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# Performance Government in Maine: The Effort to Make State Government More Efficient, Responsive, and Accountable

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# Performance Government in Maine:

## *The Effort to Make State Government More Efficient, Responsive, and Accountable*

by Bruce Clary and Barton Wechsler

*Maine, like the federal government and many other states, has embarked upon a major initiative to change how government conducts its business. At the federal level this initiative has been called the National Performance Review. Spearheaded by Vice President Al Gore, its goal is nothing short of reinventing government so it performs better, costs less, and gets results. Today, many states have undertaken initiatives similar to the National Performance Review and the general term used to describe these activities is “performance government.” In Maine, a 1991 Special Commission on Governmental Restructuring marks the first time this concept was seriously talked about. Although performance government may apply to a wide range of administrative changes, it most typically applies to three reform initiatives: strategic planning, performance budgeting and performance contracting. Maine has been reinventing its government systems to include each of these components. This two-part symposium on performance government begins with an article by Bruce Clary and Barton Wechsler of the Muskie School of Public Service. Clary and Wechsler provide an overview of efforts to reinvent government and the context for Maine’s current initiatives. Part two of the symposium features a roundtable discussion with eight individuals who have been helping to shape the reinvention of Maine state government. Through their unique vantage points, they illustrate the complex set of factors—political, organizational, and technical—that have an impact on government reform and the prospect for meaningful change.*

## INTRODUCTION

Government reform has a long history in the United States. From the founding of the Republic, Americans have continuously examined the purpose, structure, and functioning of their government and sought to improve it. In recent years, numerous reforms have been proposed to improve government efficiency and effectiveness, often emphasizing practices drawn from the private sector such as management by objectives, zero-based budgeting, total quality management, and strategic planning. However, despite these many efforts, the search continues for better ways to manage government.

This symposium examines the concept of performance government, an important public management reform initiated in 1996 by the King administration. Performance government focuses on the basic questions of reform: How can governmental services be made more efficient, more responsive to consumers, and more accountable to the public who funds them? The administration's approach was based upon a new comprehensive system in which state agencies develop strategic plans, outlining their basic goals and objectives, and then build their budgets based upon the approved plans.

To provide some context for the remainder of the symposium, we first examine governmental reform in the United States and in Maine. The push for performance government in Maine is representative, not only of a current emphasis upon "reinventing" government in the United States, but reflective of long thinking in the country about the basic purposes of government and how best to achieve them. We then describe the reform activities that are taking place in Maine, both in the text of this introductory piece and in the sidebars. In the last part of the symposium, a roundtable on the subject is presented. The discussants include citizens, former legislators, consultants, executive managers and university professors active in Maine politics, particularly the state's performance government initiative. The roundtable illustrates the complex set of factors—political, organizational, and technical—that have an impact on government reform and the prospect for meaningful change.

### REFORM AND REORGANIZATION: A BRIEF HISTORY

As noted above, there have been many efforts at a conscious and planned reform of government, and how it operates. All of these efforts have sought to reconcile a basic tension of

## OVERVIEW

In 1996, the Maine State Legislature directed the executive branch of state government to move toward a performance-based budget system. The legislation requires state agencies to develop strategic plans that are focused on measurable results and to develop budgets that link funding requests with outcomes achieved by state programs. The intent of this new system is to enhance the ability of citizens and decisionmakers to monitor the progress of state government in achieving its public purpose and, within state government, to improve the information that is used in management, policy, and budget decisions.

Sidebar continues on next page.

MAINE  
STATE  
AGENCIES  
UNDERTAKE  
STRATEGIC  
PLANNING

by  
Jody L. Harris

### Origin and structure

Since 1996, every state agency that receives an appropriation or allocation from the legislature has been required to develop a strategic plan; in 1998, a requirement for biennial revisions also was enacted. Strategic plans provide direction to each agency in terms of where it wants to go and what it intends to accomplish. It is a document that includes the agency's mission, goals, and objectives, as well as a strategy and performance measures for each of the state's budget programs. Strategic planning is also a process that forces each agency to consider pressing issues within the context of the agency's resources and capabilities. By design, this process seeks the input of employees, customers, legislators, and citizens. In fact, Maine law requires each agency to seek input from its legislative oversight committee.

