



Fairfax County, Virginia Department of Management and Budget

# Performance Measurement Matters

## County Staff Share Lessons Learned

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*“Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.”*  
 - Alfred, Lord Tennyson



**IDEAS WANTED**

If you have any suggestions for topics or speakers for future Performance Measurement Brownbag Lunches, please pass them on to any of the PM Team members listed on page four.

Fairfax County employees have numerous training opportunities available to them. Sometimes the hardest part is finding the time to take advantage of them. This is where one-hour brownbag lunches prove valuable. Without having to give up an entire day or more, County staff have the opportunity to learn from their peers — often the best lessons. Since 1998, the County’s multi-agency Performance Measurement (PM) Team has offered brownbag lunch sessions on a number of topics from data collection to customer satisfaction.

On November 2, 2006, three County staff — **Allan Phillips**, Director of the Infant and Toddler Connection Program, Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB); **Cathy Pumphrey**, Director of Planning and Information Management for CSB; and **Allison Lowry**, Quality Assurance Manager for the Department of Family Services, shared recent their experiences relating to the balanced scorecard and benchmarking to enhance strategic planning and improve performance.

The Infant and Toddler Connection Program serves children with disabilities from birth to age three. The program had a previous strategic plan but wanted to update it with one that was easier to use and track. In addition, they wanted to use the balanced scorecard approach so they turned to **Marie Custode** and **Deborah Gutierrez** of the Department of Systems Management for Human Services to help facilitate their effort (see the Summer 2006 issue of this newsletter for Marie’s perspective as facilitator). Allan noted that having “outside” facilitators really helped the process.

Even so, he acknowledged that it took several months to develop a balanced scorecard to complement their strategy map. He also noted that they went into it knowing that the initial product might not be perfect, but they were committed to improving it over time. In addition, he told the group that Infant and Toddler Connection staff tried to focus on data they were already required to provide because this would meet areas of strategic

importance to key stakeholders such as the federal government.

Approximately 50 staff from the Infant and Toddler Connection Program were on hand in July 2006 when their balanced scorecard was introduced. Allan Phillips noted that it has had a “very positive impact on the agency and how they think about their work” and that it really helped them focus their efforts. He reiterated that it is a work in progress and they have found that they don’t necessarily have every system in place to get all the data they would like; however, they agreed to stick with it at least a year before changing it.

*(continued on page 3)*

The Balanced Scorecard relies on the following four perspectives:

- ◆ Customer
- ◆ Financial
- ◆ Process
- ◆ Learning and Growth

## KUDOS TO COUNTY STAFF FOR ACHIEVING RECOGNITION FOR OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT EFFORTS

Fairfax County's performance measurement efforts were recognized again by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) with its Certificate of Distinction, for continuing efforts in measuring and improving performance. This is the higher of ICMA's two levels of recognition and acknowledges the County's efforts to incorporate performance data into decision-making, sustain the program through training and process improvement, and share its successes by networking with others.

Only 18 of approximately 150 jurisdictions participating in ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement earned the prestigious Certificate of Distinction this year. Presentation of this award took place September 10, 2006 at the ICMA annual conference in San Antonio, Texas.

Literally thousands of County staff contributed to the achievement of this award; however, a number of employees stood out for their contributions. Starting at the top, the County Executive and Deputy County Executives strongly support this effort and are continually seeking ways to encourage measurement to improve performance.



They are joined by numerous agency directors who lead by example and also make a point of using performance data to continuously improve. The County's multi-agency Performance Measurement Team also contributes significantly to the advancement of performance measurement and accountability in Fairfax County.

As noted above, there are many County staff who contribute to this effort. In particular, collecting the thousands of data elements for the ICMA templates is a monumental task shared by many staff each fall. The following deserve special recognition for ensuring that the data templates Fairfax County submits for the comparative performance effort are accurate and complete. They include the following:

**Code Enforcement**—Lorraine Jackson, Glenn Smith, Suzanne Gilbert, Jill Markham, Jerry McMillian, Steve Gibson and Audrey Clark.  
**Demographics**—Fatima Khaja  
**Facilities**—Linda Midcalf  
**Fire and EMS**—Jeanne Dargusch, Shirley Crawley, Paula Ferrer, Kim Panzer, Katie Mangione, Maria Teel and Laurie Stone  
**Fleet**—Sheila Bishop  
**Housing**—Tom Fleetwood  
**Human Resources**—Dawn Brown, Susan Holsneck, Sherry Rowe and Sue Woodruff  
**Information Technology**—Jennifer Zindler, Cathy Spage, Greg Scott, Steve Brundage, David Barney, Gayle Berkeley, Tom Conry and Jeff Porter  
**Library**—Doug Miller, Amy Brown and Julie Pringle

**Parks and Recreation**—Kristen Cigler, Seema Ajrawat, Susan Tavallai, Steve Lewis, Dan Sutherland, Mike Baird and Nick Duray  
**Police**—David Ferris, Joe Bui, Edwin Roessler, David Sommers, Jesse Bowman and Charles Woodruff  
**Purchasing**—Mary Jane Comly  
**Risk Management**—Len Clark and Teri Flynn  
**Solid Waste Collection and Recycling**—Pamela Gratton, Venita Hawkins and Marion Plummer  
**Youth Services**—Liz Henry, Allison Lowry, Katherine Williams and Linda Marrama

In addition, if anyone was inadvertently left off this list, thanks to you as well. It was truly a team effort and once again, Fairfax County staff came through in a BIG WAY! Congratulations to all!

