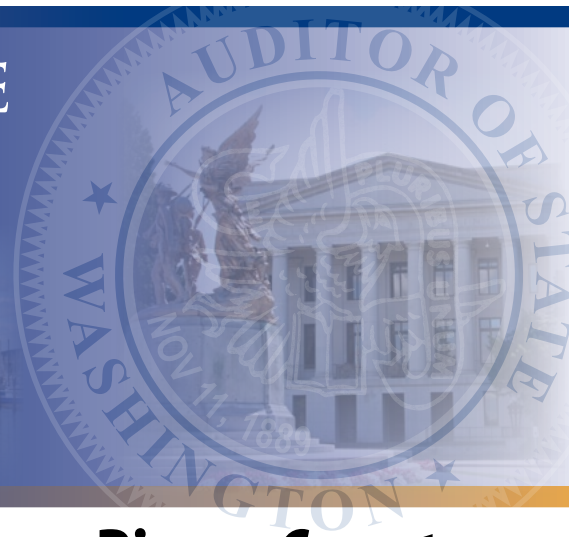


STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE PERFORMANCE AUDIT



Pierce County Performance Measures Assessment

November 16, 2010

Report No. 1004626



WASHINGTON
BRIAN SONNTAG
STATE AUDITOR

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LETTER TO PIERCE COUNTY

November 16, 2010

The Honorable Pat McCarthy
Pierce County Executive
930 Tacoma Ave. S., Room 737
Tacoma, WA 98402-2100

Dear Executive McCarthy,

In May, you asked our Office to consider a performance review of the Executive Branch of Pierce County government. In response, we assessed the County's performance measures focusing on the central question: Does the County have high quality performance measures to inform management decisions and promote accountability and transparency to the public? In addition to 20 executive branch departments, the Sheriff's Office and the County Auditor's Office participated in our assessment.

As you will see in the attached report, we found Pierce County has many performance measures and a foundation for developing a solid performance management system. Our assessment also found that the County could improve in several areas:

- Demonstrating public value with performance measures.
- Linking measures and program activities to strategic goals.
- Balancing measures to reflect both operations and outcomes.
- Measuring what matters.
- Improving the quality of performance measures.
- Setting performance targets.

We recognize you are leading the County through a strategic planning process and developing a "balanced scorecard," to measure performance. We hope this assessment and the tools and techniques we shared will be useful to you and other county leaders in your efforts to improve government services for the citizens of Pierce County.

The State Auditor's Office shares your commitment to make government work better, cost less and deliver results that matter to our citizens. Thank you for the opportunity to work toward that shared objective. Please contact us if you have questions or would like additional information about any of the issues addressed in our report.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SONNTAG, CGFM

Washington State Auditor



The State Auditor's Office Mission

The State Auditor's Office independently serves the citizens of Washington by promoting accountability, fiscal integrity and openness in state and local government. Working with these governments and with citizens, we strive to ensure the efficient and effective use of public resources.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why we did this assessment

Citizens, government officials, policymakers, legislators and others need good performance information in order to make informed decisions. Performance measurement is the continuous monitoring and reporting of data that shows whether an organization is making progress toward achieving its goals and objectives. High-quality performance reports reveal opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs, giving decision-makers the facts and data they need to make informed decisions. Meaningful performance measures provide quantitative evidence to demonstrate the value of government programs to citizens.

The State Auditor's Office provides an objective, third-party assessment of performance measures and results to help state and local governments work better, cost less, and deliver results that citizens value. A state law passed by a citizen initiative in 2005 (Initiative 900) authorizes the Office to analyze state and local government performance data, measures, and systems. The Auditor's Office provides performance measures assessment, training and other tools and techniques to help local leaders make government more effective and efficient.

At the request of the Pierce County Executive, the State Auditor's Office assessed the County's performance measures. We analyzed the relative strengths and weaknesses of those measures with the following questions in mind:

- Does the County have high-quality performance measures? Are the measures clearly linked to specific strategies, goals and objectives to achieve results that citizens expect from government?
- Does the County have a balanced portfolio of performance measures to inform decision-making and promote openness and accountability?

