Jordan Fiscal Reform II Project
Good Practices in Reporting Performance to the Public

June 2012

This publication was prepared for review by the United States Agency for International Development.

It was prepared by DAI.

Jordan Fiscal Reform II Project

Good Practices in Reporting Performance to the Public Tool

Project Title: Jordan Fiscal Reform II Project

Sponsoring USAID Office: Jordan USAID/Economic Growth Office

Contract No.: EEM-I-00-07-00009-00

Application No.: EEM-I-08-07-00009-00

Contractor: Development Alternatives Inc. DAI

Publishing Date: June 2012

Author: Martha Marshall, Management Consultant

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

GOOD PRACTICES IN REPORTING TO THE PUBLIC TOOL

1. OVERVIEW

This tool is intended to help managers make their organizations more transparent and accountable by applying good practices in reporting performance to the public. Nine recommended practices are explained so managers can compare their organization's current practices, identify current strengths, and identify opportunities for improvement. The tool includes **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps** to aid with the assessment and action planning.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS TOOL

- Reinforce the role of performance reporting and its importance in the results management cycle with an emphasis on increasing accountability
- Help managers assess their organization's practices in reporting performance to the public against recommended practices so they can recognize gaps and take action to report more effectively
- Explore success factors and strategies used to overcome common challenges

3. EXPECTED BENEFITS

- Supports fulfillment of the King Abdullah II Award (KAA) Criteria sponsored by the King Abdullah II Centre for Excellence (KACE) for an entity's use of best practices and methodologies in performance management
- Assists a manager to develop an action plan defining the most opportune steps to take to strengthen reporting to the public in his or her organization

4. THE CONTEXT FOR REPORTING IN JORDAN'S PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

The process for departments, agencies, or institutions to report their actual performance to higher levels of Jordan's government is as shown in **Table 1** below:

Table 1: Government Reporting Requirements

Entity	Document against which reporting	Period of reporting
Ministry of Planning	National Executive Plan (for donors purposes)	Yearly
Government Performance Administration	National Agenda	Monthly inputs from line ministries and institutions yet GPA's analysis are on quarterly basis
Prime Minister Office	Government yearly work plan	Monthly

The practices recommended in this tool should supplement requirements and guidance provided through official channels. These recommended practices suggest methods to enhance current reporting practices, especially reports targeted to the public.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS TOOL

A related tool on **Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning from Performance** is included in the Results Oriented Government toolkit, focusing on internal uses of performance information for management purposes. For the greatest benefit, we recommend managers start with the tool on using performance information for management purposes and then progress to this tool on reporting practices. However, it is possible to use **Good Practices in Reporting Performance to the Public** quite effectively in a stand-alone manner.

This tool can be used to advantage in a number of settings, for example:

- A manager may use the tool as an independent study guide to learn about effective practices and gain ideas for more effective performance reporting
- A department, agency, or institution may facilitate a process for all senior managers to use the tool and identify next steps to strengthen reporting in their respective areas
- Managers of similar levels from diverse organizations may use the tool to compare and contrast practices in their respective areas and generate ideas to strengthen reporting

Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps provides a form for managers to use with the tool**.** Managers should assess their organizations against each of the nine recommended practices and plan actions to close gaps they have identified.

6. SOME KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The term **Government Department** is used to refer to any ministry, department, authority, or public body whose budget is included in the General Budget Law.

What is a goal, result and an outcome?
For purposes of this toolkit the terms “goal,” “result,” and “outcome” are used with the same meaning. While some sources make distinctions in these terms, all three describe the broad aim or intent that has been set for accomplishment (for example, regarding the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the term “Outcome” refers to the highest-level and long-term measurable results of a program). Goals, results, and outcomes usually take the form of statements such as these examples from Jordan’s National Agenda: “Improve and preserve the quality of the environment” or “Ensure proper health care to Jordanians on all levels” or “Enhance Jordan’s economy to allow it to thrive and be open to regional and global markets.” Goals focus on the intended benefit or impact on the intended beneficiary – simply stated, they describe the desired future state and tell how the beneficiaries will be “better off.” Notice that goal statements describe the desired end state, but they are usually silent on the specific timeframe and level of achievement desired, because they are concerned with the fundamental reasons for the organization’s or the program’s existence rather than for specifically attainable results.

What is a program?
Government typically uses what are termed “programs” as the focus of management and measurement when aligning government’s efforts and investment of resources toward goals. The government of Jordan presents its budget at the level of program. A program is a set of related activities performed for an intended group of beneficiaries or customers intended to produce a common outcome or result.

Jordan’s Budget Manual further defines program as “a grouping of activities and projects one level below government departments and units. A program is designed to achieve a specific objective or closely related objectives. A program should have an identifiable target population; a defined budget, staffing, and other necessary resources; and clearly defined objectives and outputs…”[1]

What are performance indicators?
Jordan’s Budget Manual defines a performance indicator as*:*
“A quantitative measure of what the government is achieving in terms of its progress towards reaching an objective. The term “key performance indicator” (KPI) is often used interchangeably with “performance indicator,” but KPI should be used to refer to the performance indicators that are most important to an organization or representative of its work, e.g., the KPIs may be the subset of performance indicators presented in a budget or other strategic document.[2]”

---

[1] January 2012 Budget Manual page 10
[2] January 2012 Budget Manual page 10

What are the main types of program performance indicators?
Input: The resources used to perform the program's activities generally expressed in monetary terms.

Output: The quantity of services, goods, or assets produced. This is generally expressed as a count or number.

