How to Start Performance Measures

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website (mtas.tennessee.edu). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Why aren't more municipal public works departments using performance measurements? Usually because (1) they do not see the value, and (2) starting and maintaining the program requires extra effort. Managers need to realize on the front end that performance measurement is a continuous improvement process. It will not be perfect in the beginning. But, once started and continued, it becomes just part of the way the department does business.

The biggest effort may be deciding to implement performance measures in the first place. The tendency is to "keep doing things the way we've always done them." As noted, there are lots of good reasons to implement performance measures, but starting a program can be a hard sell, especially internally. Overcoming employee resistance may be the most difficult part of starting a performance measurement program. Employees will make statements such as

- We already tried that. Didn't work then; won't work now.
- Performance measures are unfair because we don't have control over outcomes.
- This program will only be used to hurt us.
- This may be a great idea, but it won't last. The next manager (mayor, administrator, council) won't continue it. (Silently, they'll say, "I'll just wait this out.")
- There is no way to measure what I do.

The manager will need good communication skills to work through these and other staff concerns. It's a vital first step because the enthusiastic participation of workers is essential to the success of a performance measurement program. The manager could talk about the following points in favor of performance measures:

- They provide mission and focus for the workers;
- They indicate how well the job is being done;
- They provide information for decision making;
- They serve as a communication tool;
- They identify areas where productivity can be improved; and
- They increase program accountability.

Once employee resistance is overcome, consider essential elements for developing a program for your department. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) recommends the following elements.

- **Usefulness.** How helpful will the information be in decision making?
- **Clarity.** Will those who collect the data know what they should be looking for? Will those who analyze and interpret the data understand their meaning? Will those who read the performance measurement report understand what it tells them?
- **Relevancy.** Do the measures selected apply to the department's most important activities?
- **Uniqueness.** Do the measures selected provide information not available elsewhere?
- **Timeliness.** Do the measures provide information in time for leaders to use it in making decisions (about budget, purchases, etc.)?
- **Controllability.** Does our department have control over the performance of the program or service?
- **Completeness.** Does the measure provide a complete picture of the service and its objectives?
- **Comparability.** Can the measures be used for comparison (against ourselves, with other departments)?

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