

**CASE STUDY:  
DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA**

**USE AND THE EFFECTS OF USING  
PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR  
BUDGETING, MANAGEMENT,  
AND REPORTING**

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# DeKalb County, Georgia

## A Measured Approach to System Implementation

### Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PEOPLE INTERVIEWED AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PEOPLE AND THEIR ROLES.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Who has been involved in initiating, developing, and using performance measurement, and how have they been involved? .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>USES AND EFFECTS OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>What intended and expected uses and effects of performance measurement were articulated? .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>What actual uses and effects of performance measurement were identified?.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>Resource Allocation and Policy Decisions .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Strategic Planning, Performance Monitoring, and Performance Improvement .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Accountability and Communication .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>How have performance measurement quality issues been addressed?.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Have organizations changed to accommodate performance measurement?.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<b>Written Guidance.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Training and Facilitation .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Technology.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Staff Support and Other Organizational Changes .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>EVOLUTION OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>What barriers have been identified to making effective use of performance measurement?.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>What lessons have been learned from the performance measurement experience to date? .....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>What are future expectations for the use of performance measurement? .....</i>	<i>19</i>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The government of DeKalb County has been implementing a system of performance management that has several goals:

- To improve team, section, division, and departmental performance
- To assist in managing department operations
- To shift the focus from outputs to outcomes
- To emphasize customer service
- To aid resource allocation decisions
- To increase communication about individual and team performance
- To foster an ongoing improvement philosophy

Performance goals and indicators are intended to be used for assessing and ensuring that DeKalb's programs and services are delivered efficiently and effectively. The county has implemented the performance measurement system with the intent to better manage operations, to allocate resources, and for service planning and general budgeting. Early in the effort, [DeKalb County](#) included department heads and senior staff to develop and collect measures of input, output, and outcome as well as those that assess client demand and efficiency of operation. This effort has produced a large set of indicators that department heads and others can use to better manage, monitor, and evaluate their functions and activities. The process for implementing this system in DeKalb County was marked by the sustained leadership of then-CEO Liane Levetan and others throughout the government with a commitment to provide better service on the part of individual departments. Further, implementation of this system is characterized by significant planning, inclusiveness of department directors and staff in determining and "auditing" measures, and adherence to a reasonable timeframe for institutionalization of the system. The greatest lack of the system as implemented concerns the inadequacy of communication regarding individual, team, and department performance, both internally within the county government structure and externally to program clients and citizens in general.

## PEOPLE INTERVIEWED AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

Interviews were held with seventeen people, noted below. Subjects are referred to by title in the text below.

<b>Interviewee/Official</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Liane Levetan	Chief executive officer	DeKalb County
Ken Davis	Commissioner	DeKalb County, District 4
Donna Adams Morgan	Assistant county administrator	CEO's Office
Michael Bell	Director	Finance Department
Dwight B. Cochran	Deputy director	Finance Department, Budget & Grants

Gwen Brown Patterson	Financial management analyst	Finance Department
Karl B. Williams	Executive director, Community Relations Commission	<a href="#">CEO's Office</a>
Deborah Spector Victor	Chairperson	Community Relations Commission
Carl Glover	Associate director	<a href="#">Public Works for Roads &amp; Drainage</a>
Willie Greene	Assistant director	Public Works for Roads & Drainage
Fred Young	Deputy director	Public Safety Department, EMS
Frank Boldoe	Deputy director	Public Safety Department, Animal Control
Debora Palmer	Training specialist	Public Safety Department
Darro Wiley	Director	<a href="#">Library</a>
Magda Sossa	Assistant director	Library
Peter Burke	Director	Private Industry Council
Allison Lowe	Assistant director	Private Industry Council

## OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

An urban county in the metropolitan Atlanta area, [DeKalb County](#) has been recognized as one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the southeastern United States. The county services approximately 610,000 residents, with most of its 270 square miles remaining unincorporated. The government structure is made up of a [Chief Executive Officer](#), elected countywide, in addition to the [Board of Commissioners](#). The Board includes one commissioner for each of the county's five districts and two commissioners from two super-districts that overlay the five districts. The board elects a presiding officer and deputy presiding officer from its members. The board sets policy for the county and has final say on DeKalb's budget. The CEO can veto board decisions; such veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the board. The CEO is the chief administrator of the county, which employs approximately 7,000 employees (*Destination DeKalb* 1998).