Efficiency: The relationship between the input consumed and the output, or sometimes the outcome produced generally expressed as a ratio.

Outcome[3]: A quantitative or qualitative metric describing the type of change in condition, status, or impact produced for or achieved by the intended beneficiary. This is generally expressed as the percentage of the program's intended beneficiaries that attain the criterion of success, and so it is often used to express the highest-level attainment of a program.

Note that any of these indicator types could be used as a KPI, but most often an outcome indicator would be selected because of its value in defining the desired and highest level future state.

7. OVERVIEW OF REPORTING PRACTICES

Nine recommended practices are explained in the following sections, along with advice and tips for success:

1. Focus on results that matter most to the public
2. Make the link between actions and results clear
3. Provide context to facilitate better understanding
4. Use break-outs of performance information that make reports more interesting to users
5. Use stories and examples to make data "come alive"
6. Candidly discuss performance issues and planned steps to improve performance
7. Ensure that data are accurate, timely, reliable and verifiable
8. Use citizen-friendly design
9. Make reports accessible to the intended audiences

These recommendations are drawn from respected sources on best practices in public performance reporting as well as the author's experience in government performance management. For additional information on these sources of best practice advice, see the annotated list in **Appendix 2: Notes on Resources for Best Practices in Public Reporting**. References for all sources and examples can be found in Works Cited at the end of this tool. Managers can enhance their understanding of effective reporting practices by exploring these sources and examining award winning reports in more detail.

[3] The term "result" may be used interchangeably with the term outcome

7.1 FOCUS ON RESULTS THAT MATTER MOST TO THE PUBLIC

To make public performance reporting relevant and useful government organizations must focus on reporting performance information that matters most to the public. The public cares most about the outcomes or results[4] of government, in other words the impact, effect, or change in condition or status that is achieved for the intended beneficiary. The performance indicators selected should provide a basis to assess the achievement of the major goals and objectives of the organization and the particular program or service being reported.

In reviewing U.S. Federal agency reports, the Mercatus Center rates the extent to which the reports cover the agency's main outcome goals:

> An "outcome goal" is defined as the intended benefit (or harm avoided) that results from an agency's programs or activities. It should be articulated in clear terms that describe benefits to the community rather than activities that are presumed to be of value. For example, the number and percentage of children learning to read at grade level is an outcome; the number of children enrolled in a remedial reading program, or the number of schools receiving grants to fund these programs, are measures of activity, not outcomes. Vague verbiage that emphasizes things an agency does instead of why it is doing them should be avoided. (McTigue, Wray, & Ellig, 2009)

Figure 1 highlights the three key questions the Mercatus Center's uses as criteria to rate how well the reports focus on results. Fundamentally, performance reports should tell the public how well you are doing to achieve the goals and objectives your organization was created to address. Managers can apply these questions to strengthen their reporting of results to the public.

Figure 1: Key Questions to Guide Reporting Results or Outcomes

The Mercatus Center (McTigue, Wray, & Ellig, 2009)

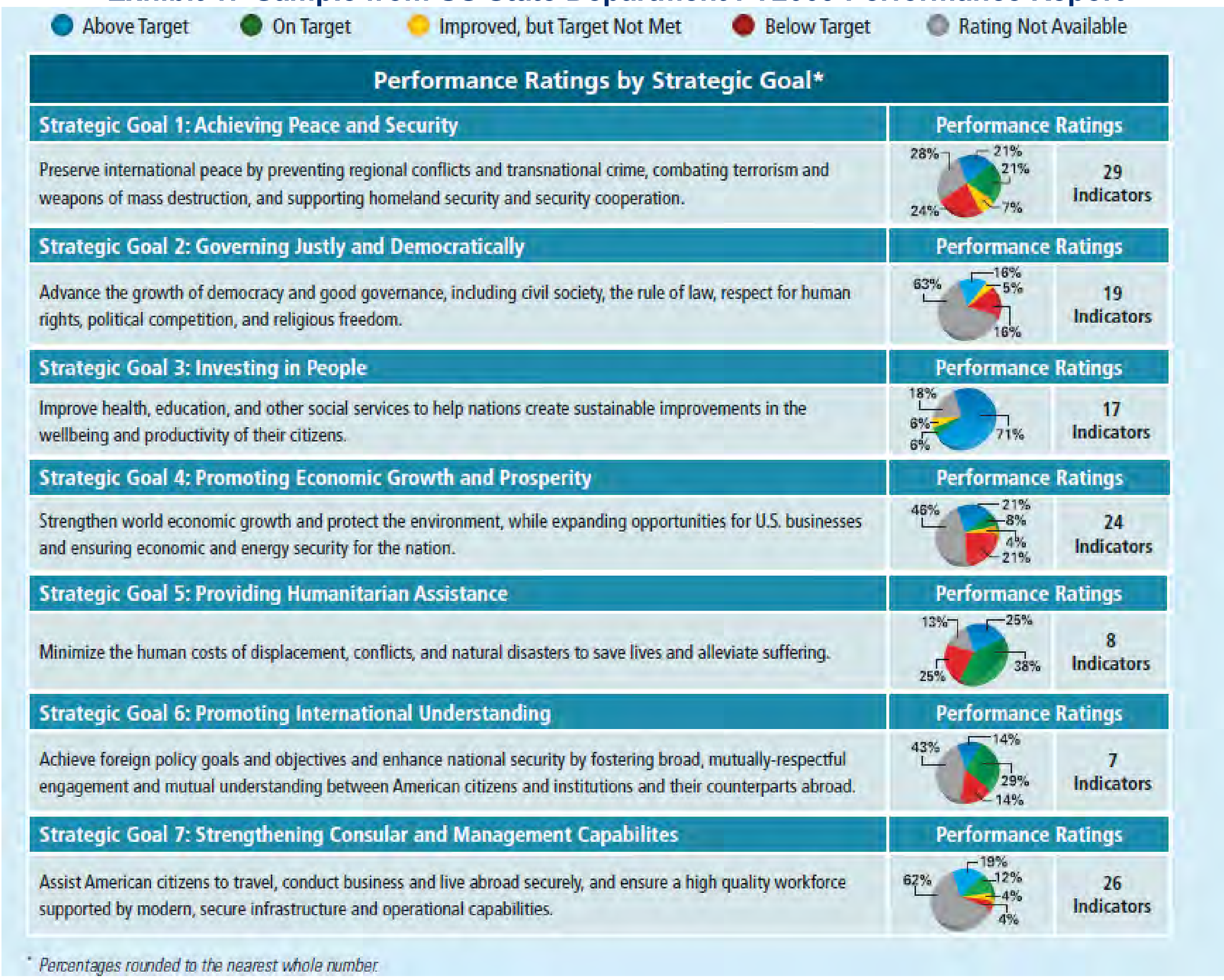
- Are strategic (long-term) and annual performance goals expressed as measurable outcomes that a lay reader can understand and relate to public benefits?
- If strategic goals are expressed at a high level of generality, are they accompanied by strategic objectives that provide more specific and measurable outcomes?
- Do the goals cover all of the agency's core missions?

