

MERCATUS CENTER

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Suggestions for Performance Report “Highlights” Document

Overview:

The document should be brief and highlight major agency performance-related information for members of the general public and others who seek a straightforward, non-technical, “bottom line” understanding of the agency’s key mission(s) and performance results. It should be located prominently on the agency’s home page and, as explained below:

- (1) provide a clear, concise, and outcome-oriented explanation of what core public benefits the agency seeks to achieve and its progress toward achieving them;
- (2) describe key programmatic and management challenges the agency faces to achieving these public benefits and what it is doing to overcome them;
- (3) contain prominent and user-friendly links to other sources for additional detail on the agency’s performance which backs up the information in the highlights document; and
- (4) identify a specific and knowledgeable agency source for members of the public to contact with questions or comments.

The highlights document should elevate quality of performance information over quantity. It should include only key data necessary to inform the general public and other non-specialized audiences.

Content:

Agency head introduction. A brief introductory statement signed by the agency head (not delegable) highlighting the agency’s most important accomplishments relevant to the agency’s mission outcomes for the applicable fiscal year, including appropriate assurances that this is a fair representation of the performance of the agency. This section should also identify any major failures at the strategic goal level. It should include a simple yes or no statement by the agency head as to whether the agency’s financial and performance data are complete and reliable. A link could be provided to other sources for more detail on data verification and validation, as well as any data shortcomings and how they are being addressed.

Strategic goals. A list of strategic goals covering the agency’s major mission areas expressed as outcomes

- (1) whose nature and importance are clear to members of the general public and
- (2) which realistically relate to the agency’s functions and sphere of influence.

Management-type strategic goals should be omitted from the highlights document.

Annual performance goals and measures. A list of the key annual performance goals and measures which most directly implement the strategic goals included in the highlights document. These should be limited in number and capture end outcomes or intermediate outcomes directly

relevant to the applicable strategic goal. If a goal or measure is not expressed as an end or intermediate outcome, there should be a clear explanation of its relevance to achieving the outcome.

Agencies should omit from the highlights document goals and measures which do not meet the foregoing criteria since they do not meaningfully inform the public. (Other goals and measures would be included elsewhere in GPRA-related documents to meet the needs of other stakeholders and ensure full compliance with GPRA.) While developing such goals and measures is challenging, agencies should rise to this challenge if they wish to demonstrate their value to the ordinary citizens and taxpayers who foot their bills.

Performance results. Provide a clear statement of whether the agency met or missed each key goal and measure included in the highlights document and whether the reported result is based on final data or a projection. For each missed goal or measure, include a brief explanation of why it was missed and what the agency will do about it. Identify the data source for each measure and its reliability, with links to other sources for more detail on data issues.

Trend data. List performance results for each key goal and measure going back at least three previous fiscal years, showing both the prior year targets and actuals. Include long-term strategic targets for the goal/measure, if applicable, in order to provide context. Also include some explanation of trends and target selection, particularly where the trend data raise obvious red flags (e.g., results trending in the wrong direction; large disparities between targets and actuals; current targets are less ambitious than prior year targets or actuals).

Costs. Link the agency's budget costs to each key measure. If this is not currently possible, explain why.

Most serious management challenges. List the most serious management challenges identified by the agency inspector general (and GAO, if applicable) and include a link to the full text of the inspector general's statement of major management challenges pursuant to 31 U.S.C. 3516(d). Include a table that provides separate responses by agency management and the inspector general to the following questions concerning each management challenge:

- An estimated date by which the agency should resolve the challenge. (Resolve means eliminating the challenge or, if the challenge cannot be completely eliminated, mitigating it to the greatest extent that the risk is acceptable.)
- An assessment of the agency's progress toward resolving each challenge using the following "traffic light" system: green if the agency is actively implementing all specific remedial actions that it can reasonably take; yellow if the agency is actively implementing most remedial actions; and red if the agency is ignoring the challenge or could do significantly more to resolve the challenge.

This section may also address whether or not the agency possesses the necessary capabilities to successfully carry out the mission and strategic goals of the organization.

Also include the agency's scores for the President's Management Agenda and the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) and list any GAO-designated "high-risk" areas that apply to the agency and how long they have been high risk.

The highlights document could, of course, include additional information and narratives. However, it should be limited to information which is readily understandable to ordinary citizens and which would significantly enhance their understanding of the agency's performance.