This report is the result of a pilot project and reflects a "point in time" in the County's performance management efforts.

Summary of results

Pierce County already has a foundation for developing a comprehensive performance management system. The County budget includes performance measures, workload measures and other performance data. Additionally, the County Executive is leading the County through a strategic planning process and developing a countywide Balanced Scorecard, which is a system of performance measures used extensively by businesses, governments and non-profit organizations.

Our assessment found the County could improve in several areas; (1) Demonstrating public value with performance measures, (2) Linking measures and activities to goals, (3) Balancing measures to reflect both operations and outcomes, (4) Measuring what matters, (5) Improving the quality of the performance measures, and (6) Setting performance targets.

Summary table of conclusions and recommendations

What we found	What we recommend
<p>Performance measures are currently reported to the County Budget Office.</p> <p>The departments varied in their capabilities to define, analyze and report performance measures.</p> <p>Many of the measures could be revised so that they are more clearly focused on customer service and results that matter to citizens.</p>	<p>The County should review and revise its current performance measures so that they are more meaningful and relevant to County employees, management, and the public.</p> <p>The County Executive should publish an annual performance report for the public focused on results citizens care about.</p>
<p>The County does not consistently link performance measures to specific goals and objectives.</p>	<p>Department leaders should develop department measures that directly tie to strategic goals and objectives.</p>
<p>Overall, the County has an appropriate mix of performance measure types, but many departments do not have an equitable balance of types of measures.</p> <p>The County and departments have developed too many measures.</p>	<p>Departments should ensure their performance measures address a balance of program operations and results – including measures of resources, productivity, efficiency, customer service and outcomes.</p> <p>The County should limit the number of measures reported to ensure that County leaders have relevant information to support their decisions.</p>
<p>Most performance measures did not have targets to measure results against.</p> <p>Some of the measures reported are not quantifiable or suitable measures of progress over time.</p>	<p>The County should revise its performance measurement instructions, systems and tools in order to report more meaningful performance information.</p>

Auditor’s role

During the assessment, we discussed with management methods and criteria for measuring and reporting on program performance and provided technical assistance. We provided some tools and methodologies such as performance measurement training manuals, examples and references to elements of a good system, but we did not make management decisions nor did we perform management functions. Management is responsible for developing, tracking and monitoring performance measures.

This assessment does not constitute an audit under Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). We did not independently verify the accuracy of the information gathered from the County or its departments nor can it be relied upon to disclose possible errors, irregularities or misappropriation at the County. The implementation of activities and tasks that we performed, however, was consistent with the independence principles specified by GAGAS.

INTRODUCTION

A performance measurement system is designed to ensure continuous monitoring of the efficiency and effectiveness of programs, services, activities, and operations. A good system can substantially improve transparency and accountability for results.

Components of a sound performance management system:

1. Commitment and involvement from leadership. Government leaders should be committed to and involved in performance measurement and improvement.
2. Relevant measures of outputs that lead to outcomes. Management should define which measures are relevant. Even if it is difficult or too costly to measure outcomes, developing a logical framework that explains how outputs lead to intended outcomes makes the measures more meaningful.
3. Sufficient data to produce meaningful analysis. Performance data should be collected frequently enough for meaningful analysis to inform timely management decisions.
4. Regular review and analysis. For performance measures to be effective, management must regularly review them and use the results to inform decision-making and allocate resources.
5. Reporting: Many public agencies communicate the results of their performance through annual reports and other performance-related reports that illustrate the value of programs and services.

Source: Association of Government Accountants State and Local Government's Use of Performance Measures to Improve Service Delivery

Scope and Methodology

The Pierce County Executive asked our Office to assess the County's performance measures. The Sheriff and County Auditor, both separately elected officials, voluntarily participated in the assessment. We collected information on more than 400 performance measures from the 22 departments and elected offices as shown below.

