

A Legislative Perspective: Evaluation's Role in Effective Government



SENATOR JOHN C. WATKINS
NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

August 6, 2012

Overview

- **Evaluation Plays Crucial Role in Virginia General Assembly**
- How Evaluation Facilitates Legislative Effectiveness

Evaluation Plays Crucial Role in Virginia's Legislative Environment

- Legislative session is either 60 or 45 days each year
 - Member and committee staffs relatively small compared to Executive branch staff
- Scope of government and legislative workload presents challenges
 - \$84 billion biennial budget for FY 2013-2014
 - 2,876 bills introduced during 2012 Session

Legislative Approach to Oversight, Evaluation, and Audit

- Committee/Subcommittee Structure
 - Money committees conduct ongoing oversight
- Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC)
 - Program evaluation
 - Ongoing oversight
- Auditor of Public Accounts
 - Financial audits
 - Investigation of fiscal mismanagement

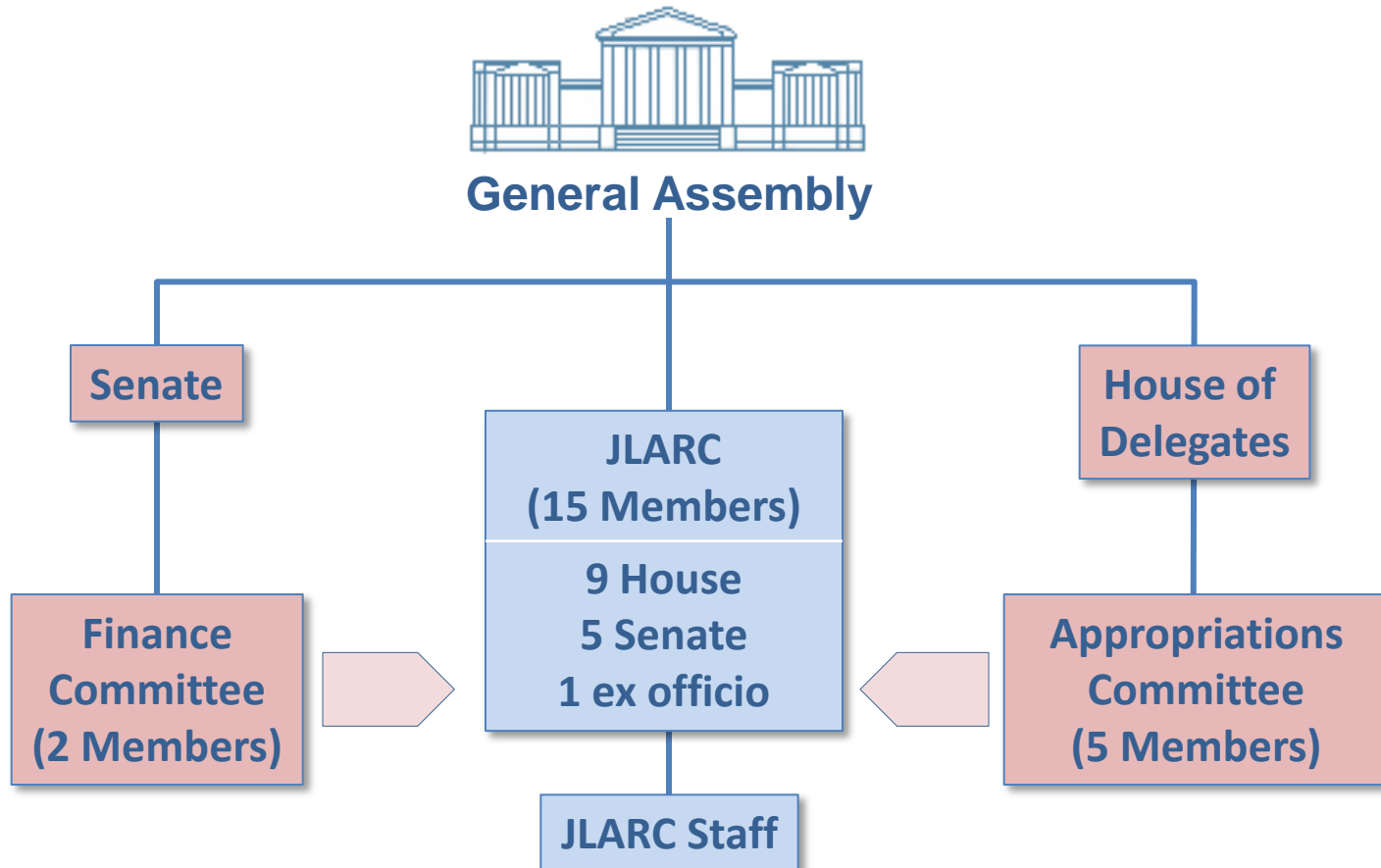
JLARC Budget and Staff

- JLARC budget for FY 2013 is \$3.4 million
 - Improved technology has served to reduce operating costs
- JLARC has 28 staff
 - Nearly all staff have role in producing major work products
 - Staff level has remained relatively constant over last 10 years

JLARC Work Products

- Complete 8 major studies per year on average
 - Selected by General Assembly or Commission
- Conduct ongoing oversight
 - Virginia Retirement System, Virginia Information Technologies Agency, and Virginia College Savings Plan
 - Issue periodic reports
- Fiscal impact analysis

JLARC Is Comprised of Members of the Senate and House of Delegates



Credentials of JLARC Members and Staff Facilitate Its Effectiveness

- Legislative members
 - Typically among most senior leadership and hold key committee positions
 - Ensure legislative support for organization over time
- Staff
 - Non-partisan
 - Non-political
 - Full-time, professional with advanced degrees

JLARC Staff's Evaluation Process, Access, and Reporting Also Facilitate Effectiveness

- Conduct objective research and analysis
- Have full access to government officials, documents, and data
- Report study findings and recommendations directly to the General Assembly and the public
- Follow up and report on recommendations

Overview

- Evaluation Plays Crucial Role in Virginia General Assembly
- **How Evaluation Facilitates Effectiveness**