### Challenges to implementation

Many of Maine's state agencies have found the strategic planning process to be valuable. Some managers believe the process fosters the development of strong management teams, helps individual bureaus articulate a common vision, builds employee trust, and provides a vehicle for helping the public to understand the programs of state government. In contrast, those agencies that have not committed the time and resources needed to adequately develop a strategic plan do not perceive these same benefits to the new system.

While legislative feedback is critical to ensure that strategic plans reflect legislative priorities (thereby avoiding costly midstream changes), getting input from all of the legislative oversight committees has been difficult. In

part, this is because the process of strategic planning has not been institutionalized within the processes and procedures of the legislature.

Likewise, many state agencies have adopted a "wait and see" approach to developing their strategic plans (and to the state's performance budget initiative as well). Some perceive a lack of commitment within the executive and legislative branches; thus, they are reluctant to invest resources into strategic planning, data collection, or performance measurement. Further, there is a lack of clarity about how the performance measures (which specify the results to be achieved) will be verified and used. For example, it is unclear what incentives or disincentives an agency may expect for achieving (or not achieving) performance targets.

Finally, there are limitations to developing and using performance measures. The development of a performance measurement system takes time and resources as well as experience in identifying the best and most usable indices. By themselves, performance measures do not explain why performance is at the level reported or how to improve performance over time. Furthermore, the majority of Maine's state agencies do not have historical or even baseline data to help them establish realistic performance targets. Hence, identifying key measures and collecting data to track progress is a considerable challenge.

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The central tenet of government reinvention is that managers must be unshackled from bureaucratic control so they can act in an entrepreneurial, creative, and risk-taking fashion.

administrative politics—the balance between administrative efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness. Efficiency is a widely accepted goal for government operations; however, at the same time, administrative accountability and responsiveness to political authorities are at the center of representative government. How to maximize these competing values is a basic dynamic of government reform. The desire for reform has come in waves throughout our history with one or the other of these values being emphasized in turn (Kaufman, 1976).

Most government reform efforts at the federal level have involved the appointment of blue ribbon commissions. As the titles of the more prominent of these commissions attest, the question of how the federal government should do its business has been a long preoccupation of both the president and Congress: Taft Commission on Economy and Efficiency (1910), Brownlow Commission on Administrative Management (1931), and Hoover Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government (1949). President Reagan created the Grace Commission with a mission similar to previous commissions: reduce waste and identify cost-cutting opportunities. It had a strong private sector orientation with most members drawn from business, not government. Its approach to the issues and the recommendations it made assumed that government could be made more efficient if it were run more like a business. The Commission identified upwards of \$400 million in potential savings, but most observers agreed it had little impact upon the federal government and its operations, a fate common to many reorganization commissions, at both the federal and state levels. While recommendations are relatively easy to make, the process of implementation is a different and more complex political challenge (Rainey, 1998).

At the base of reform efforts in the 1990s is the concept of “reinventing government,” a term taken from the title of a best-selling book by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992). The themes are drawn from the managerial revolution that first swept through the private sector. The central tenet of government reinvention is that managers must be unshackled from bureaucratic

control so they can act in an entrepreneurial, creative, and risk-taking fashion. Today, virtually every public manager is familiar with the concepts discussed in Osborne and Gaebler’s book: consumer satisfaction, mission-driven operations, participation and teamwork, anticipatory planning, market solutions, performance measurement and accountability for results. Unlike most previous reform efforts, the reinvention movement has had impacts across all levels of government—federal, state and local. It does not have the traditional, independent commission examining government in seeming isolation from its day-to-day operation. Instead, in an effort to improve the performance of government, public managers across the country (and around the world) are experimenting in a wide variety of ways.

