Measuring and Evaluating Stewardship and Innovation Programs
Learning From the PART
A REVIEW

Scope and Purpose of this Study
The Environmental Protection Agency’s National Center for Environmental Innovation sponsored a review of how federal agencies measure the performance results of programs engaged in stewardship and innovation. The goal of this research is to provide insights that will help EPA stewardship and innovation programs understand how they can better measure and evaluate their performance. This research draws on best practices of programs from a variety of federal agencies that have undergone one or more Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) reviews conducted by the Office of Management and Budget.

Key Definitions for this Study
Stewardship programs cultivate both an ethic and a practice of responsibility for the long-term wellbeing of a resource.

Environmental stewardship, in particular, is where all those whose actions affect the environment – individuals, businesses, communities, and government organizations – actively take responsibility to improve environmental quality and achieve sustainable results.

Innovation programs identify and increase the adoption of more effective programs (those that achieve better results) and more cost-effective programs (those that achieve the same or better results for less investment of resources) compared to traditional approaches.

Key Findings from the Analysis
A number of programs across the federal government are designed to foster stewardship and innovation. Many successful programs do not set innovation goals, per se, but rather set goals in terms of outcomes which drive them to innovate. These programs have found that they can be more effective by identifying program goals and performance measures that focus on outcomes or the program’s results, and then using those goals and measures to make routine and strategic decisions. In addition, this research finds that:

1) The best outcome measures are those that are directly tied to a program’s strategic goals. This finding applies both to intermediate outcomes such as changes in attitudes and behavior, as well as to long-term outcomes such as reductions in pollution. Aligning performance measures across subprograms and having them all roll up into overall measures that show progress toward strategic plan goals is a good strategy for long-term performance measurement.

2) Measurement approaches that will be most effective for a given program depend on the program’s objectives. For example, when a program’s goal is to reduce unwanted events (e.g., oil spills or accidents), counting and characterizing the events in terms of location, time, and causal factors is extremely useful for improving outcomes. Alternatively, when a program’s goal is to change attitudes or behavior, it is helpful to create a mechanism (e.g., a survey) to assess changes in those people whose attitudes or behavior the program is trying to influence.
3) **Performance measurement works best when measurement data are regularly analyzed and shared, and when program strategies or practices are continually revised based on the evidence.** For example, innovative programs may compile and analyze performance data from a variety of sources (e.g., EPA, states, industry, and academic articles) in order to identify performance trends, factors that may be influencing changes in performance, and best practices for improving performance. Innovative programs can then share their findings with program staff and target audiences to help them assess their own performance and identify ways to make improvements. It is also important to offer flexibility in how program staff and target audiences conduct routine operations, so that if individuals discover better or more cost effective approaches for meeting the outcome goals and targets, they are able to adopt them.

4) **Having a few priority targets, some of which are “stretch” targets, fosters innovation.** This applies both to intermediate targets, such as changes in attitudes or behaviors, and to long-term targets, such as reductions in pollution. Stretch targets are best applied to a few, strategic priorities, where breakthrough progress and innovation is sought. In other areas, more modest targets in line with past rates of progress are more appropriate. Programs will be better prepared for PART reviews if they periodically re-evaluate ambitious long-term goals in light of experience and make adjustments if new information shows that the existing goals are unreasonable.

5) **Program evaluation is useful for confirming or refuting causal relationships.** This is particularly true for stewardship and innovation programs with program goals of a relatively abstract nature, where many contributing factors could potentially cause a desired change in behavior. Program evaluation can help stewardship and innovation programs demonstrate their impact to key audiences, such as senior management, Congress, and the public.

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**Recommendations for Stewardship and Innovation Programs**

The findings from this research suggest that programs seeking to foster stewardship and innovation should:

- Develop outcome-focused goals and measures
- Invest in collecting outcome-based performance data
- Integrate performance measures and results data into program management decisions whenever possible.
- Tailor performance measures to reflect program goals and a significant portion of a program's activities.
- Select a few intermediate and long-term targets for improving program performance, including a few stretch targets.
- Arrange for periodic evaluation of the program by external, independent evaluators.