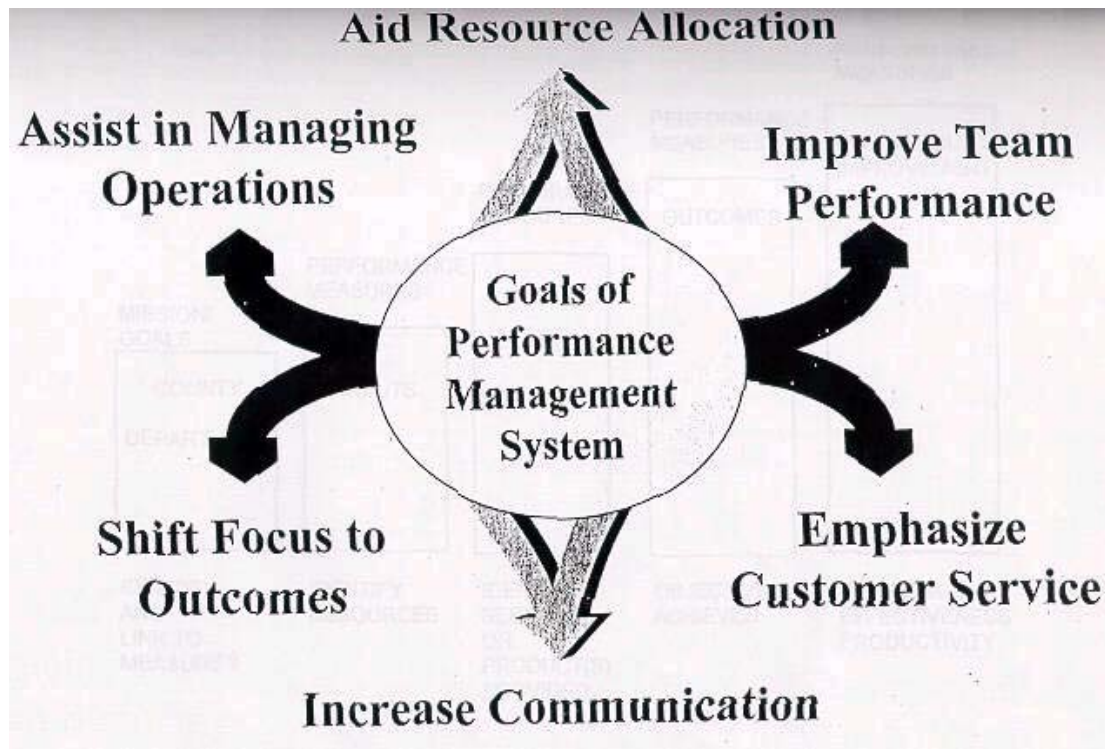
The county's industrial base is a mix of enterprises predominated by healthcare services and medical and research institutions. Further, the county has the largest public school system in the state and includes colleges; law, medical, and business schools; and a number of private educational institutions. More than 93,000 students and 13,000 employees make up the DeKalb County School System. In 1999–2000, the county spent an average of \$6,560 per pupil for education. An unusually high number—more than 82 percent—of DeKalb County high school graduates go on to college or postsecondary schooling.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In 1997, DeKalb County voters passed a one-cent sales tax dedicated to school capital projects. Revenues are being used to build new schools and classroom additions onto existing schools to accommodate the increasing school-age population, to construct a physical education building at every elementary school in the system, and to substantially increase the amount of cutting-edge technology available to students. The sales tax is also being used to retire \$91

The goals of the DeKalb County performance management system are illustrated in Figure 1. The performance management system addresses the county's focus on customer service and service quality. In 1999, the system concentrated on two areas: (1) training and (2) audit of established indicators. Training in performance management theory and practice was provided for midlevel managers and administrators early in the system's development. These individuals have then been responsible for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data compiled in the Executive Level Performance Management Indicators Report.

**Figure 1: Goals of the Performance Management System, DeKalb County, Georgia**



Source: Executive Level Performance Management Indicators Report.

