efforts to secure the right talent. One participant also said that these reviews should examine whether or not there are shortages/surpluses and what the levels of expertise are.

One factor that might be difficult to measure, but was deemed worth the effort, is whether or not employees are a good fit. The idea is that it would be valuable to do a check-in survey with hiring managers 3-6 months after a new hire to see if the new employee is a good fit. Managers will be reluctant to admit mistakes, so it will take extra effort to ensure the anonymity of the managers being surveyed.

Finally, measuring the diversity of the workforce is important to ensure that government reflects the diversity of the nation.

Some of the specific metrics proposed as possible indicators to gauge whether government has the right talent include employee surveys to assess if managers and employees think they have the right talent; measures of recruiting effectiveness (e.g., number of qualified applicants per job, percentage of first-offers accepted, and ratio of acceptances to job offers); productivity (outputs per hour worked); and retirement projections.

The pre-conference report highlights the Government Accountability Office’s human capital metrics as an example of how some federal agencies are already measuring their talent stock. The measures include:

- **New hire rate** — ratio of new employees hired to the number of planned hires.
- **Acceptance rate** — ratio of acceptances to offers made.
- **Retention rate** — percentage of staff that stays with the agency.
- **Staff development** — based on staff responses to four questions on the annual employee survey. These questions ask employees to rate the impact of internal training, computer-based training, external training and on-the-job training.

AN ENGAGED WORKFORCE

GOAL

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYS ENERGETIC AND ENGAGED EMPLOYEES WHO DELIVER RESULTS

Employee engagement is commonly seen as being closely tied to organizational performance, although that link can be exceedingly difficult to establish in the public sector. Private sector companies devote considerable resources to measuring engagement.

Breakout team members said the biggest factors to examine that will assess worker engagement are the level of commitment to the agency's mission and the sense that work is making a difference. Almost equally important is whether or not people feel connected to their co-workers. One conferee asked, "What motivates soldiers? It's not patriotism, as much as it's their buddies." Simply put, if people respect their co-workers they are more likely to stay and work hard. If they are dispirited by the people around them, they will not be engaged.

There was broad agreement within the breakout team that worker engagement measures would have to rely heavily on surveys. Participants suggested a series of possible questions, including:

- Do I have the right skills/tools?
- Am I getting the training I need?
- Am I challenged?
- Am I learning?
- Am I making a difference?
- Am I appreciated?
- Am I part of a team?
- Am I allowed to do my job?
- Do I have friends?
- Do I have the opportunity for advancement?

As identified in the pre-conference report, the Partnership for Public Service's *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings offer an excellent example of an engagement indicator based on employee survey data. These rankings, created in partnership with the American University Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation and U.S. News and World Report, use data from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's Federal Human Capital Survey of hundreds of thousands of federal employees to create an engagement

index for more than 280 federal agencies and subcomponents. These rankings have proven to be a useful tool for the agencies being measured as well as potential job seekers.

In addition to employee survey questions, conference participants also recommended using client surveys. It was also mentioned that there is hard data available to measure engagement. For example, it is possible to quantify the number of employee hours required to generate outputs. Turnover rates and "early" voluntary separation rates can also be useful indicators.

STRONG LEADERSHIP

GOAL

MANAGERS ARE ABLE TO INSPIRE AND MAKE MEANINGFUL AND CREDIBLE DISTINCTIONS AMONG EMPLOYEES IN TERMS OF PERFORMANCE

Successful leadership is critical to create effective workforces and effective workplaces. This is an area where research shows that the public sector lags behind the private sector. Corporate leadership development programs have been shown to produce returns on investment of up to 500 percent. The challenge for measuring leadership in the public sector is to establish equally effective indicators, including measuring the results that leaders produce. The Partnership's *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings already provide survey data on how federal employees feel about their leaders. GAO surveys its employees on leadership through questions such as, "My immediate supervisor gives me the opportunity to do what I do best," and "My supervisor provides meaningful incentives for good performance."

Conference participants stressed the need to distinguish between political leadership and career leadership. The Partnership is sponsoring additional research to assess whether differences in leadership (i.e., political appointees or civil servants) are linked to differences in employee satisfaction.

Other suggested measures of leadership effectiveness include:

- Attrition of top performers. If turnover is higher in specific organizational units, this could suggest leadership problems.
- The extent to which leaders develop and advance top performers.