Participating Departments and Elected Offices

Elected offices that participated in this assessment

- Executive's Office
- Auditor's Office
- Sheriff's Department

Departments that participated in this assessment

- Assigned Counsel
- Budget and Finance
- Clerk of the Superior Court
- Communications
- Community Services
- Economic Development
- Emergency Management
- Facilities Management
- Family Justice Center
- Government Relations
- Human Resources
- Human Services
- Information Technology
- Medical Examiner
- Parks and Recreation
- Planning and Land Services
- Public Works and Utilities
- Risk Management
- Sustainability

Performance measures evaluation criteria

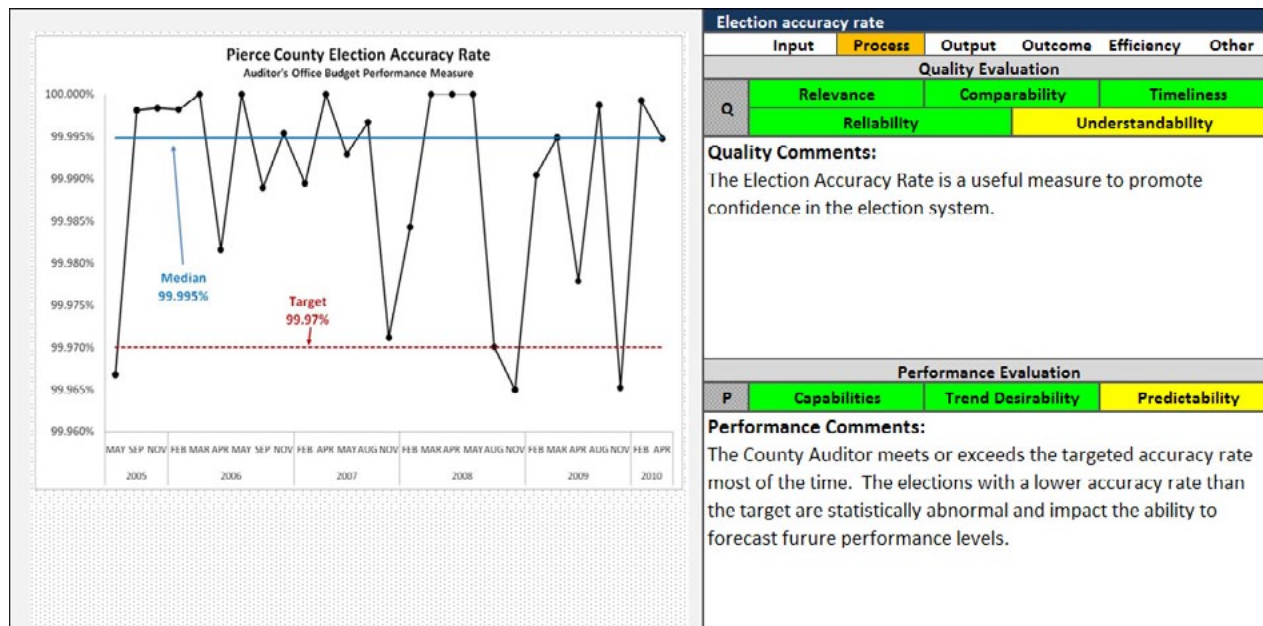
For each measure, we categorized its type and assessed its quality. The guidance we used to assess the quality of performance measures is shown in the table below.

Quality of Performance Measures	
Relevance	– Is the measure useful to the intended audience as evidence of performance and accomplishment?
Comparability	– Do the data, targets, and footnotes reveal whether performance is improving, declining or staying the same?
Timeliness	– Is the data current and reported frequently enough to support decision-making, public accountability and government openness?
Reliability	– Is the information verifiable, free from bias, and a faithful representation of what it claims to represent?
Understandability	– Is the measure clear, concise, and easy for a non-expert to understand?

