

The United States of America

Key National Performance Indicators Forum

Washington, D.C.
February 27, 2003

“Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness. In one in which the measures of government receive their impressions so immediately from the sense of the community as in ours it is proportionably essential.”

— George Washington, *First Annual Message to Congress*,
January 8, 1790 —



in cooperation with

THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES
Advisors to the Nation, on Science, Engineering and Medicine

Background

The pace and character of change is having a profound impact on the United States government, the nation and our position in the global community. Demographic, security, globalization, technology and other trends have exacerbated economic, social, and environmental tensions. This has created new challenges and opportunities both within the U.S. and among nations of the world.

To help serve Congress and the U.S. public in addressing such issues – ranging from education, health care, and infrastructure to national, homeland and personal security – GAO continually works to enhance oversight, insight and foresight on major 21st century challenges. In just one example, the U.S. faces a huge and growing long-range fiscal imbalance due primarily to known demographic trends and rising health care costs. The nation must reconcile the gap between projected revenues and expenditures before a crisis is upon us.

To have a democracy that is performance-oriented and accountable, national performance indicators are needed to assess the overall position and progress of our nation, frame strategic issues and chart future direction. A large and growing amount of activity is taking place, throughout the U.S. and around the world, on measuring national performance. New facts, insights and approaches are being developed. Understanding and interpreting these efforts is vital to the process of setting direction and measuring progress – on both an absolute and a relative basis – as a context for governance.

Many in the U.S. now believe there is a need to establish a comprehensive portfolio of key national performance indicators. The dramatic changes, challenges and increasing interdependencies affecting the country demand new and more cross-sectoral, cross-border responses. Such responses should be based on new, more integrated information resources to support informed public debate and decisions within

and between different levels of government and society. These resources should be built on the foundation of information from our statistical system and other sources in areas such as the economy, health, children, families, and aging.

For example, in homeland security, what indicators will measure national preparedness? In health care, how will we measure the health and well-being of an aging population? How can we best measure success in education? Is the most useful information available to assess our degree of economic and social progress? Are we in fact moving ahead and in the right direction in key areas and how do we compare to other nations? The stakes are high, including scarce public resources, jobs, future industries, global competitive edge, security, environmental sustainability and quality of life considerations.

Defining key national indicators goes beyond any one sector. It involves complex issues ranging from agreement on performance areas and indicators to getting and sharing reliable information for public planning, decision-making and accountability. Importantly, key national indicators should be outcome-oriented and used to assess the current state of affairs along with progress and positioning. They should not be seen as being the nation's goals or only priorities. Only if these issues are addressed can leaders and the people decide the respective roles and strategies of the public, private and non-profit sectors in solving U.S. challenges.

The Forum

A long-term strategic initiative is necessary to stimulate dialogue and identify issues in developing key national performance indicators. This effort must be collaborative and transparent, involving leading institutions and individuals from all elements of society.

To that end, the Comptroller General of the United States — in cooperation with The National Academies — will convene a Key National Performance Indicators Forum on February 27, 2003 in Washington, D.C. at the GAO headquarters on 441 G. Street, N.W. Participants in the forum will be national leaders and experts representing the major independent producers, users and funders of public information (See pp. 5-6). To encourage an open dialogue, comments made at the forum will not be for individual attribution.

The forum is an attempt to bring more valuable facts to bear on decision-making by the public and its leaders. It is not intended to frame issues, influence priorities or resource allocations – which are the province of the nation’s duly chosen representatives.

The goal of the forum is to explore whether and how to establish a portfolio of national indicators for the United States. It will be organized around four central questions:

- How are the world’s leading democracies measuring national performance?
- What might the U.S. do to improve its approach and why?
- What are important areas to measure in assessing U.S. national performance?
- How might new U.S. approaches be led and implemented?

One idea for discussion will be creating a “next generation” shared information resource on key indicators of national position and progress. This would be done through a public/private partnership of the leading independent institutions in the U.S. It would build on our statistical system to enhance public decisions,

increase civic engagement, and reinforce accountability in our democracy.

Currently, there are large amounts of statistical information widely available from public and private sector organizations. In a “next generation” information resource there would be: a) more valuable inputs to key national issues and choices, b) an improved interface for wider and more useful access, and c) better data integration and increased transparency as well as more widely agreed upon standards for quality.

Users of such a resource would range from local to national, public to private, grassroots activists to elected representatives and major institutions. They may be interested in information on progress in areas ranging from the environment and education to health care and the economy. They may wish to assess certain specific trends or they may wish to take a holistic view of how their nation is doing on all of its major issues.

