How to Improve Performance Management in Government
Government leaders at all levels know that the need for improved performance and operational efficiency is rapidly increasing. The passage of new requirements in the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRA), in tandem with the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA), has governmental and public sector organizations scurrying to build smarter infrastructure.

The expectation to deliver significant operational improvements is at an all-time high. Still, in today’s recovering economy, with limited budgets and staff, public sector and government leaders must learn to do more with less.

So, how are decision-makers tracking program performance outcomes and costs against their mission? How are organizations creating a disciplined way of monitoring programs with the ability to pivot on timely information? How is this information being communicated to constituents and citizens all within an increasingly complex technology environment?

Like most organizations, government agencies have historically accessed data via static reports from enterprise applications that are generally heavy, complex, inflexible, and must be managed by IT departments. As a result, many knowledge workers rely on spreadsheets as their primary analytical tool. The problem is that spreadsheets don’t offer meaningful or actionable insight in a timely manner to leaders, decision-makers or workers on the ground.

Data-driven decisions are only helpful if people can understand and communicate insights in time to take action. Additionally, today’s employees who have grown up with the Internet and social media are unwilling to wait in a months-long queue for the IT department to generate a new report. They aren’t willing to carry around stacks of paper and scan through tables to answer important questions. It’s time for a new approach to performance management in government.

This paper outlines how organizations at the city, state and federal levels can improve data insight to action 10 to 100 times faster.

Four ways to quickly scale modern performance management are:

1. **Empower Workers with Self-Service Visual Analytics**
2. **Choose Scorecard Metrics that Matter**
3. **Utilize Current Data**
4. **Create a Collaborative Culture**
Empower Workers with Self-Service Visual Analytics

With the general goal to stretch every tax dollar, government performance management consists of a set of processes to optimize financial performance. It provides the framework for organizing, automating, and analyzing business systems for operational efficiency. Performance management in government and public sector agencies has traditionally been tracked by using some method of a scorecard.

More recently this scorecard is being delivered in the form of a dashboard built with data. Dashboards with interactive data visualization and analytical technology are economically and operationally transforming the way government leaders make critical decisions, meet their mission goals, and interact with public organizations and private citizens.

But no single dashboard can answer every question. The crucial element of faster performance improvement with scorecard dashboarding is to give employees at every level the ability to ask and answer their own questions. Self-service analytics is key to process improvements. Enabling it requires IT-managed infrastructure and data that help users be successful.

Many times, government work must be communicated and executed quickly. This includes situations like disaster response, public health crisis, snow removal or new legislation. In these time-sensitive situations, self-service is imperative, as it gives decision makers more control to set priorities, alter timelines and allocate resources.

Hassett Willis, a management consulting firm, specializes in helping federal sector agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implement faster methodologies for performance analysis with an overarching goal to save lives, money and human suffering.

Teri Caswell, a senior associate at Hassett Willis admits, “The government is slow. And by the time a report lands on someone’s desk, either that person doesn’t work there any longer, or it’s been overcome by events that something else is of more importance. And we don’t make progress that way.”

“The public sector can benefit from self-service analytics for things like performance management because it speeds up the process to insight,” she continued. “We can ask the ‘what-if’ questions instead of waiting for regenerating reports that take days, weeks, and sometimes months.”

Watch to learn more about how Hassett Willis uses self-service analytics to speed up data insights, improve data governance, and see the big picture for better decision-making.
At Hassett Willis, consultants call self-service analytics “clear insights” because they are trying to find compelling stories that drive positive change.

A recent self-service dashboard using data from the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management allows users to ask and answer questions about the money being allocated for relief after Hurricane Sandy.

In times of crisis when resources are limited, materials and people are the government’s largest spend. Labor usually accounts for half or more of every budget dollar. Dashboards can show where resources should go first and how much is needed to meet the demand.

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**FEMA Sandy Public Assistance Program**

**Amounts Eligible, Obligated, Paid through 4/12/14**

**Expected FEMA payments**

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<th>Eligible</th>
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**Source:** NJ Office of Emergency Management

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In this dashboard, users can drill down to see exactly where dollars are being spent, what types of projects should be priorities, and where funding is coming from. Click to learn and interact with this data visualization.

Using self-service visual analytics, government leaders can react faster to data they can trust and understand. Those same leaders are also able to relay information in an easily understood way both internally among decision makers and externally to the citizens and constituent organizations they serve.
Choose Scorecard Metrics that Matter

Most agencies have already invested millions of taxpayer dollars into operational and transactional systems, but have fallen far short on reporting the necessary requirements. Governments need to analyze data with ease and certainty in order to report exactly how much government programs cost and whether they’re meeting the agency’s goals.

Above all, the metrics for a scorecard should be closely tied to the goals at hand. A team should be highly selective in determining which metrics earn a spot on the scorecard dashboard. Consider the following when choosing metrics:

- What are your organization’s core objectives?
- How do your programs directly contribute to those objectives and what values do you measure them in?
- Are you utilizing the right data, either internal or external, that can shed light on these objectives, or simply data that’s easiest to get?
- Can you design a meaningful metric that measures those contributions?
- Is this metric truly necessary to explain the program’s contribution to the objectives?
- Can you build a systematic and on-going means of measurement?
- What do citizens and constituents care most about knowing?
- What do citizens and constituents need to know in order to actively participate in the business of the government?

While most performance metrics will allow leaders to discover what is going on, the right metrics will help users ask and answer questions to discover why. Be sure you can clearly explain how every metric on your dashboard connects to organization objectives and the mission.
The city of Houston’s finance department utilizes the following dashboard to track how council members allocate funding for projects. Users can filter by district, funding source and project status to see where money is going in real-time. Users can also see exactly where money is being spent on a geographical map.

