

Agencies have worked hard to comply with the results-oriented spirit of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). They have made good progress in developing better strategic and annual performance plans, and in reporting annual results.

They have even begun creating performance budgets.

The Office of Management and Budget has been active in promoting this

new accountability for performance and results. As part of its budget process, OMB has begun conducting performance-oriented oversight of agency programs that involves a systematic assessment of planning, management and results.

Unfortunately, a very important player in this effort to instill performance accountability in government remains largely AWOL: Congress. With few exceptions, congressional committees are not actively engaged in examining agency plans, performance and accountability

# A scorecard for Congress

## Time to grade committees on performance oversight

challenges, or program results. This inattention sends a disheartening message to the agencies — that Congress does not care about the performance of the programs it creates and funds. And if Congress does not care, why work so hard to develop clearer, more effective plans and more useful performance reports?

Congressional appropriators focus their attention almost entirely on the incremental increase in an agency's budget request over the previous year's funding level. They argue that with annual budget deadlines pending, they don't have time for broad, in-depth oversight hearings.

Authorization committees could help a great deal in filling this void, as oversight is one of their most important responsibilities. This would also benefit appropriators, who could use the oversight findings in their own deliberations. However, authorizers have generally shirked this role, focusing instead on developing new policies and programs. What so-called oversight they do tends to address specific problems in

a hunt for scandals and not the big picture of overall performance.

In an effort to motivate Congress to get more involved in conducting GPRA-related oversight, I have developed a scorecard for evaluating congressional performance ([www.governmentperformance.info/scorecard.htm](http://www.governmentperformance.info/scorecard.htm)). Why a scorecard? Because scorecards work. They may oversimplify some things, but scorecards do motivate effort to improve, especially when the results get press coverage.

The effectiveness of scorecards as both a guidance and motivational device can be seen in the recent experience of federal agencies. GPRA was launched government-wide with Congress scoring and awarding letter grades for departmental plans in 1997 and 1998. The Mercatus Center uses a scorecard annually to rate the quality of agency performance reports. Both the president's management agenda and the Program Assessment Rating Tool involve OMB's use of scorecards to rate agencies and programs. These have been

major motivators for agencies to take performance planning and accountability seriously and to mark steady improvement.

Now I believe it is Congress' turn. The Congressional Oversight of Management and Performance Accountability Scorecard, or COMPAS, points congressional committees toward more effective oversight of agencies and programs. The scorecard contains 12 issues that an oversight hearing should cover, with points on the COMPAS based on whether questions were asked covering each subject. The issues are assigned varying weights, with more points awarded for questions by a committee chairman.

The scorecard asks whether a committee held hearings that examined such issues as the agency's GPRA plan goals and past results, the effectiveness of agency strategies, the linkage of budget amounts to achievement of specific goals, processes for ensuring the accountability of managers, the quality of performance and financial information,

and major concerns raised in General Accounting Office and inspector general reports.

Under each issue, guidance is given on suggested questions. A letter grade may be awarded for the hearing, based on the total points earned out of a possible 100. The COMPAS also provides direction on giving an overall grade to a committee or subcommittee for its general oversight of performance by all agencies within its jurisdiction. To earn an A, a committee and its subcommittees would have to cover their full range of jurisdiction with effective oversight hearings over a four-year period.

The COMPAS is a nonpartisan, non-ideological tool for rating Congress's contribution to performance accountability in the use of the public's money. It is my hope that interested organizations, perhaps even a university graduate program, will apply this or a similar scoring methodology to congressional committees. Publishing the results would likely motivate Congress to get involved.

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