The best known of the reinvention initiatives is the federal National Performance Review (NPR). The goal of NPR is simple: Change the way the federal government works. In the words of its major proponent, Vice President Al Gore, we need a government that “works better and costs less.” While NPR is an initiative of the executive branch, its purposes have been furthered by the enactment of a number of congressional acts, including the Government Performance and Results Act, the Chief Financial Officers Act, the Government Management Reform Act, and the Information Technology Management Reform Act of 1996. The Clinton Administration has even established “reinvention laboratories” within federal agencies to promote innovative approaches, especially documenting and modeling successes. All of the major federal departments have been involved and, by 1996, almost two hundred labs had been implemented. Many of the labs apply concepts, such as reengineering, that have been directly taken from the private sector. Improving customer service is the goal in over one-half of the lab experiments (United States General Accounting Office, 1996).

The states are active reinventors as well. By the mid 1990s, forty-three states had conducted performance reviews of their own (Gibbs, 1994). One widely recognized initiative is Oregon Benchmarks, a process in which the state could gauge progress toward a strategic vision of what Oregon should be like in 2010.

MAINE  
STATE  
GOVERNMENT  
MOVES  
TOWARD  
A BUDGET  
SYSTEM  
BASED ON  
PERFORMANCE

by  
David Lachance

### Origin and structure

Strategic planning and performance budgeting emerged from the same piece of legislation and are part of the same performance government process. However, the history of performance budgeting in Maine and the challenges to implementation are somewhat different. The genesis of performance budgeting in Maine State government was a 1991 Special Commission on Governmental Restructuring, which proposed a system of state budgeting based on measurable performance objectives. In 1995, the Legislature created Maine's Commission on Performance Budgeting to study the issue and make recommendations to the governor and to the legislature.

Ultimately, these recommendations were enacted into law; in 1998 that law was amended to change the deadlines for implementation and clarify budget elements.

Currently, Maine law requires that a prototype performance budget be submitted to the legislature by December 31, 1999. This budget not only will be based on the state's existing program format—as defined by the legislature in the budget process—but also will include performance measures for each budget program. The addition of performance measures will allow policymakers to evaluate each program's success in a new way. In the future, each of the budget programs to which the legislature appropriates or allocates funds will correspond to the strategies depicted in the strategic plans that are submitted by agencies. Full performance budgeting becomes effective with the governor's Fiscal Year 2002-2003 biennial budget proposal submitted in January 2001.

### Challenges to implementation

The state was ambitious in its first attempt to implement performance budgeting. The original timetable called for the delivery of a performance budget to the legislature in just

two years, which was predicated on the development of more than sixty strategic plans by each of the state's agencies. The result was considerable legislative debate over the initiative. At the heart of the debate, legislators were not familiar with the elements of a performance budget and expressed reservations about moving away from the traditional budget format. The outcome of this debate was the 1998 amendment, which slowed down the process of implementation. The new requirement for a prototype budget in December 1999 will include real numbers from a previously adopted budget as well as performance measures. The inclusion of both is intended to help legislators understand the implications of a change to performance-based budgeting and discuss the policy issues surrounding a new budget format.

It is important to note that linking budget dollars to outcomes is very difficult. In a two-year budget cycle, stipulating a dollar amount for a program or strategy, and then directly attributing those dollars to the achievement of specific outcomes, is a high hurdle to clear. Furthermore, a focus on outcomes rather than on program inputs often does not provide information about the short-term impacts of a budget decision—such as how many program staff will be hired to implement a new program. The 1998 amendment gives the legislature a major role in crafting future performance budgets. A challenge for both the executive and legislative branches will be to reach a consensus on how best to correlate new performance measures with each program's budget resources so that the need for detailed information and a focus on outcomes are both achieved.