The City of Houston’s Council District Service Funds program sets aside $11 million - $1 million for each Council District member - to allow Council Members to fast track projects. Approximately $6 million comes from capital monies while the remaining $5 million is pulled from operating funds. Click to learn more and interact with this dashboard.

In this scorecard example, council district members, and the public at large, not only get insight into the source of the dollars to fund a project, but they can also tie projects to a particular district. In addition, the dashboards track the number of projects in play against their execution costs.
People need to be able to defend the decisions that they’re being asked to make on the part of the public.

Teri Caswell, Hassett Willi
”A picture is worth 1,000 words on a map. Now each one of the district engineers can see within their district, what is going on. This really is open data. And it’s actionable data. Its usable and consumable by anybody.”

—Keith Donley, manager of enterprise data management at Virginia Department of Transportation

3. Utilize Current Data

Responding to fire drills is a fact of life for government. Whether data is from this year, this month, this week, this hour, or better yet, a few minutes ago, there’s no doubt about it, reliable data that is within the right timeline for an agency’s needs will elevate operational efficiency.

In order to keep decision-making moving at the speed of business, data must be current, or at the very least, within an appropriate timeline for asking relevant questions. Proactive government organizations are turning to right-time data feeds to improve decision-making and track costs and outcomes as they go.

Right-time data can vary. If a city is making decisions about where to dispatch police vehicles, they’ll need data that is extremely current. Budget decisions for a city, on the other hand, can usually be made with data that is updated weekly.

Almost as important as having current data is having the ability to change and update the metrics represented in a dashboard. If you’re stuck with an outdated metric, your thinking will be outdated too. You need to be current and flexible in terms of what you’re measuring.

The state of Virginia’s Department of Transportation operates the third largest roadway network in the country. With its mountains-to-sea geography, its complex infrastructure is organized into five regions and nine districts, and contains 58,000 miles of roadways and 20,000 bridges.

With public safety in mind, the Virginia Department of Transportation is challenged on a daily basis with where to deploy traffic engineering departments and corrective labor.

> Watch this webinar to learn how the Virginia Department of Transportation leverages data visualization to analyze operations and crash events, as well as optimize the deployment of DOT assets.
By visualizing current and historical data from car accident reports, insurance companies and the Department of Motor Vehicles, chief district engineers can track high volume accident activity, injury, and fatalities to prioritize deployment of teams.

This dashboard is the Virginia Department of Transportation’s “crash book.” It operates with a highly detailed filter page on the main tab, and allows users in all five regions and nine districts to drill down to the most current information that matters most to their particular teams. Click to learn more and interact with this dashboard.

Data visualization with this right-time information brings a method to the madness as decision makers can make weekly and even daily decisions to deploy workforces, change the timing of traffic lights or simply cut overgrown shrubs. Right-time data elevates the ongoing question of where do we go next, and prioritizes high-risk areas to saves lives.
“We used to provide our colleagues with information around ‘what’, and we were often unable to deliver the ‘why’. We’re changing how people think about the data and the services we provide, because they are now enabled to ask questions and thereby drive insights that simply were too complex to see before.”

—Robert Radburn, Team Leader at Leicestershire County Council

4.

Create a Collaborative Culture

Governments can’t operate in a bubble. In order to maximize mission outcomes, governments must work collaboratively with the public, the private sector, academia, and nonprofit organizations.

In this case, dashboards get everyone looking at the same information. Once different users are interacting with the same data sets, viewers will have unique questions about what they see. It is important that agency users and citizens alike can both interact with the same data to get the answers to the different questions they have.

Leicestershire County, in the United Kingdom, knows a thing or two about using data to collaborate with its citizens.

Citizens regularly come to the Leicestershire County Council for help with everything from social care to education, libraries, transportation and waste management.

Robert Radburn, a research and insight team leader for the council explains, “We undertook a really big budget consultation last year with the public to find out where they wanted the council to spend its money over the next few years. It had around 7,000 responses. And when people fill in this form, they expect to get some feedback.”

“We just have so many different services. So we’re looking at a lot of web analytics data,” he continued. “We’re also looking at data from things like library usage, survey data for budget consultations and children who are in care. We’ve got multiple different outcomes—and it’s not always about the bottom line for us.”

With interactive, sharable data visualizations, leaders on the city council don’t have to be experts in all those areas. They don’t have to be an expert in social work or highway maintenance to bring actionable insight and informed decision-making to their citizens.

“It’s just amazing how you just show a couple of visualizations and then the room starts talking about what they’ve seen. They just care about that they can see this data, and it’s the data that affects them everyday,” Radburn said.

Watch this video to learn more about how the Leicestershire County Council uses dashboards to collaborate with citizens.
Interactive dashboards also enable anyone to perform basic analytical tasks, such as filtering views, adjusting parameters, quick calculations, and drilling down to examine underlying data—all with intuitive selections on the dashboard. Providing this interactivity transforms stockpiles of data into actionable insight. Employees and citizens become engaged in problem solving and decision making instead of struggling to understand data sets. They can have deeper conversations about the connections between data, solving more complex questions with greater speed.

**Conclusion**

Performance management dashboards built with data visualization are transforming the way government leaders make critical decisions, meet their mission goals, and interact with public organizations and private citizens.

Performance management, paired with open data, is saving government leaders thousands of work hours and millions of dollars by reducing the time they spend sorting through mountains of information. Also, as more citizens are embracing self-service analytics technology, government organizations are starting to become more collaborative with citizens who want to be active participants.

With governments operating within the new normal of fiscal restraints, these new trends in measuring performance management promise opportunity for growth, sustainability and efficiency improvements. Not only is government transparency and accountability increasing, but the ability for governments to be more fiscally accountable and responsive is growing too.
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