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The Federal Government Wants to be Held Accountable

Americans deserve to have the government spend their hard earned tax dollars effectively, and better every year. The President, every member of Congress and all Federal employees need to be held accountable for getting results with the money they spend.

The PART – How We Figure Out What’s Working and What’s Not

To find out what’s working and what’s not, OMB and agency officials work together to determine whether a program:

- Has a clear purpose and a sound design;
- Sets outcome-oriented and suitably aggressive goals;
- Is well managed; and
- Achieves its goals.

This assessment is done systematically through the Program Assessment Rating Tool – PART. It is a set of common questions that are asked of every program, though it also includes additional questions for certain types of programs such as credit programs or competitive grants programs. The questions aim to identify a program’s strengths and weaknesses so agencies can better identify actions needed to improve the program.

A key element of each assessment is defining the program's performance goals and determining whether they are being achieved. Performance goals are central to the PART. Through the PART process, OMB and agencies ensure all programs have a clear definitions of success and that they have outcome-oriented performance measures to judge their success. In order to achieve the most accurate program assessment, the PART process is collaborative. Agency and OMB staff work together and consider all available data in determining the answers to the questions. This supporting data is explained and cited in the detailed PART, which is available for public scrutiny at ExpectMore.gov.

The answers to the questions are used to generate an overall score for the program. Based on numeric ranges, the overall score is then translated into one of four qualitative ratings: Effective, Moderately Effective, Adequate, and Ineffective. If a program has not been able to develop outcome-oriented performance measures or collect performance information to measure performance against those goals, it receives a Results Not Demonstrated rating.

Whether a program is rated Effective or Ineffective, we are constantly looking for ways to improve its performance. Every program commits to taking steps to improve its performance and get more for taxpayer dollars every year. Some are more aggressive than others and we are working to strengthen these improvement plans.

ExpectMore.gov = Transparency = Accountability

Summary and detailed information about all assessed programs is posted to **ExpectMore.gov**, a website launched with the release of the President's FY07 Budget. The site is the most comprehensive source for information about programs we've assessed and their plans to improve. The purpose of this website is to provide easily understandable, candid information about which programs work, which programs don't, and what they are all doing to improve.

Currently, the ratings on **ExpectMore.gov** show that more than 70 percent of Federal programs are performing. A program that enhances highway safety provides a clear example of a program that demonstrates improved results. To reduce fatalities from automobile accidents, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration promotes greater seat belt use among high-risk groups such as younger drivers, rural populations, pick-up truck occupants, 8–15 year-old passengers, occasional safety belt users, and motor vehicle occupants in states with secondary safety belt use laws. As a result, nationwide seat belt use increased from 73 percent in 2001 to 82 percent in 2005, which is an all-time high. This saves lives.

However, almost 30 percent of all programs are either ineffective or cannot demonstrate their success. A youth employment program created under the Workforce Investment Act demonstrates the need for improvement. The program awards grants for America's neediest youth to successfully transition to the workplace. The program is currently rated as ineffective. It does not have authority to target or reallocate resources to areas of greatest need and duplicates other programs. To remedy this problem, the Administration is working with Congress to gain increased authority to reallocate resources to areas of need. The Administration has also proposed legislation to consolidate this program with other Department of Labor job training grants. This will reduce overhead, ensure that more funds go directly to participants, and give States the flexibility to design processes that best serve their citizens.

We believe the transparency provided by **ExpectMore.gov** creates more constructive dialogue about how to improve program performance, and extra incentive to perform. **ExpectMore.gov** is not targeted to Democrats or Republicans, liberals or conservatives. Its audience is all Americans.

Program Assessments and the Federal Budget

This past year, the Administration assessed an additional 20 percent of the government's programs, marking the fourth year in our effort to find out what works, what doesn't, and what we need to do to improve. Program assessments are a factor in budgeting, but they are one among many factors. No budget decision is made automatically based on a program's rating. It may be that a highly rated program is not a priority for this Administration; therefore the President may propose to decrease funding for the program. A poorly rated program may need additional funds to address a weakness uncovered in the assessment. If we believe a program has been demonstrated to be ineffective and can't be fixed, or has outlived its usefulness, the Administration may recommend Congress spend the money on higher priority programs. The attached table shows the funding recommendation by program rating and by program.