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A strategic planning process was used to develop this vision and widespread use was made of public forums. Over one hundred fifty “benchmarks” were developed to allow the measurement of this progress. Florida and Texas have also been leaders of reinvention efforts in the states.

### REINVENTION IN MAINE

The reinvention movement began in Maine with the creation of the Special Commission on Governmental Restructuring in 1991. In creating the commission, the state legislature gave it the mandate “to maximize citizen participation in public policymaking, to use public resources more effectively, and to consolidate and restructure state government in such a way that efficiency is assured and cost savings result.” As in most reform efforts, the themes of efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability are evident. While the commission’s work and resulting recommendations have parallels with earlier reorganization initiatives in Maine (for example, the Commission on Government Reorganization in 1970), it differed in fundamental respects. Maine’s previous task forces and commissions were influenced by the “administrative management paradigm” that focused almost exclusively on organizational structure, trying to find the optimum arrangement of boxes on the organizational chart (Moe, 1994). Recommendations typically referred to a set of universal principles, such as matching administrative responsibility with the authority to act. This orientation was not particularly conducive to original thinking. Relying heavily upon anecdotal evidence, hearings, and previously prepared reports, earlier commissions looked to determine what problems existed and then looked for the appropriate principle to provide the answer.

In contrast, the Special Commission of 1991 drew many of its ideas from a relatively new concept in its application to the public sector—strategic management—an approach premised on a longer term view of administration (Clary and Nicoll, 1994). While some argue that politics does not permit a perspective beyond the next election, a majority of states have adopted this innovation (Berry and Wechsler, 1995). Strategic management requires programs to set goals, look at the long-term, and focus upon the environment in which they operate. Agencies also engage in specific planning activities designed to better understand their strengths and weaknesses as well as the constraints and opportunities they face. They examine these dimensions in terms of internal and external environments as well as present and future contexts.

Strategic management is best exemplified at the state level in terms of what has become known as the “performance government” movement (Broom, 1995). Although the individual initiatives of states vary considerably, several themes are common to the majority of them:

- They seek to clarify the mission and priority objectives of government;
- They place an emphasis on expected results;
- They develop mechanisms for monitoring and reporting the achievement of objectives;
- They use this information to make decisions about government activities, including making government more accountable to the public.

Over the last five years, Maine State government has embarked on its own reinvention initiative. In important respects, these actions reflect the strategic management emphasis of the earlier Special Commission on Governmental Restructuring (1991). The major initiatives have been in the areas of strategic planning, performance budgeting and performance contracting. In the sidebars, these specific performance government initiatives in Maine are described.

A new planning and budgeting system was established by P.L. 1995, Chapter 705, “An Act to Implement Performance Budgeting in State Government.” A key to this new system is the development, by every agency, of mission statements that outline the broad programmatic goals and values they want to achieve. Agencies then generate strategies to achieve these goals and ways to measure their accomplishments. A central focus in measurement is whether the client is better off for the provision of the service. This emphasis also was reflected in the legislation that authorized performance contracting, which mandated a focus on client betterment.

Agencies have to be cognizant of their external environment as well. Accompanying strategic planning is an environmental assessment that includes the development of mechanisms to assess how stakeholders (such as provider agencies, consumers, the general public, and legislators) view what the agency is doing and/or should do.

Agency budgets are to be built around the results of the strategic planning process. The budgeting process focuses on strategies and the specific outcomes the strategies are designed to produce. Agencies are funded to implement strategies (activities)

THE  
IMPLEMENTATION  
OF  
PERFORMANCE-  
BASED  
CONTRACTING  
IN  
MAINE  
STATE  
GOVERNMENT

by  
Sue Ebersten

In 1994 the Maine State Legislature passed "An Act to Establish a System of Performance-based Agreements for the Provision of Certain Social Services" (LD 1732). The Act required that all state agencies entering into contractual relationships with private/nonprofit vendors for the purchase of social services begin to move toward a performance-based contracting system by no later than July 1996. Although this initiative resulted from different legislation than that which established performance budgeting and strategic planning, it represents the same underlying values toward the administration of state government.