To lay a foundation for discussion of such ideas at the forum, background materials will be prepared on a) the history of measuring U.S. national performance over the last century, b) the state of the practice at the local, regional, state, national and global levels, and c) how key indicators from the most advanced areas of measurement could serve as a basis for developing a national portfolio.

A summary of the key ideas and issues raised at the forum will be created and published to raise the profile of this important public dialogue. This report will provide the background, enumerate the topics and questions that were addressed, distill highlights from the discussion and identify areas where constructive action may be taken.

The Key National Performance Indicators Forum

Agenda

Wednesday, February 26th <i>All Events at the GAO</i>	
5:30 p.m.– 7:30 p.m.	Reception: The Comptroller General of the United States Light refreshments, brief background and overview of the next day's events
Thursday, February 27th <i>All Events at the GAO</i>	
8:00 a.m.	Coffee
8:30 a.m.	Welcome and Overview
9:00 a.m.	Democracy and Key National Performance Indicators: <i>Plenary</i> <i>How are the world's leading democracies measuring national performance?</i>
9:30 a.m.	Break
9:45 a.m.	Exploring Opportunities and Alternative Solutions: <i>Plenary</i> <i>What might the U.S. do to improve its approach for measuring national performance and why?</i>
11:00 a.m.	Key National Performance Indicators for the United States: <i>Plenary</i> <i>What are the most important areas to measure in assessing U.S. national performance?</i>
12:00 p.m.	Working Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Key National Performance Indicators for the United States: <i>Small Group Sessions</i> <i>What are the most important areas to measure in assessing U.S. national performance?</i>
2:00 p.m.	Break
2:15 p.m.	Key National Performance Indicators for the United States: <i>Plenary</i> <i>What are the most important areas to measure in assessing U.S. national performance?</i>
3:45 p.m.	Leading Meaningful Action: <i>Plenary</i> <i>How might new U.S. approaches be led and implemented?</i>
5:00 p.m.	Break
5:15 p.m.–6:00 p.m.	Leading Meaningful Action: <i>Plenary</i> <i>Summary of the day and next steps</i>
Friday, February 28th <i>All Events at the National Academies</i>	
8:00 a.m.– 10:00 a.m.	Action Planning: Presentation and Discussion

The Key National Performance Indicators Forum

Confirmed Participants

Lawrence Alwin – President, National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers and Treasurers
Derek Bok – Former President, Harvard University
Donald Borut – Executive Director, National League of Cities
Charles Bowsher – Former Comptroller General of the United States
Heinrich Brungger – Director, Statistics Division, The U.N. Economic Commission on Europe
Phil Burgess – President, National Academy of Public Administration
Richard Cavanagh – President, The Conference Board
E. William Colglazier – Executive Officer, The National Academies
Rita Colwell – Director, National Science Foundation
Kim Corthell – Professional Staff, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs
Michael Delli Carpini – Director, Public Policy Program, The Pew Charitable Trusts
Michael Feuer – Executive Director, The National Academies, DBSSE
Dr. Harvey Fineberg – President, Institute of Medicine
William Galston – Professor and Director, Univ. of MD Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
Gaston Gianni – Vice-Chair, PCIE
John D. Graham – Administrator, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, OMB
Robert Groves – Director, Survey Research Center, University of Michigan
Judith Gueron – President, Manpower Research Development Corporation
Hermann Habermann – Deputy Director, U.S. Bureau of the Census
Mary Hamilton – Executive Director, American Society of Public Administration
Nils Hasselmo – President, American Association of Universities
Harry Hatry – Director, Public Management Program, The Urban Institute
Theodore Heintz – Council on Environmental Quality
Robert Kaplan – Professor, Harvard Business School
Andrew Kohut – Director, Pew Research Center for People and the Press
Charles Kolb – President, Committee for Economic Development
John Koskinen – Deputy Mayor/City Administrator, District of Columbia
Bill Kovach – Chairman, Committee of Concerned Journalists
Risa Lavizzo-Mourey – President and CEO, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Charles Lewis – Founder and Executive Director, Center for Public Integrity
Rosemary Marcuss – Deputy Director, Bureau of Economic Analysis
Sylvia Mathews – Executive Director and COO, The Gates Foundation
Patricia McGinnis – President and CEO, Council for Excellence in Government
Sara Melendez – Former President, The Independent Sector
Alex Michalos – Director, ISRE, University of Northern British Columbia
Marc Miringoff – Founder and Director, The Fordham Institute for Innovation in Social Policy
Yolanda Moses – President, American Association for Higher Education
Daniel Mulhollan – Director, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress
Janet Norwood – Former Director, Bureau of Labor Statistics
Robert O'Neill – Executive Director, International City/County Manager's Association
Martha Riche – Former Director, U.S. Bureau of the Census
Dorothy Ridings – President, The Council on Foundations
John Rolph – Chair, Committee on National Statistics, The National Academies
John Salamone – Professional Staff, Senator George Voinovich
Thomas Sawyer – Former Representative, State of Ohio, 14th District
Max Singer – Board Member and Senior Fellow, The Hudson Institute
Pete Smith – President, The Private Sector Council
Edward Sondik – Director, National Center for Health Care Statistics, HHS
Edward Spar – Executive Director, Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Mike Taylor – President, National Association of Local Government Auditors
Michael Teitelbaum – Program Director, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
Dennis Trewin – Chief Statistician, Australia
Kathleen Utgoff – Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics
Katherine Wallman – Chief Statistician of the United States
Vincent Yee – National Association of Asian-American Professionals