This year's budget calls for major reductions in, or total eliminations of 141 Federal programs, saving nearly \$15 billion. There are a variety of reasons for these reductions, primarily they were not getting results or not fulfilling essential priorities. Reductions in these areas do not mean Americans should expect less from Federal agencies or programs. On the contrary, they should expect the government to give them more for their tax dollars. They should expect the government to become more effective and efficient each year.

One program the Administration proposes to terminate is the Advanced Technology Program (ATP), a grant program for businesses that was intended to develop new technologies for commercial use. A PART analysis for this program noted that there are many non-governmental entities investing in early stage technology development, such as corporate research labs, venture capital firms, angel investors, and universities. The program is no longer warranted in today's research and development environment. Federal subsidies to industry for ATP projects are not appropriate or necessary, given the growth of venture capital and other financing sources for high-tech projects and the profit incentive private entities have to commercialize new technologies.

The Administration also proposes to eliminate the Even Start program and redirect funds to programs that are likely to be more effective at improving early childhood education including Title I. Even Start's poor results on national evaluations over a number of years and Ineffective PART rating provide strong justification for terminating the program. The children and adults who participate in the program do not make greater literacy gains than non-participants. The most recent evaluation concluded that, while Even Start participants made small gains, they did not perform better than the comparison group that did not receive Even Start services.

Because the National Assessment of Vocational Education found no evidence that high school vocational courses themselves contribute to academic achievement or college enrollment, the Administration proposes to terminate this program as well. Under the PART, Vocational Education State Grants was rated Ineffective because it has produced little or no evidence of improved outcomes for students despite decades of Federal investment. While the Administration has urged Congress to reform the Vocational Education program, neither the House nor Senate reauthorization bills adopted significant reforms to the current program.

Americans deserve better than to have their tax dollars invested in ineffective programs.

Congress and the Focus on Results

Like the Executive Branch, Congress wants programs to work. I believe the PART can be useful to Congress in its appropriation, authorization and oversight of programs. In some cases, Members of Congress are making use of the information to improve programs. Even Start is a good example. In 2004, the Administration proposed to fund only continuation awards, based on PART findings, and to begin phasing out the program. In 2005, the Administration proposed termination. Congress provided the first funding cut for the program in 2005 (-\$22 million),

reducing it from \$247 million to \$225 million. The Congress reduced the program further in 2006 to \$99 million.

Certainly, we can do a better job of making the information available in a form that is more useful to Congress. The report accompanying the Treasury, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Act that recently passed the House Committee on Appropriations stated: “[M]ost [budget] justifications continue to be filled with references to the Program Assessment Rating Tool [PART], drowning in pleonasm, and yet still devoid of useful information.” While a harsh assessment, I agree that we can improve. We must do a better job of more clearly articulating our objectives, not only for programs, but about how we expect information about program performance to be used. We also must do a better job of providing information about program performance in a way that is useful to you, the Congress. ExpectMore.gov is a first step in that effort. I would be grateful for the Committee’s suggestions on how we might do more.

How has the PART changed?

Like programs, the PART process will improve over time. Although the Administration has tried to keep PART questions constant so the performance of programs can be compared over time, we have adopted changes in the PART process. We have implemented better information technology solutions to make application of the PART less burdensome and more collaborative. We review each newly completed PART to ensure the answers are consistent with PART guidance. If agencies disagree with a PART assessment, they can appeal to a panel of senior agency officials. These steps and others will make the PART more reliable, less of a burden, and hopefully, more focused on identifying what steps programs need to take to become more effective.

Conclusion

The message is simply that we want our citizens to expect more from their Federal government, and we want to be held accountable for how programs perform and how aggressively they improve. Of course, we do.