The legislation defines performance contracting as "an agreement for the purchase of direct client services employing a client-centered, outcome-oriented process that is based on measurable performance indicators and desired outcomes and includes regular assessment of the quality of services provided." In other words, the legislation required state agencies to move away from contractual agreements that were based solely on the units of service to be provided, and move toward contractual agreements that specified the outcomes to be achieved as a result of the units of services that were provided.

In 1996, the Community Services Center (a newly created interdepartmental unit of the Department of Human Services and Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services), took the lead in this initiative by establishing a steering committee, which was directed to develop a contracting system that would serve all of the state's contracting agencies. The steering committee was representative of all contracting interests within the two

departments. Within the Department of Human Services alone, this included representation from forty-three diverse service areas, ranging from health services such as immunization to social services such as AIDS case management and refugee resettlement. The challenge to develop one system to fit such diverse service areas was significant. After several meetings, the steering committee proposed a system based on four performance elements. The first two—performance goals and indicators—were to be common and non-negotiable across all contracts within a particular service area. The second two—strategies and measures—were to be negotiated on an individual basis by the contracting agencies and contractors.

The legislation also specified that the development of the state's performance contracting system include the input of consumers, service providers, legislators and state agency staff. To meet this requirement, the steering committee convened service area work groups for each service area, and then charged these groups with defining the non-negotiable performance goals and indicators to be common across all contracts within a particular service area. These groups met over three months and forwarded their recommendations back to the steering committee. Simultaneously, the steering committee arranged for training programs to educate state agency staff and service providers about the elements of this new system.

By Fiscal Year 1998, goals and indicators had been defined for all service areas and the negotiation of strategies and measures within individual contracts had begun. Since then, the process to develop performance measures has been modified; it was quickly discovered that

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that produce specified outcomes. Consequently, agencies have to think differently about their budgets, focusing on the relationship between activities and results rather than on the cost of inputs.

Performance contracting resulted from a different legislative act: Chapter 737, H. P. 1284 - LD 1732, "An Act to Establish a System of Performance-based Agreements for the Provision of Certain Social Services." Nevertheless, its goals are consistent with the thrust of the other initiatives. The purpose is to have contracts that require that performance outcomes be met by the contractor. For example, many of the contracts in the Department of Human Services require provider agencies to undertake surveys that measure client satisfaction. Although the outcomes are specified at a contract-level, performance contracting has the same results-orientation as strategic planning.

Maine State government is relatively new to this approach to government administration as compared to states like Texas (see sidebar). More than any other state, Texas has moved toward results-oriented management through the integration of strategic planning and performance budgeting. Although more comprehensive, Texas' program reflects the key steps in performance government that Maine is trying to achieve.

Increasingly, states accept performance government as the model of government administration. However, performance government is generally easier to conceptualize than to realize. Implementation faces a number of political, organizational, and technical difficulties. Performance government represents a new way of doing business that challenges the status quo; however, many stakeholders benefit from the old way of doing business. Agency staff can face salary reductions and loss of status through reorganization, and interest groups may find it more difficult to influence agency policy. The inevitable result is resistance to change (Kaufman, 1971). Implementing performance government is as much about changing the organizational culture as reforming an administrative system.

Agencies have found it relatively easy to develop strategic plans; however, putting them into action is a more difficult challenge. In today's rapidly changing and unpredictable environment, trying to forecast where an agency should be in two or three years is problematic at best. Private sector companies have found this as difficult to determine as the public sector (Drucker, 1995).

Trying to reorganize a budget process presents similar challenges. Legislators have to account for the monies spent by government. When budgets are organized by line item, it is easy to

## PERFORMANCE GOVERNMENT IN TEXAS

Texas has one of the most comprehensive systems of performance government in the United States. Like Maine, it links strategic planning to performance budgeting in an effort to integrate goal-setting, outcome measurement, and budgetary decisionmaking. The elements of Texas' strategic planning and performance budgeting initiatives are listed below.