Exhibit 1 reproduces a section of the U.S. Department of State Citizens Guide to Foreign Affairs performance report for Fiscal Year 2009 (US Department of State,

[4] The term "result" may be used interchangeably with the term outcome

2010). Note how the agency summarized and reported performance according to each of its strategic goals. The exhibit illustrates how each goal is stated and how performance on indicators related to the goal is summarized in graphic form. A color coded graphic in each of the pie chart format summarizes the extent to which intended targets were achieved.

Exhibit 1: Sample from US State Department FY2009 Performance Report



Above Target | On Target | Improved, but Target Not Met | Below Target | Rating Not Available

Performance Ratings by Strategic Goal*		
Strategic Goal 1: Achieving Peace and Security	**Performance Ratings**	
Preserve international peace by preventing regional conflicts and transnational crime, combating terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and supporting homeland security and security cooperation.	28% 21% 21% 24% 7%	29 Indicators
Strategic Goal 2: Governing Justly and Democratically	**Performance Ratings**	
Advance the growth of democracy and good governance, including civil society, the rule of law, respect for human rights, political competition, and religious freedom.	63% 16% 5% 16%	19 Indicators
Strategic Goal 3: Investing in People	**Performance Ratings**	
Improve health, education, and other social services to help nations create sustainable improvements in the wellbeing and productivity of their citizens.	18% 6% 6% 71%	17 Indicators
Strategic Goal 4: Promoting Economic Growth and Prosperity	**Performance Ratings**	
Strengthen world economic growth and protect the environment, while expanding opportunities for U.S. businesses and ensuring economic and energy security for the nation.	46% 21% 8% 4% 21%	24 Indicators
Strategic Goal 5: Providing Humanitarian Assistance	**Performance Ratings**	
Minimize the human costs of displacement, conflicts, and natural disasters to save lives and alleviate suffering.	13% 25% 25% 38%	8 Indicators
Strategic Goal 6: Promoting International Understanding	**Performance Ratings**	
Achieve foreign policy goals and objectives and enhance national security by fostering broad, mutually-respectful engagement and mutual understanding between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad.	43% 14% 29% 14%	7 Indicators
Strategic Goal 7: Strengthening Consular and Management Capabilites	**Performance Ratings**	
Assist American citizens to travel, conduct business and live abroad securely, and ensure a high quality workforce supported by modern, secure infrastructure and operational capabilities.	62% 19% 12% 4% 4%	26 Indicators

* *Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number*

Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on reporting its major results and record the result in the **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- For helpful advice on forming goals with well aligned indicators, refer to the tool **Aligning Results and Roles**
- Use charts to help summarize more complex data. Performance "dashboards" can provide a user-friendly overview of accomplishments

7.2 MAKE THE LINK BETWEEN ACTIONS AND RESULTS CLEAR

The first practice emphasizes choosing indicators to report that focus on outcomes or results. But the results your organization reports must be ones that its efforts can be shown to impact. Researcher Richard Boyle raises the important issue of causality or attribution in performance reporting. Boyle notes:

> An interesting issue is the extent to which changes in the reported indicators can be directly attributed to the agency/program. If the change cannot be attributed to the agency/program, it is described here as aspirational in nature: i.e., achievement is outside the direct control of the agency/program. (Boyle, 2009)

Aspiration does not equate to performance! It is not acceptable to report data on high-level indicators of community condition without explaining the link between government's strategy or activities and performance on that outcome. The report should help readers understand the "theory of change" linking government actions toward the result. **Exhibit 2** illustrates a sample performance report from a mid-size U.S. city for its Fire and Emergency Medical Services. Note how the City has graphically arranged the report to mirror a "program logic model" or "chain of success" with the arrows and text boxes showing the progression of performance indicators on the left hand side of the chart. The City's performance over two years is reported in a table on the right hand side of the page.