The U.S. General Accounting Office

Established in 1921, GAO is an independent, professional and nonpartisan agency in the legislative branch. It is commonly called the “audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress” or the “Congressional Watchdog” because it examines how taxpayer dollars are spent and advises lawmakers and agency heads on ways to make government more economical, efficient, effective, responsive, accountable and results-oriented.

Over the years, GAO has earned a reputation for providing Congress with the best information available to help it make informed policy decisions – information that is timely, accurate, and useful. Each year, GAO issues more than 700 reports and testifies frequently before dozens of congressional committees. Its work translates into a wide range of legislative actions, improvements in government operations, and billions of dollars in financial benefits to taxpayers. Every GAO report, no matter what its subject, reflects three core values: accountability, integrity, and reliability. GAO takes a professional, objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, nonideological, fair, and balanced approach to evaluating government programs and policies. To that end, the agency operates under strict professional standards of review. All facts and analyses presented in GAO’s reports and testimonies are thoroughly documented for accuracy.

GAO also strives to stay on the cutting edge of emerging issues, such as responding to terrorism and preparing for homeland defense, the impact of globalization on the U.S. economy, the aging of the U.S. workforce, the nation’s long-range fiscal imbalance, and the use of information technology to improve government service. National issues with local impact also get considerable attention from GAO, such as land use policy, deteriorating infrastructure, public health, and election reform.

The Comptroller General of the U.S. heads the GAO. He is appointed to a 15-year term by the President from candidates proposed by a bipartisan and bicameral commission of congressional leaders. The President’s nominee is confirmed by the Senate. David M. Walker, the current Comptroller General, took office in November 1998. The long tenure of the office gives GAO a continuity of leadership, independence, and longer term and broader perspective that is rare within government. GAO’s independence is further safeguarded by the fact that its workforce is comprised of career employees hired on the basis of their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., GAO has offices in eleven other major cities. GAO’s more than 3,200 employees include specialists in fields ranging from weapons procurement to welfare, banking to budgeting, farm policy to foreign policy, health care to human capital, and energy to the environment.

The National Academies

“... the Academy shall, whenever called upon by any department of the Government, investigate, examine, experiment, and report upon any subject of science or art”

With these words, Congress established the National Academy of Sciences in 1863, at the height of the Civil War. Scientific issues would become even more contentious and complex in the years following the war. To keep pace with the growing importance of science and technology, the institution that was founded in 1863 eventually expanded to include the National Research Council in 1916, the National Academy of Engineering in 1964, and the Institute of Medicine in 1970. Collectively, these organizations are called the National Academies.

For advice on the scientific issues that frequently pervade policy decisions, the nation’s leaders often turn to the institution that was specially created for this purpose: the National Academy of Sciences and its sister organizations — the National Academy of Engineering, the Institute of Medicine, and the National Research Council. The Academies and the Institute are honorary societies that elect new members to their ranks each year. The Institute of Medicine also conducts policy studies on health issues, but the bulk of the institution’s science-policy and technical work is conducted by its operating arm, the National Research Council, created expressly for this purpose.

These non-profit organizations provide a public service by working outside the framework of government to ensure independent advice on matters of science, technology, and medicine. They enlist committees of the nation’s top scientists, engineers, and other experts — all of whom volunteer their time to study specific concerns. The results of their deliberations have inspired some of the United State’s most significant and lasting efforts to improve the health, education, and welfare of the population.

The Academies’ service to government has become so essential that Congress and the White House have issued legislation and executive orders over the years that reaffirm its unique role.

Leading the Academies’ work to prepare for and conduct this forum is its Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT). It has a broad charter to reflect and study topics to improve the effectiveness of the nation’s statistical system.