### STRATEGIC PLANNING:

- A *mission* statement;
- A statement of agency *philosophy*, core values, and operating principles;
- An *assessment* of the key external and internal factors that influence the success of the agency in achieving its mission;
- Agency goals and objectives;
- Descriptions of the *strategies* to achieve goals and objectives;
- Output (efficiency) and *outcome* (effectiveness) measures.

### PERFORMANCE BUDGETING:

- The basic funding element is the *agency strategy*.
- Agencies organize their budget requests to show how their *strategies support the objectives and goals* defined in the strategic plan.
- Strategies are broken down by *cost*, the *outputs* that will be produced, and the *outcomes* that will be achieved.
- Administrative and support costs, originally itemized and allocated to agency strategies, are now reported as a distinct line item (*crosswalk*).
- Agencies also provide information about strategy priorities and estimated performance measures under *different funding levels*.

Source: Broom, 1995.

THE  
IMPLEMENTATION  
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(Continued)

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the use of measures developed during the negotiation of individual contracts translated into a large number of different measures, which proved unwieldy and sometimes impossible to monitor. As a result, common measures within service areas are now being developed to reduce the complexity of measurement, both for the providers of service and for the contract officers who represent the state.

Departments have continued to adjust and improve upon the system in other ways as well. Looking ahead, the state will need to meet the future challenge of developing a management information system that is capable of handling all of the incoming performance data derived from these new contracts. In addition, the state will need to establish policies about how these data are to be used. In spite of the complexity of these challenges, the implementation of this system has been largely successful. In fact, the collaborative spirit with which this new system of performance-based contracting was developed remains today as the state continues with its efforts to improve the ways in which it delivers services to the citizens of Maine.

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identify where the dollars were spent and for what purpose. With a performance budget, dollars are allocated and spent in the context of outcomes produced by program activities. Building budgets around results tends to make legislators nervous—they feel they have less control over a budget formulated in reference to hypothetical results than one based on the tangible purchase of labor, goods and services (Joyce, 1993). In Texas, this concern among legislators led to the adoption of a “crosswalk” budget. Proposed budgets were stated not only in terms of the new performance categories, but the older line item format as well.

Aside from the organizational and political difficulties of performance government, there are some technical difficulties as well. Measuring whether something has been accomplished is an example. How do you define, for instance, whether the “quality of life” of a client has been increased? Much of the current thinking about mental health services focuses on whether clients have shown an increase in the quality of their lives. It is one thing to say this goal is important to case management and counseling services, yet it is an entirely different question as to how to measure the accomplishment of that goal (Behn and Kant, 1998).

These obstacles also have been evident in Maine as the state implements its performance government initiative. In recognition of the difficulties of achieving a performance budgeting system that meets the disparate perspectives of the executive and the legislative branches, the time line to implement a performance budgeting system has been extended two years in the future. Performance contracting is moving forward, but behind the schedule initially envisioned by the legislature and its structure has been modified to accommodate problems in measurement. Has Maine realized performance government? The question is ultimately the most critical one, but, at this point, it is too premature to know. Given the challenges, we should not be surprised that change comes slowly. The state should be applauded for beginning a process of self-examination and reform

that began in 1991 with the Special Commission on Governmental Restructuring. The legislation enacting the Commission's key recommendations was a significant attempt to balance the need to provide services in an efficient manner with the imperative to make these processes accountable to the public. As Jane Addams, the noted innovator in social welfare, said: "Social advance depends as much upon the process through which it is secured as upon the result itself." As performance government unfolds in Maine, we should adopt a similar perspective. 🐟

*Photos and biographical information about Bruce Clary and Barton Wechsler can be found on pages 21 and 27 respectively.*

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