

PROGRESS ASSESSMENTS

HOW ARE WE DOING: THE PUBLIC REPORTING OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Released: [December 2008](#)

1st Follow-up: [March 2010](#)

2nd Follow-up: [September 2010](#)

3rd Follow-up: [April 2011](#)

Discussed by the Public Accounts Committee: [June 2010 Transcript](#)

Background

Public sector organizations in British Columbia typically develop a set of performance measures that reflect their goals and objectives. These performance measures enable the organization to report their annual performance for their key stakeholders, often in their annual service plan report.

In 2008, the Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia (OAG) conducted a comprehensive survey of the performance measures then being reported by a broad sample of organizations within the Government Reporting Entity (GRE) and WorkSafeBC. WorkSafeBC is not part of the GRE; however, it was included in our survey as it is recognized as a leader in public performance reporting. The results of this survey were reported in our December 2008 report *“How are We Doing? The Public Reporting of Performance Measures in British Columbia”*.

While the survey results provided an encouraging picture of the maturity of performance measure reporting in the Province, it also identified important areas for further improvement. Specifically, we found that many organizations reported an excessive number of performance measures and not enough measures that reflected the accuracy, timeliness, or efficiency of government services. As well, school district results did not include current year targets for approximately half of the stated performance measures.

Since the report was published in 2008, we followed-up with government twice regarding their progress in implementing the recommendations contained in the original report. On both occasions, government [provided a self-assessment of their progress](#).

Objective and scope

In 2010 we re-performed our 2008 survey with the same organizations using the original evaluation criteria. As a result, we updated our understanding of performance measure reporting within the GRE and government’s progress in improving their performance measure reporting. Furthermore, we confirmed the accuracy of government’s self-assessments in implementing the recommendations from our original report.

Overall conclusion

The results of our 2010 survey showed that government has retained areas of strength identified in our 2008 survey and that organizations reduced the volume of reported performance measures. We also found that while there was still a lack of performance measures focused on the accuracy, timeliness, and efficiency of government services in most sectors, the government ministry sector had expanded the number of timeliness measures it reported. Although minor, one new area of concern identified in our recent study is the lack of disclosure by Health Authorities of current year performance indicator targets.

The survey results support government’s responses regarding the implementation status for three of the four recommendations contained in our original report.

Findings and recommendations

We found that the volume of performance measures being reported by the organizations within our survey group had declined by 33% from the volume reported in our 2008 survey. This significantly addressed a key finding from our 2008 report concerning organizations reporting an excessive number of key performance indicators.

With the exception of the ministries’ reporting of timeliness measures, organizations in the GRE continue to lack performance measures that reflect the accuracy, timeliness, or efficiency of government services.

However, we did note that the 2010/11 – 2012/13 service plan guide provided to Ministries suggests including efficiency measures and the guide to Crown Corporations includes references to efficiency, accuracy and timeliness. That said, our 2010 management letter to government recommended that government continue to monitor the effectiveness of guidance in encouraging the development and reporting of measures that reflect the efficiency, accuracy and timeliness of operations.

We also found that School Districts still do not provide targets for all of their current year performance measures. In fact, the number of current year performance measure results presented with the current year target declined from 53% in our 2008 survey to 37% in our 2010 survey. Current year targets are an essential piece of information for readers to understand current year performance. Our 2010 management letter included a similar recommendation to our 2008 report in that school districts include current year targets for all performance measures disclosed in their accountability and achievement contracts.

A new item identified in our 2010 survey was that health authorities, similar to school districts, were also not providing current year targets for their current year performance measure results. We did note that the Ministry of Health collected and published this performance measure information on its website for all Health Authorities, but that the information was one year behind the results reported on the Health Authority's websites. Our 2010 management letter included a recommendation that Health Authorities include current year targets for all current year performance measures results being publically reported.

As previously mentioned, this work was also intended to evaluate the accuracy of governments' statements, obtained during our follow-up process, regarding their progress in addressing the recommendations made in our 2008 report *"How are We Doing? The Public Reporting of Performance Measures in British Columbia"*. Our 2010 survey results support government's representations of the actions taken and results achieved for three of our four 2008 report recommendations. However, we were not able to support their representation that they had "fully or substantially implemented" our recommendation that school districts include current year targets for all performance measures disclosed in their accountability or achievement contract reports. As noted earlier, our 2010 survey indicated that current year targets were provided for only 37% of reported current year performance measures. This issue is not fully addressed by Government's statement that "At least one performance target appears in 80% of achievement contracts and more than one performance target appears in 66% of achievement contracts for the 2009/10 school year. This is an improvement over last year and is an area of continuing work."

Looking ahead

This survey updated the Office's understanding of the performance measures being reported by organizations within the GRE. This knowledge will inform our future project planning.

Summary of observations

1. We reported to government that they continue to monitor the effectiveness of guidance designed to encourage the development and reporting of measures that track the efficiency, accuracy and timeliness of government operations.
2. We reported to government that school districts and Health Authorities include current year targets for all performance measures being publically reported.

Response from Government

Government would like to thank the Auditor General for his follow-up 2010 longitudinal study of published performance measures contained in the 2009/10 service plans. Each year Government continues to enhance its guidance to organizations to ensure continuous improvement on selecting performance measures which support the achievement of the organization's objectives.

Government agrees with the Auditor General's recommendation for the need for measures that track efficiency, accuracy and timeliness of government operations. This guidance has been included in Crown corporation service plan guidelines since 2009/10, and ministry guidelines since 2010/11. Government also believes that individual ministries and Crown corporations should determine whether efficiency, accuracy and timeliness measures are better suited than other types of measures (i.e. effectiveness, satisfaction, quantity, etc.) to track how well the organization is progressing toward its goals, and that they are doing a good job of this. For example, 40 of the 154 measures appearing in ministry service plans for 2009/10 measured either efficiency, timeliness or quality of service. We believe this to be an appropriate amount.

School Districts and Health Authorities

At present, 80% of school districts include at least one performance target in their achievement contracts. The Ministry of Education has revised its achievement contract guidelines to encourage Boards of Education to include performance targets for each of its achievement indicators. The ministry is presently following up with districts to ensure these targets are established for the 2011/12 school year.

Health authorities voluntarily develop and publish service plans which are in addition to the comprehensive reporting system that the health authorities have with the Ministry. In addition, Ministry of Health Services ensures public accountability through the publication of a consolidated health authority report on service plan measures and targets on its website. The ministry acknowledges that providing public reporting current year targets on Health Authorities' websites would enhance public accountability.

Government expresses its appreciation to the Auditor General for his continuing work in identifying areas where improvements can be made for performance measure reporting and will consider this report's recommendations, while balancing the need for a select few key performance measures that are appropriate to each entity's mandate.