The training provided a method to design and implement performance indicators and customer service surveys. The following list presents a chronology of the Performance Management System Project as executed by the county:

- *June 1996*: Determine composition of task force, program focus, and goals and objectives of performance system.

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million in existing bond debt for new school construction. This will save the school district \$14 million in interest, making it one of the few debt-free school systems in the county. The county's top five largest employers are [Emory University](#), [DeKalb County School System](#), DeKalb County government, General Motors (Doraville), and the Internal Revenue Service (Chamblee) (*Destination DeKalb* 1998).

- *March 1997*: Dr. David N. Ammons, author of *Municipal Benchmarks*, introduces performance measurement concepts to DeKalb's CEO staff, board of commissioners, department directors, associate directors, managers, and others.
- *April 1997*: CEO directive to county departments requesting productivity measures; measures received from departments become draft copies.
- *June 1997*: Performance Measurement Staff Resource Team (PMSRT) formed to review performance measurements drafts.
- *July 1997*:
  - o Selected Department Performance Indicators (SDPI) compiled from productivity measures.
  - o Departments select and rank top five performance indicators critical to their departments from SDPI listing.
  - o Departments assume role of internal customer and rank top five most critical performance indicators for other departments. Rankings serve as peer review and provide CEO with system-wide perspective on what department heads view as important across county operations.
- *August 1997*: PMSRT review and rank top five critical performance indicators per department.
- *September 1997*: SDPI further developed according to ranking of departments and PMSRT.
- *November 1997*: Chief executive officer's Performance Management Indicators Report (PMIR) finalized.
- *December 1997*: Chief executive officer's PMIR forwarded to Dr. Ammons for review; "Consultant's Review and Commentary" of the CEO's MPIR received.
- *January 1998*:
  - o Dr. Ammons discusses "Consultant's Review and Commentary" with the PMSRT and individually with department directors, associate directors, and key staff.
  - o Performance Measurement Task Force meets with Dr. Ammons to review proposed benchmarks and present overview of performance indicators.
- *February 1998*:
  - o Modified performance indicators forwarded to CEO for compilation and review by the PMSRT.
  - o Modified performance indicators forwarded to Dr. Ammons for final review and returned to Office of the CEO.
- *March 1998*: PMSRT reviews Dr. Ammons' comments recommending that performance indicators be accepted as final set.
- *April 1998*: CEO requests department heads implement performance measurement, noting that first report will be due on July 24, 1998. The report will include the results of

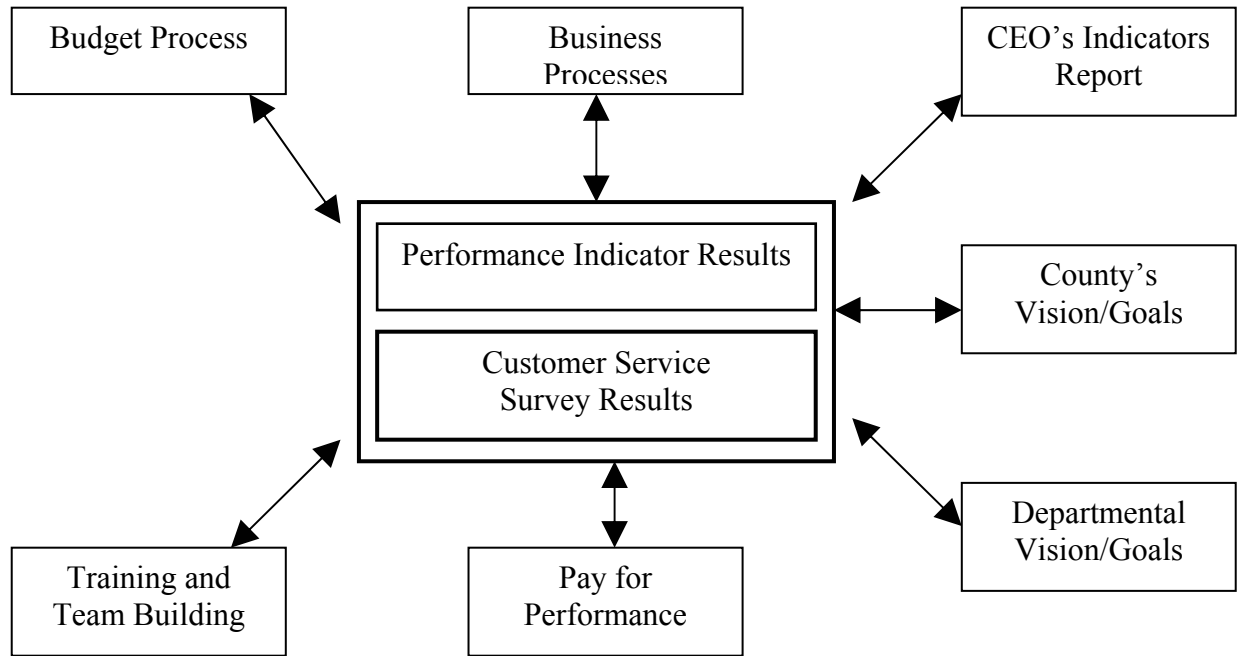
the performance indicators measured and the results of the customer service surveys for each department.