Evaluation Has Proven Particularly Valuable to Legislature in Three Contexts

- Evaluating concerns about governance, management, or performance of programs or agencies
- Evaluating proposed policy initiatives
- Evaluating rising costs of programs or agencies and proposing lower cost options

Evaluation of Governance, Management, or Performance of Programs or Agencies

Legislators need reliable and rigorous assessment of concerns about programs or agencies and whether legislative action is needed

Agency	Key Information Provided*	Key Result
Virginia Information Technologies Agency	Governance structure limited governor's responsibility and authority for state IT and created inherent conflicts	Legislation enacted to substantially change governance structure, giving governor full responsibility and authority for state IT

*JLARC report *Review of Information Technology Services in Virginia*

Evaluation of Initiatives Proposed by Policy Makers

Legislators need reliable and objective assessment of the potential benefits, costs, and consequences of proposed initiatives prior to making decision

Proposal	Key Information Provided*	Key Result
Post-election audits of voting equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">JLARC audits revealed that Virginia's optical scan voting equipment was accurateRequiring large-scale, ongoing audits not prudent use of scarce resources	No legislative requirement for large-scale, ongoing audits of optical scan voting equipment

*JLARC report *Review of Post-election Audits of Voting Equipment*

Evaluation of Rising Program Costs and Potential Options to Control

Legislators need reliable assessment of factors contributing to higher costs in major programs and sound options for controlling them

Program	Key Information Provided*	Key Result
Virginia Retirement System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State-paid employee contribution for pension was unique compared to other states• Cost of living adjustment for retirees was particularly expensive	Legislation enacted requiring <ul style="list-style-type: none">• mandatory employee pension contribution• reduced cost of living adjustment for future retirees

*JLARC report *Review of State Employee Total Compensation*

In Summary

- Virginia's legislative environment makes evaluation particularly critical
- JLARC's composition, research, and reporting process facilitate legislative effectiveness