Your organization's plans should be a valuable source of guidance about the intent and the "theory of change" driving performance. Your plans should lay out what the organization intends to accomplish, provide indicators that can be used to measure success and indicate the amount of change you intend to produce over a specified period. Effective reporting helps readers understand how well an organization achieved its planned accomplishments.

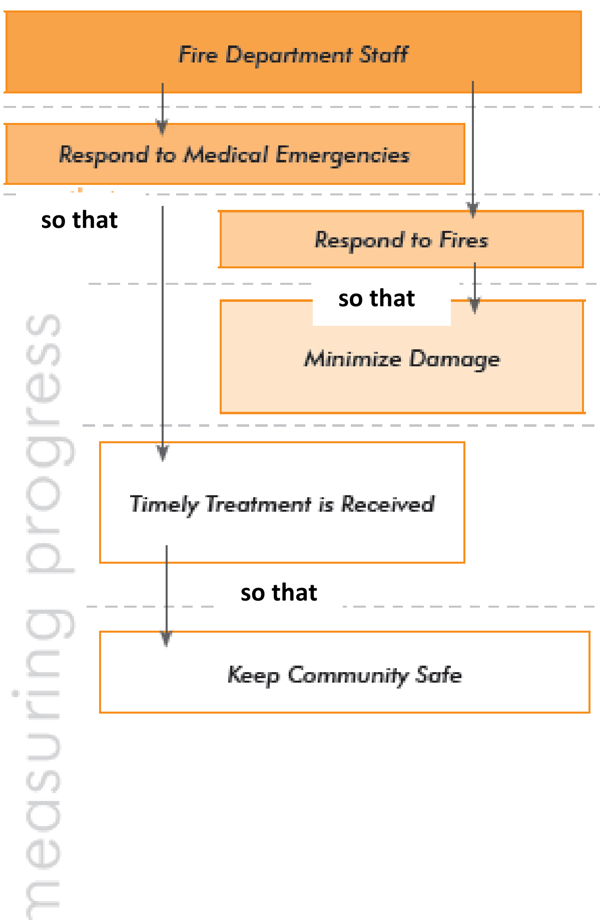
Exhibit 2: Sample Performance Report Showing How Actions Contribute to Result

(City of Kirkland WA, 2006)

fire and emergency management

goals

When Fire and Emergency Management Services employees respond to fires and medical emergencies, they work to minimize the damage and ensure that citizens receive timely treatment. Their goal is to keep our community safe.



MEASURE	2004[1]	2005
Paid fire and EMS staffing per 1,000 population served	.89	.93
EMS responses per 1,000 population served	66.2	65.2
EMS Response Time	4:36 min[2]	4:29 min
Total fire incidents per 1,000 population served	27.4	26.6
Total non-fire incidents per 1,000 population	12	9.6
% Responses time under 5 minutes	53.1%[3]	33.1%
Fires Contained to Room of Origin	58%	67%

(Footnotes)
[1] From ICMA Data
[2] Average time from conclusion of dispatch to arrival on scene
[3] Emergency calls; Non-Emergency calls is 27.3%

.**Tips and Advice Before Moving On:**

- Assess your organization's current practices on explaining the link between its actions and the reported results. Record the result in the **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Be sure the lay reader can understand both your organization's intent and its performance in achieving its objectives. It is helpful to test draft reports with members of the public who can provide feedback about whether you are measuring and reporting what matters most
- For helpful advice on illustrating the cause and effect relationships between program activities and results, see the tool **The Program Logic Model and Developing a Chain of Success**
- If your organization developed a Balanced Scorecard, the links between its levels or perspectives should help explain cause and effect relationships and aid in reporting. Reproducing a simple version of the scorecard can help communicate your organization's strategic intent
- Check to be sure your report communicates in graphic and/or narrative form how your efforts lead to the outcome indicator or result you are reporting. You may be able to use a brief excerpt from your organization's strategic plan to help explain the logic or causality linking actions and accomplishments

7.3 PROVIDE CONTEXT TO FACILITATE BETTER UNDERSTANDING

In addition to providing the context of goals or objectives recommended in **Section 7.2 Make the link between actions and results clear**, an effective performance report should illustrate and explain the performance targets against which performance should be judged. If possible, performance trends should be reported with prior year targets and actual data over multiple years.

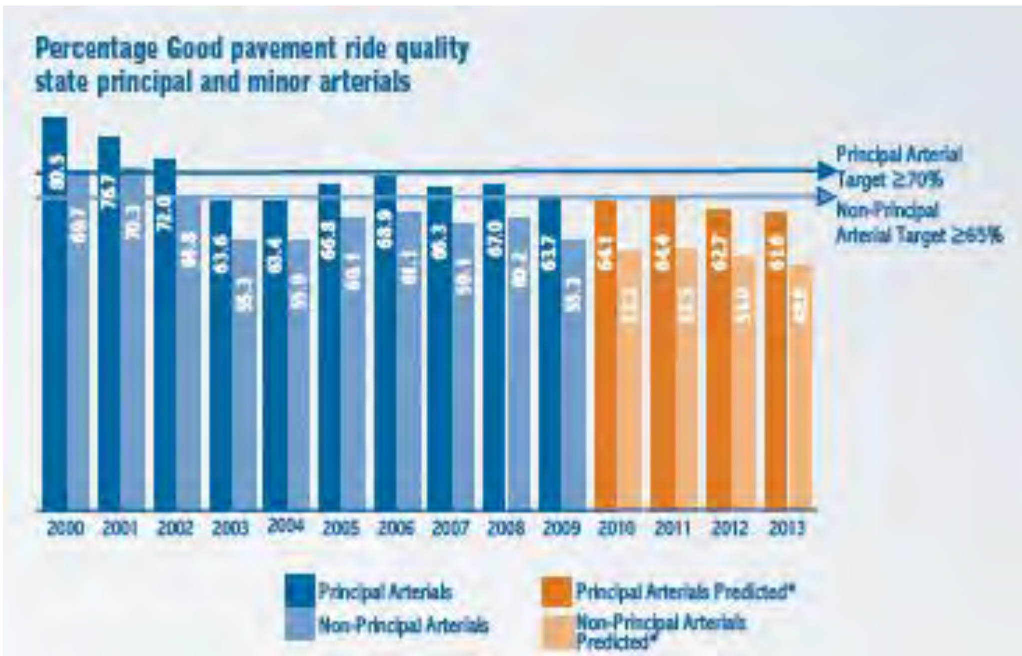
Exhibit 3 illustrates an example of providing performance context in a report. Note how the U.S. Department of Justice reports performance over a four year baseline period to provide context and illustrates performance and targets for FY2008 in its performance report for FY2008. The report offers a footnote with information explaining target setting and narrative not reproduced in the Exhibit further discusses performance on each of the agency's goals.