- How successful (or unsuccessful) a leader is in clarifying the organization’s mission and inspiring people to achieve that mission.
- Respect for diversity and success in achieving workforce diversity.
- 360-degree evaluations that would include external stakeholders.
- Surveys of customers.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

GOAL

AMERICANS UNDERSTAND, VALUE AND SUPPORT FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING GOOD PEOPLE IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Public attitudes toward our government and toward federal employment have a direct bearing on the health of our public service.

Public support is a key driver of policymaker investment. If lawmakers know that broad public support for a first-rate civilian workforce is comparable to the support that exists for our military services, they will spend more time promoting constructive solutions and less time bashing bureaucrats.

Attitudes toward federal employment are also a key part of the federal recruiting climate. If federal service becomes more appealing, it’s reasonable to expect that larger numbers of qualified applicants will apply for hard-to-fill positions.

Measuring and comparing public opinion about government to similar feelings about the private sector would provide valuable insights into government’s unique challenges.

The suggested tactics to measure public support include national surveys that focus on issues like trust in government and interest in federal service. One participant commented that it is valuable to not only ask if people are interested in federal service, but whether they are “likely to recommend” government service, which may be much more meaningful.

It may also be useful to measure public attitudes about the value of specific government agencies and services. As one participant pointed out, since government is not a monolith it is worthwhile to ask questions about specific agencies. Some agencies are well respected, while

others are not. We need a better sense of which agencies fall into each category.

Surveys should also be done for students at America’s top universities since this is a cohort government must reach.

Another recommended measurement was customer satisfaction. The University of Michigan’s American Customer Service Index already tracks opinions of some agencies, so some metrics already exist in this category.

It was also suggested that it could be useful to track media coverage of the federal government (e.g., percentage of positive/negative stories).

SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

GOAL

GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES SHOULD EMPOWER, NOT INHIBIT FEDERAL WORKERS

Even the best, most highly motivated people can’t succeed if the systems and structures they operate within hold them back. One way to approach assessing this pillar is to first identify a set of “ideal” government systems and structures. These could range from human resource systems (e.g., recruiting and hiring, compensation, performance evaluation and management, training and development) to other areas such as organizational structure, financial management, and procurement. After identifying the desired systems and structures, the *State of the Public Service* approach can be to develop measures to quantify the gaps between where the federal government is, and where it needs to be.

More specific suggestions involved measuring government efficiency. Participants suggested examining the number of layers and organizational units within each agency and whether or not they have plans to reduce these numbers. Another suggestion was to measure the number of duplicative programs. Other measures included:

- Ratio of supervisors to employees;
- Number of steps necessary to complete critical processes; and
- Percentage of political appointees (one participant suggested measuring the technical expertise of political appointees).

A profile of pay and benefits was suggested. This should allow for comparisons to the private sector and others the federal government is competing against for talent. According to one participant, “Unless we go through the entire performance measurement system itself, we will have fallen down. We need to put performance measurement side by side with pay.”

It is worth noting that during the discussion on systems and structures, one issue was raised that falls outside the scope of the *State of the Public Service* project, but nonetheless must be considered. This is the relationship between civil servants and the contractor networks that are proliferating across the federal government.

HIGH PERFORMANCE

GOAL

GOVERNMENT IS INNOVATIVE AND PRODUCES RESULTS

The final pillar of an effective federal workforce — a high-performing government — is perhaps the most important, but it is also the most difficult pillar to measure. It is widely accepted that for human resources metrics to be meaningful they must, whenever feasible, be linked to agency goals and objectives. Obviously, government’s outcomes are tougher to measure than most private sector “bottom-line” financial results. Accordingly, public agencies have a far more difficult task documenting the contributions that investments in human capital make to mission accomplishment (i.e., versus private sector return on investment calculations). Despite progress in attempting to measure the success of government programs through the Government Performance and Results Act, and the *Program Assessment Rating Tool* (PART), the link between human capital and performance is still largely a leap of faith.

During the breakout session on performance, the group agreed that it would be helpful to build on, or tie into, other performance measurement efforts. One participant suggested tying the *State of the Public Service* to the National Academies’ *Key National Indicators Initiative* on the grounds that linking to a larger initiative would enhance the odds of creating something that will survive.

Participants discussed ways to improve our government’s primary existing performance measurement tool — PART. One idea is that PART, or a similar performance measurement tool, would need to be more inde-

pendent to have maximum impact. While the administration should be commended for trying to grade the performance of the government programs it manages, there is no question that those grades would have more credibility if the organization handing out the grades were not that same administration.

Another recommendation was that rather than measure the performance of individual programs or agencies, we should grade performance by function. This would be critical for making the indicators more understandable and consequential for the public. The average American doesn’t care how the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is doing its job, per se, but the “person on the street” is exceedingly interested in knowing what kind of job our government is doing to ensure food safety.

