

# **Accountability & Transparency**

## **Self- Assessment Tool**



**Smarter Government.  
Better Results.**

## Accountability & Transparency Self-Assessment

Accountability and transparency have never been more important for government organizations of all types and at all levels. How well does your organization stack up against your expectations to be accountable and transparent to citizens? Hallmarks of effectively managed governments are that they are both:

**Accountable** – the government is willing and able to tell taxpayers what they are getting for their money in terms of results, and why.

**Transparent** – taxpayers are able to easily access and understand information showing what the government is and is not accomplishing in terms of results.

This brief self-assessment will provide insights into the degree to which your government organization is both accountable and transparent. We have suggested the meaning and implications of three ranges of scores – low, medium and high. These are not scientific, but each will illuminate your self-perception and can be used to prompt conversations on how to move forward.

Please rate yourself on the number scale 1-5, with “1” being “Never” and “5” being “Always.” Then total your score and read through “Assessing Your Accountability/Transparency.” Good luck!

We hope this tool is helpful as you continue to focus on greater accountability and transparency. Please feel free to contact us to let us know how or if this document is useful to you and what we can do to make it more helpful. Please send your comments to William Aaron, Chief of Consulting Services and Innovation, at [waaron@weidnerinc.com](mailto:waaron@weidnerinc.com) – or feel free to call him at 615-390-7006. We look forward to hearing from you.

*The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works – whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified.*

*Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end.*

– President Barack Obama  
Inaugural Address



## Accountability

1. Department staff know and can articulate who their customer is: individuals or organizations receiving the services and experiencing the benefit or impact.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

2. Department staff know what measurable results they are trying to help their customer experience. Their focus is not just on their processes – but also on the impact those processes have on their customers.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

3. The Department regularly collects information on these key customer experiences – that is, on the results it provides to its customers.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

4. The Department regularly sets numerical targets for its measurable results.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

5. The Department regularly reviews its performance information and looks at how to maintain/improve performance.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

## Accountability, *continued*

6. The Department regularly reports performance information on the key results upwards in the organization.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

7. Key results are contained in strategic plans or strategic business plans.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

8. Selected operational key results are aligned to support the long term (2-5 year) Strategic Goals for the entire organization.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

9. Managers' performance plans and evaluations include these key results.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

10. There are consequences for performance that meet or exceed pre-set performance targets, as well as for sustained and unimproved poor performance.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

11. The budget document(s) includes performance information tied to specific services so there is a clear relationship between a level of funding, the delivery of services, and the customer experience.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

### Assessing Your Accountability

**If your score is 41-55:** Congratulations! You have systems in place and are using them to establish and manage accountability throughout your organization. While there's still room for improvement, the organization has gone a long way toward creating a culture that focuses on results for the customer. Continued use of these systems and tools will drive better results and improve outside perceptions of the organization as expressed in bond ratings, votes supporting levy funding of services, better or fair treatment in the press, etc. Areas to check in on are: 1) Is the culture (language, beliefs and behaviors) fully focused on results equally at all levels?, and 2) Is there consistent use of performance information in the management of service delivery?

**If your score is 25-40:** Your organization has taken some important steps toward ensuring accountability but has room for improvement. There may be systems in place that are not as well used as they should be. The development of additional systematic and consistent efforts to focus on performance may be needed. Some employees are likely receiving mixed signals about what is truly important, undermining their efforts to focus on the organization's top priorities – improving this will help ensure better organizational performance. Some parts of your organization are using these tools more fully and frequently than others – by supporting them and recognizing their success, you can promote additional focus on performance. Whether the budget connects resources with results should be closely checked. Much has been accomplished and much is yet to be done but you are definitely on the way to being accountable.

**If your score is 11-24:** Your organization probably lacks the basic management systems and infrastructure recognized as essential to effectively managing performance and demonstrating accountability. As a result, no matter how well intentioned and skilled, most employees are not aligned to advance your organization's goals putting your organization at risk. It is likely that you are managing from crisis to crisis without the stabilizing force of a focus on operational and strategic results. It is highly likely that the budget does not communicate the connection between resources and performance, making budget decisions more difficult and highly subject to the politics of the moment. There is a lot of work ahead to integrate your management systems and focus the organizational culture on results for citizens. The positive in this assessment is that you are taking a closer look.

## Transparency

1. Citizens can easily access performance information about all government operations.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

2. Performance information can be easily accessed on-line and in person (hard copy).

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

3. Performance information is regularly and frequently updated for all distribution channels.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

4. Citizens know where and how they can access the performance information.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

5. Citizens report they understand the performance information and find it valuable.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

6. Performance information is included in the budget document.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

### Assessing Your Transparency

**If your score is 21-30:** Congratulations! You have reporting systems in place and are using them to communicate transparently your organization's performance to your citizens. While there is always room for improvement, you have gone a long way toward demonstrating both an ability and a willingness to be open and clear about your organization's performance. The focus on the customer and on the results provided to the customer is quite clear, easy to see and the public can get information on what they are getting for their tax dollar. Continued use of these systems and tools will continue to drive better results and increase credibility with your citizens. Your efforts will achieve tangible dividends in numerous ways – bond ratings, public votes of support like bond issuances, fairer treatment by the press, public confidence in their government, etc.

**If your score is 12-20:** Though your organization is making some effort to be transparent and open to your citizens, you still have significant and yet to be realized opportunities to communicate. It is within your reach to make information on your organization's performance available, current and relevant to citizens. In some ways the public knows what they are getting for their tax dollar. Taking some additional focused actions to make the information more readily accessible will demonstrate openness and transparency to your citizens, e.g. regularly posting performance information on your website, using performance information in public presentations, publishing annual performance reports, etc. Whether the budget communicates a connection between resources and results should be closely checked.

**If your score is 6-11:** Your organization appears to lack basic transparency in regard to your performance. It is likely that you are unable to close the loop between citizen expectations and your performance, thus demonstrating transparency. Your organization is likely viewed as inaccessible and generates a lot of questions about what you are and are not accomplishing and why. If citizens cannot tell what they are getting for their money, this will contribute to a lack of confidence. And this lack of confidence or credibility likely finds its way into bond ratings, public support and hostile legislation. Perceptions of your organization's effectiveness are subject to strong influence by politics, anecdotes, and rumor. There is much work to do. Actions to consider are the creation of performance measures, issuing performance reports which are shared with citizens, posting performance on your web site, issuing annual reports, and including performance information in presentations. The positive in this assessment is that you are taking a closer look.

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**Smarter Government. Better Results.**