Graphs illustrating past performance trends can be quite helpful in understanding current performance.

Figure 2 illustrates a chart from the U.S. State of Minnesota's FY2009 Performance Report (State of Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2010) showing the pavement quality of roads (arterial and non-arterial) versus the targets for nine prior years.

Additionally, the agency illustrates future performance targeted for pavement quality from its plans. This background information provides an excellent context for understanding the FY2009 performance covered in the report.

Figure 2: State of Minnesota Annual Transportation Performance Report for FY2009 Illustrating Context for Current Year Performance



Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on reporting performance context and record the result **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Consider alternate presentation formats to communicate performance trends. A graph illustrating performance over a series of years makes it easier to see trends

Exhibit 3: Sample from US Department of Justice FY2008 Performance Report Illustrating Use of Performance Targets and Trends

STRATEGIC GOAL II: Performance	FY 2004 Actual	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Actual	FY 2008 Target	FY 2008 Actual	FY 2008 Rating
Number of organized criminal enterprises dismantled	29	34	36	43	34	34	
Number of child pornography websites or web hosts shut down	2,638	2,088	906	1,667	1,000	1,525	
Percentage of firearms investigations resulting in a referral for criminal prosecutions	N/A	55%	57%	57%	58%	60%	
Consolidated Priority Organizations Target-linked drug trafficking organizations							
Disrupted	159	204	189	169	220	293	
Dismantled	36	121	93	86	115	102[1]	

[1]The FY 2008 targets were very ambitious. Even though the Department experienced resource reductions for the OCDETF program in FY 2008, it was still able to achieve 102 dismantlements, a 19 percent increase over the 86 dismantlements in FY 2007.

Legend: Achievement of 100% of performance targets for this Strategic Goal = Green; 75-99% = Yellow; 74% or below = Red; and when data are not yet available = Blue.

Continued on next page.

7.4 USE BREAK-OUTS OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION THAT MAKE REPORTS MORE INTERESTING TO USERS

Performance reports typically begin by reporting aggregate or total data on results. But reports that only provide aggregated data may mask important differences in performance for different geographic areas or different groups of customers. Many reports benefit from using break-outs to better communicate performance in areas of interest to the public. This is particularly true for services with a geographic or placed based characteristic such as transportation, public safety, and human services. The public wants to know about performance where they live as well as overall performance. Where possible, it is helpful to show geographic breakouts by region, section, or service area.

The U.S. Department of Transportation was cited by the Mercatus Center for effective use of graphics that illustrated the annual change in traffic fatality rates on a map of the country with the percentage change shown for each one of the 50 U.S. states as well as country-wide performance. In this way readers can see performance for the country and also the state in which they live.

When public organizations make performance information available on-line it becomes easier to allow report users to delve further into performance break-outs. Sophisticated on-line performance reporting systems allow users to define geographic and other break-outs of interest. On-line reporting offers user defined flexibility that is not possible for paper reports. You may want to go on-line to see how the U.S. State of Virginia reports its performance and has an interactive feature called Mapping and Reporting that enables users to obtain custom reports for geographic areas of the state (State of Virginia).

Break-outs by type of client or customer are also of interest particularly for human services and education. In educational attainment, for example, looking at results by the income or ethnicity of youth will illustrate the extent to which all types of youth are progressing. In health outcomes, gender, income, and educational level may be important factors to illustrate the health status of different groups. So outcome data broken out by relevant demographic characteristics can illustrate any important gaps or disparities in condition. These insights help shape service planning and policy decisions as well as enhance transparency on performance.

Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on reporting informative breakouts of performance information. Record the result in **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Consider using maps as a visual aid to enhance the understanding of performance information reported by geographic area
- Be sure to include relevant break-out data if your organization has different customer types

- On-line reporting may not be feasible at this time, but it is useful to think ahead about the possibilities it could offer in the future

7.5 USE STORIES AND EXAMPLES TO MAKE DATA "COME ALIVE"

Reports that are statistical in nature can seem abstract to readers and may be perceived as "boring." Stories are particularly useful to help illustrate efforts that are abstract, complex, or may take years for results to unfold, such as research or prevention programs. Stories help readers understand the relevance of the program's work to their lives and gain a better understanding about what an organization's success means for the public. A few selected stories can make performance information more "approachable" by adding "human interest."

