

Appropriations Committee Budget Hearings

Eight Standard Accountability Questions for All Programs¹

1. What is the quality of life result to which the program makes the most important contribution?

This question relates to the broader mission or vision of the program. Programs are the means to an end. They are created in order to help the state achieve a certain vision or mission for improving the quality of life for people in the state (a population). For example, a job training program contributes to the result, “All Connecticut workers earn a living wage.” A waste water treatment program contributes to the result, “A clean environment for Connecticut.” There is no official list of Connecticut result statements.

A result statement in its basic form can be stated as a desired result in the following sentence structure: "All (name a population) in (name a geographic location) are (statement of the quality of life condition to be achieved), e.g. “All children in Connecticut are born healthy and are developmentally on target from Birth to 3” or “All Connecticut citizens are secure and free from crime.”

There may be instances where a program contributes to more than one quality of life result. Generally, you should indicate the most important of these results. If more than one result is equally important, then you may indicate the additional results as well.

2. How does the program contribute to the result?

Programs are not responsible for population results; however, they are expected to contribute to achieving one or more results. The program’s statutory purpose or the purpose of the activities funded (we do these things in order to....) should be connected to the result. A program’s purpose is usually narrower than the quality of life to which the program contributes. For example, the purpose of the Clean Water Fund is to encourage municipalities to treat waste water and to segregate it from storm water run-off. This program is only one element that contributes to the population result of a clean Long Island Sound. If the statutory purpose no longer seems consistent with the quality of life result you think the legislature now expects, you should explain the discrepancy.

3. Who are the programs major customers?

Customers are those served by the program. They are the direct beneficiaries of the program, the individuals, groups, or entities that receive the services, funds or other benefits of the program. For example, the customers of a preschool program are the children who attend the school and their families. Being clear about customers is essential for identifying the appropriate performance measures. The direct beneficiaries of the Clean Water Fund are the municipalities

¹ This document and all other RBA resource materials for state agencies are available on the Appropriations Committee’s RBA web page: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/app/rba/>

that apply for funding. The residents of the municipalities might be seen as the ultimate beneficiaries, but they are not the direct customers.

*4. What measures do you use to tell if the program is delivering its services well?
How are you doing on the most important of those measures?*

“How well” measures relate to the manner in which program activities are carried out. These measures are often referred to as process measures. Is information collected accurately? Timely? Are services delivered courteously? Efficiently? What percent of the eligible population participates in the services? Completes them? What are staff qualifications? What do customers think of the service delivery? For example, “How well” measures for the unemployment compensation program include percent of payments made within 7 days of application (timeliness) and percent of payments made without error (accuracy). “How well” measures are often related to best practices or evidence-based practices. So, if mentoring is part of an evidenced-based practice model, the percent of youth linked to a mentor could be a “how well” measure.

For the “How well” measures you consider most important, what is the current level of performance? If you have a baseline, that is data for the last 3-5 years, provide it, along with where you think performance will be in the next 2-3 years if you keep doing what you are doing.

What is the “Story behind the Baseline”? Is this baseline going in the right direction? Is it going there fast enough? What is causing the baseline to go in this direction? What are the external circumstances affecting the direction? What interactions among people or personal characteristics are affecting the direction?

If you don’t have any baseline data, what are your plans for collecting the necessary data? Use the Data Development Agenda to document your plans.

*5. What measures do you use to tell if the program’s customers are better off?
How are you doing on the most important of those measures?*

No matter how well you are delivering your services, how do you know if your customers are benefitting? For example, a job training program may have excellent attendance at its workshops, its instructors may all be highly qualified, and it may use a nationally recognized, evidence-based curriculum. However, we would still want to know the outcomes achieved by its customers: Did they get a job, keep that job for 6 months or a year, and earn a living wage at that job?

For the “Better off” measures you consider most important, what is the current level of performance? If you have a baseline, that is data for the last 3-5 years, provide it, along with where you think performance will be in the next 2-3 years if you keep doing what you are doing.

What is the “Story behind the Baseline”? Is this baseline going in the right direction? Is it going there fast enough? What is causing the baseline to go in this direction? What are the internal and external forces affecting this performance?

If you don't have baseline data, what are your plans for collecting the necessary data? Use the Data Development Agenda to document your plans.

6. Who are the partners with a major role to play in doing better?

Government agencies alone can rarely achieve all of the outcomes that their customers desire. Partners contribute to the success of programs by making contributions to critical strategies. For example, for a program to reduce teen pregnancy, parents, teachers, doctors, clergy, and peers are all important partners. Effective strategies should include the engagement of major partners and be clear about their role.

7. What works, what could work, to do better, or to do the least harm in a difficult financial climate?

What are the actions that you know from the research, best practices, and your own experience are effective to "turn the curve" on the critical performance measures, that is to move performance in the right direction or prevent it from getting worse. These are the strategies that respond to the causes and forces behind the current level of performance.

8. What specific actions do you propose to take over the next two years? Focus on 1) no-cost and low-cost actions, 2) actions to reduce the harm of budget reductions, and 3) reallocation of existing resources to obtain best results.

To obtain the best results in this economic climate and to ensure that any budget reductions produce the least harm, what do you propose to do over the next two years? In the absence of financial resources, we need to do our best and most creative thinking, based on the analyses of the "how well" and "better off" measures, to identify no-cost or low-cost ideas, including moving funding from activities or programs that are less essential or that work less well. Be specific and concrete; focus on new actions that you will take, not what you are already doing. Remember, if you keep doing what you have been doing, you will keep getting what you have been getting.