Sources: National Performance Management Advisory Commission, Government Accounting Standards Board, and Association of Government Accountants.

Whenever targets and sufficient data were available, we also evaluated the actual performance reported compared to a target or desired trend.

Below is an example of a complete performance measure for which we were able to evaluate the quality and reported performance of the measure.



The primary data sources for this assessment included the County’s annual budget, department strategic plans, operational and performance measurement data collected from individual County departments. We did not include performance measures in this assessment that were not developed or currently used by management for continuous monitoring.

ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The County has an opportunity to improve its performance measures

Pierce County has a foundation for developing a comprehensive performance management system. The County budget includes performance measures, workload measures and other performance data. Additionally, the County Executive is leading the County through a strategic planning process and developing a countywide Balanced Scorecard, which is a system of performance measures used extensively by businesses, governments and non-profit organizations.

Our assessment of the County's performance management system found the County could improve in several areas; (1) Demonstrating public value with performance measures, (2) Linking measures and activities to goals, (3) Balancing measures to reflect both operations and outcomes, (4) Measuring what matters, (5) Improving the quality of the performance measures, and (6) Setting performance targets.

1. Demonstrating public value with performance measures

Performance measures can help government be publically accountable and improve performance. When government uses effective and relevant performance measures, it is better able to demonstrate the value of its programs and services to its customers and to the public.

Effective performance measures also help County leaders and managers determine how cost-effective services are and whether they are making progress toward goals and objectives. A results-oriented performance report would provide citizens and County leaders with clear information about the value of programs and services.

Below are three examples of performance management reports produced by local jurisdictions that demonstrate how performance measures can inform decision-makers and communicate to the public.

Sample of performance reports from other local governments

Government	Publications
King County	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Countywide Strategic Plan, which is the basis for its performance management initiatives.• King County AIMs High Performance Scorecard, a report to citizens on the results and progress of key performance indicators.• Countywide Performance Management Year-end Report on the formation of the Performance Management Workgroup.
City of Shoreline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic Directions & Performance Measures, a quick guide to the community's vision, values, and strategic objectives with associated performance measures.• Benchmark Report is intended to use to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency, analyze data, learn best practices, and illustrate public value.
City of Bellevue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report to Bellevue Citizens on Bellevue's "vital signs" and overall performance.• Annual Performance Report on citizen-based performance measures and community indicators. Departments report their performance in annual scorecards.• Comparative Cities Performance Report comparing Bellevue to other local and national jurisdictions.