Participants agreed that it is important that performance measurements should have an accountability mechanism. If actions will be taken when a measurement system shows that an agency is performing poorly, that will be a powerful incentive for agencies to improve.

While measuring performance is very difficult in a public sector setting, it is critically important to try, because success contributes to better performance, a better brand, better recruitment and better public support.

NEXT STEPS

At the close of the conference, participants discussed what the next *State of the Public Service* steps should be. It is important to note that the attendees agreed there is a critical need for these indicators, and the sooner these metrics are developed, the better.

The group agreed that initial steps should build on pre-existing activity around measurement. More specifically, we must look closely at PART, the Partnership's *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings and OPM's *Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework* (HCAAF). The latter requires all agencies to maintain a current human capital plan and submit to OPM an annual human capital accountability report providing assessments against established HR metrics for five interrelated human capital systems. The Executive Branch Management Scorecard, which gives each federal agency a grade of "green" for success, "yellow" for mixed results, and "red" for unsatisfactory in five government-wide management categories, should also be examined.

One other recommendation was to look at central governments in other nations to study their measurement activities. This will not only help spur ideas about how and what to measure, but could also eventually help establish international benchmarks so our government can see how it's doing compared to other nations.

Another critical early step is to catalog the measurements that will be needed and decide which ones already exist and which will need to be created. Once this list has been formulated it should be shared with key stakeholders to ensure there is consensus that these are the right measurements.

One specific idea for helping to get a better grasp on the task at hand was to convince a Congressional committee to hold a hearing on the measurement activities of one of the agencies it oversees. This effort could also help build support for the project on Capitol Hill.

The conferees agreed that someone needs to "step up" and take the lead to make all of this happen. The Partnership for Public Service appears to be a logical choice to fill that role. Of course, the Partnership can't do this alone. Therefore, it will be necessary to partner with other organizations committed to transforming government.

For example, the Partnership will work with:

- An advisory committee initially composed of attendees from the *State of the Public Service* Conference and federal agencies (particularly OPM and OMB, to build on and extend their work on workforce and performance measurement).
- The Partnership's network of other federal agency leaders, including Chief Human Capital Officers;
- Established contacts in the Congress, to promote legislative changes that will improve the workforce and government performance; and
- The media, to communicate these results to key audiences.

Perhaps most important, the Partnership will reach out to secure the foundation support that will be essential to move this project forward.

Once the team is in place and funding is secured, the partners will begin to identify, collect and analyze data currently available to measure the six pillars. The Partnership's team will also develop and institutionalize systems to collect this information. The current goal is to release an initial *State of the Public Service* report in 2008. The measures and the data to support them will be continually analyzed and refined. The Partnership will widely communicate results through reports, an interactive Web site and other media. We will also work with stakeholders to identify and put in place changes to improve the federal workforce, and therefore improve federal government performance.

An immediate goal of the *State of the Public Service* initiative is to create the indicators report. However, it is important to reiterate that, at the end of the day, this project is about something bigger. It is about building a more innovative, effective federal workforce that will help our country overcome its biggest challenges. The Partnership's goal is not "just" to build a new set of metrics. It is to create what President Jimmy Carter once called "a government as good as its people" — a government whose greatest strength is its diversity, a government driven by its common commitment to the core principles of justice and opportunity for all, a government whose innovative spirit is unparalleled in the world." When we help build that workforce, we will be able to claim success.

APPENDIX I

STATE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Sir Michael Barber, Partner, McKinsey & Company, Inc.

Tom Bernstein, President, Chelsea Piers LP

Patricia Bradshaw, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy, U.S. Department of Defense

Chad Bungard, Deputy Staff Director and Chief Counsel, House Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce and Agency Organization, U.S. House of Representatives

G. Edward DeSeve, Professor, Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania

John D. Donahue, Professor of Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Dr. Jesse Harriott, Vice President for Research, Monster.com

Stephen Heintz, President, Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Charlotte Kahn, Director and Co-Founder, The Boston Indicators Project

Steven Kerr, Chief Learning Officer, The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc.

Nancy Killefer, Senior Director and Washington Office Manager, McKinsey & Company, Inc.

Lance E. Lindblom, President and CEO, Nathan Cummings Foundation

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Tania A. Shand, Professional Staff Member, House Committee on Government Reform, Civil Service and Agency Organization Subcommittee, U.S. House of Representatives

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Benjamin R. Shute, Jr., Secretary, Rockefeller Brothers Fund

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