Agencies may feature current stories about success achieved for particular individuals, groups, or communities to help illustrate achievements. As an example, the USAID agency provides a brief inset in its performance report about relief efforts in the country of Haiti to help illustrate its humanitarian aid program. **Figure 3** illustrates a narrative included as an inset box in USAID's FY2009 Performance Report. This brief vignette helps readers understand the agency's work in the context of current events and its importance for a country in need.

Figure 3: Illustrative Use of A Story by US AID in its Performance Report

U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN HAITI RELIEF

On January 12, 2010 a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck southern Haiti, with an epicenter 10 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince. On January 13, President Obama named USAID the lead Federal agency for earthquake relief and reconstruction. The U.S. Government's joint civilian-military response to assist the Haitian people following the earthquake is being carried out in coordination with the United Nations, the international community, and nongovernmental organizations worldwide. Our assessment teams are also evaluating public health, critical infrastructure, and longer-term food and nutrition needs with a view to post-disaster reconstruction. The Department of State and USAID work as one to coordinate the overall American humanitarian response, demonstrating the ongoing linkage of diplomacy and development. To learn more, see *http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/ha/earthquake/index.htm* and *http://www.usaid.gov/haiti/*.

While stories can be quite beneficial, organizations use them carefully. The intent is to keep performance reports focused on real performance data and to communicate the results achieved with facts. Stories provide great accents, but should not be the main content of performance reporting. To be effective a story must be highly relevant and consistent with the facts.

Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on effective use of stories to enhance performance information. Record the result in **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Use caution to ensure that stories provide a "human interest" accent versus becoming the focus of performance reporting. Effective performance reporting must be data focused
- Stories are also effective to help staff see the impact of their work on the people they serve. See the tool **Aligning Team and Individual Performance with Organizational Performance** for an example of effective story use

7.6 CANDIDLY DISCUSS PERFORMANCE ISSUES AND PLANNED STEPS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

It is not unusual to encounter situations where performance is not as good as planned or expected. In fact, if an organization never misses a single performance target one could question whether its targets are too low. Performance reports should explain any performance that is significantly different than expected – both good and bad. Often, organizations will set a threshold, say a difference of 10% or more, for which an explanation is required for variation from target.

Performance shortfalls provide an important opportunity for learning and improvement. Effective performance reporting should tell the public not only about the shortfall but what caused it and how the organization plans to respond. The public wants to be assured the organization is taking reasonable actions to address performance shortfalls. **Figure 4** highlights the three key questions the Mercatus Center (McTigue, Wray, & Ellig, 2009) uses as criteria to rate how well the reports report on performance issues. Managers can apply these questions to strengthen their reporting of performance issues to the public.

Figure 4: Key Questions to Guide Reporting Results or Outcomes

The Mercatus Center (McTigue, Wray, & Ellig, 2009)

- Does the report clearly and candidly disclose performance shortfalls?
- Does it explain shortfalls in a way that gives the reader useful insight into their causes?
- Does it describe planned remedial actions in a way that gives the reader confidence that the agency is working to improve its performance?

Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on reporting performance context and record the result in **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Consider alternate presentation formats to communicate performance trends. Graphs illustrating performance over a series of years can make it easier to see trends
- Remember to also explain when performance is better than expected. Organizations should consider actual performance when setting future targets. Better performance trends may indicate the opportunity to increase future performance targets

7.7 ENSURE THAT DATA ARE ACCURATE, TIMELY, RELIABLE AND VERIFIABLE

Performance information should be equally as reliable and accurate as financial information organizations report. Care should be taken to ensure that decision makers and the public can rely upon the data reported by your organization. Accountability is enhanced by reliable data and damaged by unreliable or inaccurate data.

The U.S. Governmental Accounting Standards Board (Governmental Accounting Standards Board) recommends six key qualitative characteristics for reported performance information. **Figure 5** summarizes and explains these recommendations. These standards are useful to apply to performance reporting in any organization.

Every organization should have a quality assurance process in place to document and verify the performance information it reports. Many organizations have initiated formal performance auditing to verify the reported information and ensure its conformance to standards. A further good practice is to let the public know about the quality assurance process used by your organization to ensure accurate, timely and reliable data. **Figure 6** illustrates an effective example of a report describing data quality assurance drawn from Boyle's research. (Boyle, 2009)

Figure 5: US GASB Qualitative Characteristics for Performance Information for Service Efforts and Accomplishments (SEA) Reporting

(Governmental Accounting Standards Board)

Relevance
SEA performance information should include data that are essential to provide a basis for understanding the accomplishment of goals and objectives of the entity that have potentially significant decision-making or accountability implications.

Understandability
SEA performance information should be communicated in a readily understandable manner. It should communicate the SEA performance of the agency, department, program, or service to any reasonably informed interested party. To enhance user understanding, different forms of reporting such as tables, charts, and graphs may be needed by different state and local governmental entities and for different services…A balance should be achieved among the number of services reported, the SEA performance measures reported, and the capability of users to understand and act on the information. SEA performance information should include explanations about important underlying factors and existing conditions that may have affected SEA performance.

Comparability
SEA performance information should provide a clear frame of reference for assessing the SEA performance of the entity and its agencies, departments, programs, and services. SEA performance measures, when presented alone, do not provide a basis for assessing or understanding the level of SEA performance. Therefore, SEA performance information should include comparative information. This information may take various forms; for example, reported measures of SEA performance could include comparisons with (a) several earlier fiscal years, (b) targets established by the entity such as targets established as part of the budgetary process, (c) externally established norms or standards of SEA performance, (d) other parts or subunits of the same entity, or (e) other, comparable entities.