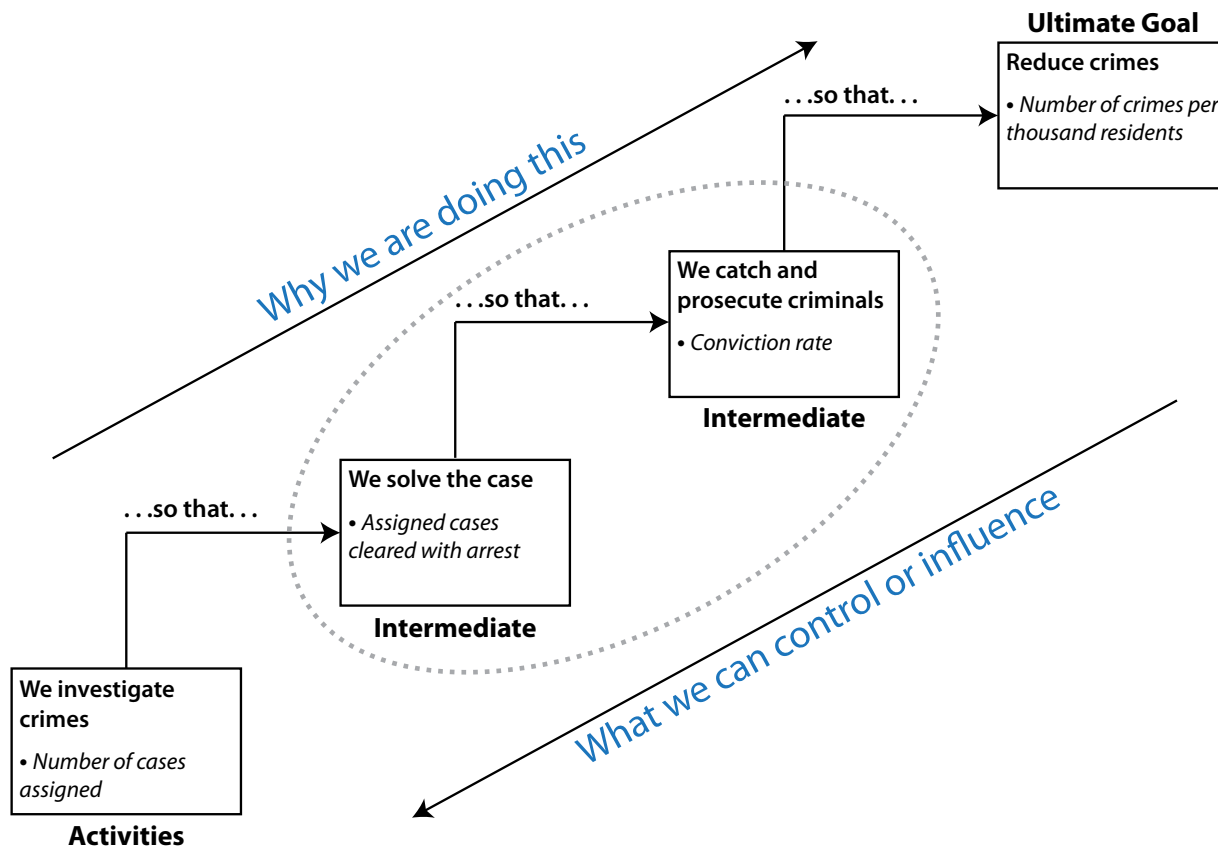
2. Linking measures and activities to goals

Although year-end County budget performance measures are associated with County goals in some budget documents, we found many departments were not able to measure the outcomes of their programs and services, or even link their outputs to specific outcomes that are meaningful to citizens. (In the diagram below, the specific outcome is referred to as “the ultimate goal” of the program.)

A program can demonstrate its value by clarifying the link between what it does and the results citizens expect. A logic model is a simple tool to clarify these connections. The core function or activity measures at the bottom of the model are linked to intermediate outcomes that lead to the ultimate goal or purpose of the program, labeled at the top. By clarifying these connections, County employees, division managers, other departments, partners, and citizens can clearly see how the program or activity contributes to the goal.

The following diagram is an example of how measures can be meaningfully connected to demonstrate the value of a criminal justice program whose purpose is to reduce crime.

Sample Criminal Justice Logic Model



3. Balancing measures to reflect both operations and outcomes

An effective performance management system should have a balanced mix of performance measures that reflect critical components of an organization’s operations. These can include input, process, output, efficiency, and outcome measures.

- **Inputs** – the amount of financial and nonfinancial resources applied to produce a service or product, such as payroll and staff expertise.
- **Processes** – the activities that generate the output, such as time to complete a task.
- **Outputs** – the quantity of services or products provided.
- **Efficiency** – the resources used per unit of output or the cost per unit of output, such as the cost to serve one client or produce one report.
- **Outcome** – the results associated with the provision of the service or product, such as the effect on the client or organization.

At the county-wide level, the County has a reasonable balance of the types of performance measures needed to effectively assess how it is operating. Of the 400 measures that we assessed, 58 percent were either an output or an outcome measure, a desirable ratio. Another 32 percent, as shown below, varied among input and process measures. The County has also included, but to a smaller degree, efficiency measures, which assess the cost of outputs and outcomes produced.