## County Staff Share Lessons Learned (continued from page 1)

He noted that they have already come up with ideas for some better measures and concluded his presentation with the offer to come back in a year to share further lessons learned.

Allison Lowry from the Department of Family Services (DFS) shared her agency's experience with initiating a balanced scorecard (Allison also contributed to the Summer 2006 issue's article on the Balanced Scorecard). She told the brownbag lunch group that while the strategic plan prepared by DFS in 2003 was a very good exercise for looking at strategic priorities, many staff ultimately ended up feeling that it was disconnected from their work and wanted to find a way to en-

sure that they were focusing on the right initiatives to benefit their customers. Some DFS staff who undertook George Mason University's Process Management Certification program, which included balanced scorecard (BSC) training saw the potential to use the BSC to help them tie strategy to action.

To get everyone on the same page, they brought in Ralph Smith from the Orion Development Group for a one-day session. As part of this, they performed a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and then grouped those SWOTs into the four BSC perspectives—customer, financial, process, and learning and growth. In three more meetings on their own, they were able to develop a strategy map. Understandably given their mission, they were heavily customer-focused, which is not a bad thing, but it highlighted that there were some gaps they needed to focus on in terms of the other BSC perspectives.

Allison noted that after they refined the strategy map, they then turned to development of the BSC that would let them know if they were making progress on their strategic initiatives. While she noted it is challenging to come up with good measures, it is worth it because the BSC provides:

- ◆ The ability to have continuous evaluation on a one-page document; and
- ◆ A good communication tool where line staff can see where they fit into the agency's strategies.

She echoed Allan Phillips' observation that the BSC is valuable tool but it is also an evolving process that will be enhanced over time.

Following the BSC presentations, brownbag moderator **Lisa Blecker** from the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (and PM Team) then shifted the discussion to another facet of performance measurement. She introduced **Cathy Pumphrey**, also from CSB, who told the group about her agency's efforts to benchmark performance in order to determine standards, as well as learn the practices that achieve high performance levels.

Cathy shared the following five benchmarking rules from Anne Evan's Web site on how to avoid benchmarking mistakes ([www.benchmarkingplus.com.au/mistakes.htm](http://www.benchmarkingplus.com.au/mistakes.htm)):

- ◆ Find your own partners, define what is achievable, and then decide whether you can achieve a similar level of performance.
- ◆ Align benchmarks with the overall strategy and goals of the organization.
- ◆ Take a balanced scorecard approach—make sure you incorporate service delivery and customer satisfaction.
- ◆ Focus on one or several processes that are part of the total system rather than benchmarking the total system. Measure your baseline before you start.
- ◆ Agree beforehand how the information will be used.

One of the biggest challenges in benchmarking is making sure you are comparing apples to apples. Cathy noted this issue with regard to the behavioral health programs she benchmarks. She observed that we are "moving into a new era" where benchmarking is becoming more commonplace and various organizations are looking

to standardize definitions to ensure consistency.

She also noted that the Commonwealth of Virginia is looking at standard definitions to enable better comparisons among the 40 community service boards in the state. Another key observation she made was that it is important to look at trends in data, not just take one point in time—compare it to the year before and the year before that if data are available. It is also necessary to investigate "blips" in the data to determine if they are due to true variation or if they might signal a data collection problem.

Cathy summarized that while it does take time and effort, benchmarking can really help organizations determine how their performance compares to others and help identify best practices to improve. She noted that the Internet now provides an incredible resource. There is a tremendous amount of information available for those willing to look for it. She closed her presentation by paraphrasing Anne Evans' tips on benchmarking:

- ◆ Be realistic.
- ◆ Be strategic.
- ◆ Be balanced.
- ◆ Be focused.
- ◆ Be clear about how the information will be

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***"What gets measured gets done; what gets measured and fed back gets done well, and what gets rewarded, gets repeated."***  
***-John E. Jones***

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### What County Staff Are Reading —

Ken Miller's *We Don't Make Widgets* (Governing Books, 2006) is a must-read for anyone who wants to improve government services. Miller's book provides humorous real-life examples on how to improve customer satisfaction, cut costs, be less bureaucratic and work faster. Fairfax County's training program also includes his course, "Better, Faster, Cheaper" as part of the new Employee Development and Learning Program (<http://s701ms01/stc/ffxllms>). Either in person or through his book, his ideas are sure to get you thinking.

**ICMA FY 2005 Benchmarking Data Posted on DMB Infoweb****A Fairfax County, VA publication**

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Each year since 2000, as part of the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) comparative performance measurement effort, County staff have completed data templates in the following service areas: Code Enforcement, Facilities, Fire/EMS, Fleet, Housing, Human Resources, Information Technology, Library, Parks and Recreation, Police, Purchasing, Refuse Collection/Recycling, Risk Management and Youth Services. These data, a number of which are published in the annual budget document, enable elected officials, County management and the public to determine how Fairfax County's performance compares to other local governments. Due to the time necessary to collect, clean and verify the data, there is generally a year lag until it is presented. The Department of Management and Budget has posted the FY 2005 Excel spreadsheets on its Intranet Web site: [http://infoweb/DMB/ICMA\\_2005.htm](http://infoweb/DMB/ICMA_2005.htm). Questions on how to use these data may be directed to Barbara Emerson at 703-324-3009 or [Barbara.Emerson@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Barbara.Emerson@fairfaxcounty.gov).

**We're on the Web:**  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb)

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