Timeliness
SEA performance information should be reported in a timely manner so that it will be available to users before it loses its capacity to be of value in assessing accountability and making decisions.

Consistency
SEA performance information should be reported consistently from period to period to allow users to have a basis for comparing SEA performance over time and to gain an understanding of the measures being used and their meaning. However, SEA performance measures also need to be reviewed regularly and modified or replaced as needed to reflect changing circumstances.

Reliability
For SEA performance information to be of value to users, it is essential that the information be reliable. To be reliable, the information should be verifiable and free from bias and should faithfully represent what it purports to represent. Therefore, SEA performance information should be derived from systems that produce controlled and verifiable data. The value of a strong internal control structure has long been recognized when dealing with financial information.

Figure 6: Example of Good Practice in Data Quality Assessment (Boyle, 2009)

Good Practice in Preparation: Data Quality Assessment

An Example from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2008 Performance Accountability Report

Data assessment of performance measure 5.1.1—Participation levels for the major Federal nutrition assistance programs (millions per month)

Participation data are drawn from USDA administrative records. State agency reports are certified accurate and submitted to regional offices. There, they are reviewed for completeness and consistency. If the data are acceptable, the regional analyst posts them to the National Data Bank (NDB) Preload System. NDB is a holding area for data review prior to release. Otherwise, regional-office personnel reject the report and the State agency is contacted. Data posted by regional personnel into NDB are reviewed at USDA. If data are reasonable and consistent with previous reports, they will be downloaded to NDB for public release. If not, USDA works with regional offices and States to resolve problems and inconsistencies. This process of review and revision ensures that the data are as accurate and reliable as possible.

Completeness of Data—Figures for Food Stamp Program and WIC participation represent 12-month fiscal year averages. Figures for National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program are based on nine-month (school year) averages. Participation data are collected and validated monthly before being declared annual data. Reported estimates are based on data through April 2008, as available July 25, 2008.

Reliability of Data—The data are highly reliable. Participation-data reporting is used to support program financial operations. All of the data are used in published analyses, studies and reports. They also are used to support dialogue with and information requests from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the Office of Management and Budget.

Quality of Data - As described above, the data used to develop this measure are used widely for multiple purposes, both within and outside USDA. The measure itself is reported in stand-alone publications as an important, high-quality indicator of program performance.

Source: *http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/usdarpt/pdf/par2008.pdf, pp. 90-91*

Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on ensuring data quality and record the result in **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Ensure that every performance indicator is well defined and documented so that it can be audited
- Draw upon advice and guidance from subject matter experts such as performance analysts and auditors to ensure highly reliable, quality data
- Accurate documentation and definition of every performance indicator also assists in orientation of new staff so they understand how successful performance is defined and tracked

7.8 USE CITIZEN-FRIENDLY DESIGN

Use of clear, crisp narratives supported by graphics and illustrations makes reports more appealing and interesting to the public. **Figure 7** highlights the six key questions the Mercatus Center's uses as criteria to rate how well the reports make information easy to read and understand for the lay person. Managers can apply these questions to make reporting more "citizen-friendly."

Figure 7: Key Questions for Reporting that is Easy to Read and Understand

The Mercatus Center (McTigue, Wray, & Ellig, 2009)

- Is the report written in plain language that a lay reader can understand?
- Is it well organized and easy for the reader to navigate and identify key information?
- Does it use clear presentational formats that the reader can readily comprehend, including effective tables and graphics?
- Are the narratives clear and concise?
- Does the report feature a manageable number of performance goals and measures that capture outcomes whose significance is apparent to a lay reader?
- Does it limit the use of technical terms, jargon, and acronyms?

Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on using citizen friendly design in its reports and record the result in **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Consider using a variety of formats to make reporting easy to understand for different audiences. Customize presentations to the needs, abilities, and interests of the particular segment of the public you want to reach. Recognize that factors such as literacy and access to computers and the internet will impact the type and format of presentation that is best suited for each audience

- It may be highly useful to combine reporting by several organizations and organize reports around issues or goals that are of interest to the public (rather than organized by institution or agency)
- Test alternate presentation formats with users to see which formats work best. Consider using focus groups to help in rating alternate designs and formats for reports. The Service Delivery Improvement Toolkit contains a tool on **Focus Group Best Practices** that explains how to conduct focus groups
- Adapt and adopt effective practices from other organizations that have been particularly effective with the public in Jordan

7.9 MAKE REPORTS ACCESSIBLE TO THE INTENDED AUDIENCES

Making performance reports accessible to the public requires "segmentation" like any effective marketing effort. Remember that the public is not a single entity but rather a variety of audiences with different situations and preferences. While there is great interest internationally in presenting information electronically in interactive formats, recognize that this approach may be beyond the capacity of many members of the public if access to the internet is limited. Accessible reporting will require presenting information in a variety of formats both written and electronic. Video formats could be considered to reach audiences with limited literacy if screens with presentations can be placed in places where these customers are being served.

Researcher Alfred Ho offers advice on effective use of both paper and electronic formats based on the experience of reporting projects he studied. A blended approach helps cross-market the reported information to attract more readers. **Figure 8** provides these tips.