County-wide performance measures by type

County-wide	Input	Process	Output	Efficiency	Outcome	Other
Total	95	42	173	22	58	35
Percentage of all Measures	22%	10%	41%	5%	14%	8%

However, at the individual department level, the types of measures were not as balanced, as shown below. Nine of 22 departments did not have any outcome-based measures; they focused more on output and/or process types of measures. Another four departments had not yet developed any type of measure, and one Department only reported outcome-based measures.

Department performance measures by type

County-wide	Input	Process	Output	Efficiency	Outcome	Other
Auditor’s Office (Elected)	4	6	8	2	1	0
Executive’s Office (Elected)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheriff’s Department (Elected)	8	13	12	3	1	4
Assigned Counsel	10	1	13	0	1	0
Budget and Finance	0	0	22	0	0	0
Clerk’s Office	6	0	1	0	0	0
Communications	0	0	6	0	2	0
Community Services	2	0	28	4	14	2
Economic Development	1	0	11	0	0	0
Emergency Management	0	0	18	1	0	0
Facilities	26	0	0	2	1	0
Family Justice Center	0	0	0	0	0	0

County-wide	Input	Process	Output	Efficiency	Outcome	Other
Government Relations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Human Resources	3	2	23	0	3	0
Human Services	17	1	21	7	7	18
Information Technology	13	2	2	1	3	1
Medical Examiner	1	0	7	0	0	0
Parks & Recreation	0	0	0	0	17	0
Planning & Land Services	4	10	1	0	1	0
Public Works & Utilities	0	6	0	1	3	8
Risk Management	0	1	0	1	4	0
Sustainability	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Local government reports as published on their websites. See Appendix for links to these reports.

4. Measuring what matters

Performance measurement has a cost in terms of resources needed to collect, manage and analyze data. A good performance system measures what matters and eliminates data that isn’t regularly used to inform management decisions. The development of a set of measures focused on quantity, quality, cost, and timeliness of services, provides a solid framework for regular management reviews.

For example, a manager of any given unit might need a set of no more than 10-15 measures including:

- One or two measures to tell if the work unit is accomplishing its mission.
- One or two measures to tell if the work unit’s customers are satisfied (timeliness, accuracy, complaints, compliance).
- One or two measures related to finances (unit cost or efficiency).
- A few measures to tell if the work is being done well (output counts, process cycle times, defect rates).
- One or two measures can be included to track progress on specific initiatives (project management reports, surveys, training completion).

5. Improving the quality of the performance measures

We closely examined the quality of the County’s performance measures by evaluating whether each measure was useful, objective, clear, concise, and easy for a non-expert to understand. We found the 22 departments varied in their capabilities to measure performance. While many departments’ information systems track key operational data, departmental strategic goals and objectives were not always defined or reviewed by management on a regular basis. We identified two specific areas that would enhance the County’s ability to improve and report on performance.

1. Most County departments need to develop better outcome measures and more clearly link their other measures to those outcomes.
2. The County could identify and track more measures that reflect the customer perspective.

In the tables below, we include some examples to illustrate how specific measures met or fell short of our quality assessment.

Sample of quality performance measures

Performance Measure	Criteria and Comments
Average wait time for licensing customers	This process measure is directly relevant to what the customer wants and includes a stated target of “not more than five minutes.”
Arterial lane miles by pavement condition	This outcome measure compares the actual pavement condition against specific targets designed to achieve the lowest overall maintenance cost.
Average cost per claim	This efficiency measure has specific targets and a benchmark to compare performance to peer organizations.

Sample of performance measures that need improvement

Performance Measure	Comments	Improvement Suggestion
By 03/31/2010 implement an electronic system in Pierce County Superior Court that generates and distributes court orders.	This is an expectation, accomplishment or project milestone; it is not a performance measure.	Revise the measure so that it can measure outputs and outcomes over time, such as generate and distribute court orders within a certain number of days.
Number of schedule 16 grants reconciled	This output measure contains technical jargon, and it is not clear how progress would be assessed.	Reduce or eliminate technical jargon, and explain how the measure connects to goals. For example, “the percent of grant payments reconciled accurately the first time” more clearly relates to a goal of financial stewardship.
Applications for job openings	It is not clear how this relates to agency performance.	A potential alternative could be the percentage of applications that meet minimum and preferred requirements.

