



Highlights of [GAO-06-28](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Government Management, Finance, and Accountability, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO was asked to examine (1) the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) and agency perspectives on the effects that the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) recommendations are having on agency operations and program results; (2) OMB's leadership in ensuring a complementary relationship between the PART and the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA); and (3) steps OMB has taken to involve Congress in the PART process. To do this, we also followed up on issues raised in our January 2004 report on the PART.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB solicit congressional views on the performance issues and program areas most in need of review; the most useful performance data and the presentation of those data; and select PART reassessments and crosscutting reviews based on factors including the relative priorities, costs, and risks associated with clusters of related programs, and reflective of congressional input. GAO also suggests that Congress consider a structured approach to articulating its perspective and oversight agenda on performance goals and priorities for key programs.

OMB generally agreed with our findings, conclusions, and recommendations, and outlined several actions it is taking to address some of the issues raised in the report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-28.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Susan J. Irving at (202) 512-9142 or irvings@gao.gov.

PERFORMANCE BUDGETING

PART Focuses Attention on Program Performance, but More Can Be Done to Engage Congress

What GAO Found

The PART process has aided OMB's oversight of agencies, focused agencies' efforts to improve program management, and created or enhanced an evaluation culture within agencies. Although the PART has enhanced the focus on performance, the PART remains a labor-intensive process at OMB and agencies.

Most PART recommendations are focused on improving outcome measures and data collection, and are not designed to result in observable short-term performance improvements. Since these necessary first steps on the path to long-term program improvement do not usually lead to improved short-term results, there is limited evidence to date of the PART's influence on outcome-based program results. Moreover, as of February 2005—the date of the most recent available OMB data—the majority of follow-on actions have not yet been fully implemented. By design OMB has not prioritized them within or among agencies. Because OMB has chosen to assess nearly all federal programs, OMB and agency resources are diffused across multiple areas instead of concentrated on those areas of highest priority both within agencies and across the federal government. This strategy is likely to lengthen the time it will take to observe measurable change compared with a more strategic approach. OMB has used the PART as a framework for several crosscutting reviews, but these have not always included all relevant tools, such as tax expenditures, that contribute to related goals. Greater focus on selecting related programs and activities for concurrent review would improve their usefulness.

OMB has taken some steps to clarify the PART-GPRA relationship but many agencies still struggle to balance the differing needs of the budget and planning processes and their various stakeholders. Unresolved tensions between GPRA and the PART can result in conflicting ideas about what to measure and how to measure it. Finally, we remain concerned that the focus of agencies' strategic planning continues to shift from long-term goal setting to short-term executive budget and planning needs.

OMB uses a variety of methods to communicate PART results, but congressional committee staff we spoke with had concerns about the tool itself, how programs were defined, and the usefulness of goals and measures. Most said that the PART would more likely inform their deliberations if OMB consulted them early on regarding the selection and timing of programs; the methodology and evidence to be used; and how PART information can be communicated and presented to best meet their needs. It is also important that Congress take full advantage of the benefits arising from the executive reform agenda. While Congress has a number of opportunities to provide its perspective on specific performance issues and performance goals, opportunities also exist for Congress to enhance its institutional focus to enable a more systematic assessment of key programs and performance goals.