

## Action Brief 16

### Call For Regular “State-of-the-State” Reports to Citizens That Highlight Outcome Information

Citizens usually know little about what their state government does or intends to do. Their most frequent direct contact with state government is their state tax bills and motor vehicle license charges!

Legislators can help improve citizens' understanding of what their state government has done by taking actions such as the following. Guidelines for such reports are presented in Attachment 1.

**Action 1. Enact legislation requiring the executive branch to provide annual state-of-the-state reports for citizens.** Regular state-of-the-state reports provide a way to update citizens periodically on what their tax dollars have accomplished.

State-of-the state reports should focus on key outcome indicators for individual state services and on the latest key state social and economic indicators. Information on major activities accomplished and major new legislation of importance to citizens should probably also be included.

These reports can take many forms, including:

- Posting the reports on the Internet, with data from individual agencies on each major government function, perhaps with an overall brief summary message from the governor. A number of states do this (e.g., Missouri and Virginia).
- Preparing a hard-copy report providing citizens with a summary of key indicators for each major state objective (e.g., Alberta Province, Canada).
- A report such as the above that also provides a citizen access to the performance data for the citizen's own county/city (no examples known).
- Individual annual reports from each major state agency describing the past year's accomplishments. These are reasonably common among states. However, most of these reports have included little in the way of outcome information.

**Action 2: Require inclusion in the state-of-the-state reports of county and city level data where available.** As discussed in Brief 15 on Constituent Briefings, this will make the reports considerably more interesting to citizens than if only statewide aggregated data are presented.

**Action 3. Provide for adequate dissemination of the reports.** For example, require copies to be provided to public libraries throughout the state. Require that availability be announced in media such as state tax bills. Require that the annual reports be promptly placed on the Internet – with easy accessibility. (This is a good step, but this procedure will not likely be easily accessible by a large portion of the population.)

**Action 4. Emphasize the need for the reports to avoid being partisan/politicized.** Focusing on outcome data can help accomplish this if the legislature requires inclusion of a stable set of outcome data that are reported whether results are good or bad.

**Action 5. Require annual performance reports to the citizens by each major state agency.** These are less likely to be perceived by the public as political documents.

A number of states already are providing variations of annual public performance reports. Here are some examples:

In Virginia, House Bill 1847 of the 2001 General Assembly Session amended § 2.1-391 of the Code of Virginia requiring that “the Department [of Planning and Budget] shall submit annually ... a report that sets forth state agencies’ ... performance measurement results pursuant to this subdivision for the immediately preceding fiscal year.” The report was placed on the state’s “Virginia Results” website. For each program under each agency, information provided includes performance indicators for the past 4 to 6 years. In some instances (though not all), outcome indicators are provided, such as customer satisfaction or “the percentage of vocational rehabilitation customers that enter competitive employment and remain employed for 90 days after case closure with average weekly wages of \$200 or more.” In most cases, the mission and key customers are also identified, and critical issues are highlighted.

An example of an annual report available to citizens in hardcopy is the Province of Alberta's (Canada) "Measuring Up" reports. These appear to have avoided a highly political flavor. The reports have been issued annually by the Ministry of Finance for eight years as of the 2001-2002 report.

Both Missouri and Virginia have for the past few years placed on their web-sites attractive charts in color showing recent-year trends for selected statewide outcome indicators.

## **Brief 16 - Attachment 1**

### **Guidelines for a “State-of-the-State” Reporting Process**

- Enact legislation requiring annual performance reports. Require that the reports place a major emphasis on outcome information. Such information is considerably more likely to be of interest to most citizens than information presented solely on activities, organization, outputs and expenditures.
- Consider calling for both a government-wide summary report covering all state services and annual reports from each agency
- Require that the reports be easily readable and reader-friendly.
- Call for county and city level outcome data – where feasible. This will greatly increase the attractiveness and interest level of the reports to citizens.
- Call for time trend data to be presented; that is, data on each outcome indicator for at least the past two or three years.
- The outcome indicators included in the reports should be stable from one year to the next. Indicators should not be dropped, for example, because they show worsened outcomes.
- The data presented should be reasonably up-to-date. The time periods covered by the outcome information should be clearly identified.
- Call for wide dissemination of the reports to citizens and through a variety of ways, to attempt to make the information accessible to all the state’s citizens, including:
  - placing the reports on the Internet (in an easy-to-find location!);
  - providing them to public libraries;
  - including them, or at least, notice of their availability with tax bills or some other routine state agency mail out;
  - notifying citizens through such mail-outs of where they can examine a copy of the report.
- Request that comparisons to other states (perhaps national averages) be included where that information is available.
- Appropriate a reasonable amount of funds for their preparation.