Source: Reports submitted to auditor’s assessment team by County departments.

3. Setting performance targets

In addition to evaluating the quality of individual performance measures, we attempted to assess actual performance to determine if departments have met or exceeded stated targets, whether results are trending in a desirable direction and the extent to which data allowed for forecasting future performance trends. However, we were unable to assess performance for more than 80 percent of the measures. The two common barriers were the lack of performance targets and the lack of sufficient data for trend analysis.

We recommend the County set specific performance targets. A target is a numerical expression of the desired or expected level of performance. A target allows for a comparison of “where we are now” with “where we should be.” A target should not be set by guessing or simply setting the bar higher than current or past performance. Unless something is changing (for example, resources available, demand, or business processes), the performance will remain constant. Achieving a higher level of performance requires significant investment of management time and resources.

A well informed process of setting targets should take the following elements into consideration:

- **Current actual performance** – What is the average of the actual performance reported? What are the normal highs and lows in the data range? Is the data trending in any direction?
- **Customer requirements** – What do our customers want or expect?
- **Resource allocation** – What level of performance is possible given the current level of resources?
- **Management expectations** – Is less, more, or about the same desirable? How much more or less?
- **Management priorities** –What is the most important thing we do that needs to improve?

Viable resources or guidance for setting performance targets include:

- Average of historical performance levels
- Targets established at other similar jurisdictions
- Industry guidance and best practices
- Mandated or regulatory requirements
- Management or customer expectations

Trend analysis and targets. In the absence of specific targets, it is possible to examine trends to determine if overall performance is increasing or declining. A sufficient number of data points (ideally at least seven data points) are necessary to establish a definable trend. Without sufficient data for trend analysis, future performance levels cannot be accurately estimated.

Conclusion

Pierce County has a foundation of performance measures collected through the budget process and reported in County budget documents. Executive management could improve the performance measurement system by linking these measures to countywide strategic goals and objectives. The County is developing a countywide strategic plan that will set the future direction of its operations and programs. When the plan is completed, County leaders will be in a better position to assess progress and report to citizens on countywide priorities.

The County could improve how departments collect data and assess their progress in the areas being measured. Targets were not established for many measures to allow comparison with actual results. Setting targets and comparing actual results with those targets on a regular basis would help County managers, employees, leaders and citizens assess whether performance is getting better, worse, or staying about the same. County and department managers could then make more informed and timely adjustments to operations to achieve their goals. We also noted some of the measures reported through the budget process are expressions of expectations or goals, rather than quantifiable measures that could be tracked and improved over time. Finally, many of the measures could be selected and described more clearly, so that the public can more fully understand what it is the County is measuring.

APPENDIX: PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT RESOURCES

National Performance Management Advisory Commission, A Performance Management Framework for State and Local Government: From Measurement and Reporting to Management and Improving

<http://www.pmcommission.org/APerformanceManagementFramework.pdf>

This report provides useful information for governments learning about and implementing performance management initiatives. For governments that have not developed performance measures, the framework provided in this report gives a starting point for creating a performance management system.

Public Performance Measurement & Reporting Network

<http://www.ppmrn.net/>

Public Performance Measurement & Reporting Network is a resource for citizens, government officials, nonprofit managers, academics and other groups who need access to a comprehensive and continuously updated database of publications and cases, national conferences and workshops, and publications of measurement-based books and articles.

Association of Government Accountants State and Local Governments' Use of Performance Measures to Improve Service Delivery

<http://www.agacgm.org/research/downloads/CPAGNo23.pdf>

This report identified key elements of performance management that are used to improve service delivery, highlighted specific governments' successful use of performance measures to improve service delivery; and determined the extent to which performance management elements are used.