Figure 8: Recommendations on Blending Paper and E-Reporting

(Ho, 2007)

- Use paper reports to provide only a summary of the key findings and highlight the most important issues.
- Use paper reports to attract the public's attention by showing nice graphics and reporting interesting stories and case studies, and then directing the readers to the website to get more detailed information and analysis.
- Highlight the web address of the e-reporting site in multiple places in the paper report.
- Put a picture of the website homepage in the front section of the paper report.
- Make sure that the website address highlighted in the paper reports does not change over time.

Tips and Advice Before Moving On:

- Assess your organization's current practices on making performance reports accessible and record the result in **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps**
- Consider using a variety of formats to make reporting easy to access by different audiences. Customize formats and distribution methods to the needs, situation, and interests of the particular segment of the public you want to reach. Recognize that factors such as literacy and access to computers and the internet will impact the mode of presentation that is best suited for each audience
- Take advantage of demographic information about literacy and internet access to help plan your efforts
- Include performance information in your outreach and marketing campaigns
- Share effective practices with other public organizations; look for opportunities to collaborate on distributing performance information to the public

8. TIME FOR ACTION

By using this tool you are now familiar with nine recommended practices for reporting performance to the public. For each practice you have had the opportunity to assess your current practices and identify both strengths and opportunities for improvement. Now it is time to plan actions you will take to close gaps and make performance reporting more effective for the public. The tool includes **Appendix 1: Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps** to aid with the assessment and action planning. It includes columns you may use to assign responsibility and due dates for completing the actions you have targeted.

Reporting government service efforts and accomplishments strengthens accountability and transparency. Following recommended practices can build confidence in government's commitment, trustworthiness and capacity to serve the public.

WORKS CITED

Public Performance Measurement and Reporting Network (PPMRN) and the Association of Government Accountants (AGA). (2012, May 22). *The Public Performance Reporting Toolkit* . Retrieved May 22, 2012, from The Public Performance Reporting Toolkit : http://www.performancereporting.org/

Boyle, R. (2009). *Performance Reporting: Insights from International Practice.* Washington D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government.

City of Kirkland WA. (2006). *City of Kirkland Performance Measures Guide.* Retrieved May 22, 2012, from City of Kirkland WA: http://www.kirklandwa.gov/Assets/CMO/CMO+PDFs/Performance+Measures+2006.pdf

Governmental Accounting Standards Board. (n.d.). *Concept Statements Qualitative Characteristics*. Retrieved May 23, 2012, from Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting for Government: http://www.seagov.org/concepts_statements/characteristics.shtml

Ho, A. (2007). *Engaging Citizens in Measuring and Reporting Community Conditions: A Manager's Guide.* Washington D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government.

McTigue, M., Wray, H., & Ellig, J. (2009). *10th Annual Performance Report Scorecard: Which Federal Agencies Best Inform the Public?* Fairfax VA: Mercatus Center at George Mason University.

State of Minnesota Department of Transportation. (2010, May). *Measures.* Retrieved May 25, 2012, from Annual Performance Report FY 2009: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/measures/pdf/PerformanceReportLowRes.pdf

State of Virginia. (n.d.). *Virginia Performs*. Retrieved May 23, 2012, from Measuring What Matters to Virginia: http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/

US Department of State. (2010, April 30). *US Department of State Plans, Performance and Budget.* Retrieved May 25, 2012, from Citizens Guide to Foreign Affairs: http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/141872.pdf

APPENDIX 1: REPORTING TO THE PUBLIC PRACTICE ASSESSMENT AND ACTION STEPS

Reporting to the Public Practice Assessment and Action Steps

Completion Date	Responsible	Opportunities to Implement	Observations	*select one* Not Applicable	Area of strength	Needs improvement	Area of weakness	At each section users are encouraged to rate how well their reporting fulfills the suggested practice: (1) area of weakness (2) needs improvement (3) area of strength or (4) not applicable to this organization. A space is provided to record observations with an emphasis on identifying opportunities for improvement. A final column is provided to note actions proposed to strengthen reporting practices.	
								Focus on results that matter most to the public	1
								Make the link between actions and results clear	2
								Provide context to facilitate better understanding	3
								Use break-outs of performance information that make reports more interesting to users	4
								Use stories and examples to make statistics "come alive"	5
								Candidly discuss performance issues and planned steps to improve performance	6
								Ensure that data are accurate, timely, reliable and verifiable	7
								Use citizen-friendly design for an attractive appearance	8
								Make reports accessible to the intended audiences	9

APPENDIX 2: NOTES ON RESOURCES FOR BEST PRACTICES IN PUBLIC REPORTING

The following five sources helped guide selection of recommended practices for this tool. Managers can enhance their understanding of effective reporting practices by exploring these sources and examining award winning reports referenced in more detail.

- The Public Reporting Toolkit (Public Performance Measurement and Reporting Network (PPMRN) and the Association of Government Accountants (AGA), 2012). This website contains recommended criteria for Citizen Centric reporting as well as award winning reports
- The US Governmental Accounting Standards Board: Concept Statements and Characteristics for Service Efforts and Accomplishment Reporting (Governmental Accounting Standards Board)
- The 10th Annual Performance Report Scorecard: Which Federal Agencies Best Inform the Public? (McTigue, Wray, & Ellig, 2009). This report by the Mercatus Center at George Mason University reviews the public reporting practices of US Federal Agencies and identifies best practices and sites examples
- Performance Reporting: Insights from International Practice (Boyle, 2009) Researcher Richard Boyle conducted a content analysis of performance indicators in a sample of performance reports produced in four countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United States
- Engaging Citizens in Reporting Community Conditions: A Manager’s Guide (Ho, 2007) This publication examines best practices in reporting to citizens on community indicators and government services