International City/County Management Association

http://icma.org/en/icma/priorities/performance_management

International City/County Management Association is a resource for local governments who need help with the performance data used to establish goals and outcomes in budget decisions, for setting targets of performance, for comparing to and learning from other jurisdictions, and for communicating service and financial improvements to citizens.

Government Accounting Standards Board Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting

<http://www.seagov.org/>

The Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) is providing this resource for state and local governments to offer guidelines for voluntary reporting Service Efforts and Accomplishments (SEA) performance information to users. This will assist these users in making informed economic, social and political decisions.

Ammons, David N. Municipal Benchmarks: Assessing Local Performance and Establishing Community Standards. 2nd ed. California: Sage Publications, 2001. Print.

This book is a resource for local government elected officials and managers and staff who wish to improve their performance measurement systems and who want to compare themselves with other comparable local governments.

Washington Local Government Resources and Examples

Community Indicators Initiative of Spokane

<http://www.communityindicators.ewu.edu/generalLinks.cfm>

The Community Indicators Initiative of Spokane is a resource for individual local community members, governmental policy makers, non-governmental organizations, businesses, business organizations, researchers, and the press for useful, unbiased data in an accessible website.

Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington

<http://www.mrsc.org/>

The Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington is a resource for Washington local government elected officials, managers and staff who are developing and implementing performance measurement systems.

King County Countywide Strategic Plan

http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/strategy/StrategicPlan/~//media/exec/strategy/documents/CWSP/1007_1182_KCStratPlan7_0727.ashx

King County's Strategic Plan is an example of reporting to decision-makers, stakeholders, and citizens how they are doing, where they want to go, and shows how they will get there. Strategic plans help define goals, set specific targets, and prioritize policy and budget decisions.

King County AIMs High Performance Scorecard

<http://your.kingcounty.gov/aimshigh/index.asp>

King County AIMs High is a great example of public performance reporting. It shows how performance reports help explain social, economic, and environmental conditions and what they are doing to improve those in King County.

King County – Countywide Performance Management Work Group 2009 Report

http://www.kingcounty.gov/operations/auditor/~//media/operations/auditor/documents/2010Documents/Countywide_PM_Report_2009_FINAL.ashx

The report demonstrates the County's success as a result of council action that has been supported by the combined efforts of the county's elected officials, the Executive's Office of Strategic Planning and Performance

Management (OSPPM), staff and management in individual agencies and departments, and the countywide Performance Management Work Group. This report highlights King County Government's 2009 performance management accomplishments and the next steps for 2010.

City of Shoreline Strategic Directions & Performance Measures

<http://www.cityofshoreline.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=4142>

Shoreline's Strategic Directions & Performance Measures highlights the City's vision, values, goals, strategic objectives, desired community conditions, strategies, performance measures, actual data, and data trends. It is an example of reporting continuous improvement to decision-makers, stakeholders, and citizens.

City of Shoreline Benchmark Report

<http://www.cityofshoreline.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=4174>

This report compares other cities to the City of Shoreline and is a tool to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency, to analyze data for high performance, and to communicate value to decision-makers, stakeholders, and citizens.

City of Bellevue Report to Bellevue Citizens

http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Finance/Report_to_bellevue_citizens.pdf

This report is a great way to deliver simple, coherent communication to citizens on how the city of Bellevue as a whole is performing in specific areas.

City of Bellevue Annual Performance Report

http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Finance/2009_COB_Annual_Performance_Report.pdf

This report shows how the City of Bellevue's is accomplishing their mission, how well they are delivering services, where challenges remain, and opportunities for improvement.

City of Bellevue Comparative Cities Performance Report

http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Finance/Entire_Document_for_website.pdf

This report presents performance measurement information among seven City of Bellevue functions and compares the measures to other cities throughout the country.

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The State Auditor's Office independently serves the citizens of Washington by promoting accountability, fiscal integrity and openness in state and local government. Working with these governments and with citizens, we strive to ensure the efficient and effective use of public resources.