- *July 1998*: Department heads submit results of performance and customer service surveys for the second quarter of 1998.
- *September 1998*: CEO's Performance Management Indicators Quarterly Report for the second quarter of 1998 finalized and submitted.
- *November 1998*: CEO's Performance Management Indicators Quarterly Report for the third quarter of 1998 finalized and submitted.
- *December 1998*: Research, planning, and preparation begin for the audit process.
- *January 1999*:
  - o Orientation class on performance measures is held, facilitated by Ron Burbank.
  - o The CEO's Performance Management Focus Group is established.
- *February 1999*:
  - o Each department appoints a point of contact for all matters related to performance measures.
  - o CEO's Performance Management Indicators Quarterly Report for the fourth quarter of 1998 finalized and submitted.
- *March 1999*:
  - o Training classes in performance measures conducted for midlevel managers, administrators, and other staff, who gather, analyze, and report data for the CEO's Performance Indicators Report. Forty-nine staff members complete training.
  - o Matrices assess the link(s) among the department's performance measures, the department's goals, and the county's primary goals.
- *April 1999*:
  - o "CEO's Performance Management Indicators Quarterly Report" is changed to "Executive Level Performance Management Indicators Quarterly Report."
  - o Results of performance indicators for the first quarter of 1999 due on April 15.
  - o Training class in performance measures conducted for department heads/division directors.
  - o A model for designing performance measures is adopted.
  - o Research, planning, and preparation for the audit process and workshop continue.

As indicated in the preceding chronology, one major thrust of the performance management system was adequate training for all managers regarding the various components of measurement and collection of data. Also, there was an effort to establish performance measurement technicians in each department and division for central contact on performance measurement initiatives and data. Measurement design—both theory and practice—and customization of customer service surveys are components of the training as well. Another thrust of this initiative

is continual review and reassessment of established indicators to ensure that they are focused on processes important to the goals and effective management of county government operations.

**Figure 2: Aspects of DeKalb County’s Performance Management System**



**FINDINGS**

The findings of this case study were obtained through interviews using semi-structured survey instruments in addition to the review of budget and performance reports, memoranda, and tabulations provided by DeKalb County. This information is organized around several themes that provide a basis of understanding performance measurement in the county. These themes regard the people responsible for development of the performance measurement system; the implementation, use, and effects of this system on county operations; activities and spending; and lessons learned from this system’s implementation in DeKalb County.

**PEOPLE AND THEIR ROLES**

*Who has been involved in initiating, developing, and using performance measurement, and how have they been involved?*

The CEO’s goal was to have performance measurements that improved customer satisfaction, promoted team building, provided incentives for effective and efficient operations, and served as preliminary steps to a pay-for-performance approach at some point. CEO Levetan appointed a task force of county department heads and business and community representatives

from Georgia Power, Hewlett-Packard Company, Southeastern Die Company, Inc., and the county's Community Relations Commission in 1996. She also assigned Donna Morgan, assistant county administrator, as the project manager to ensure that the process remained a high priority for the departments.

The task force researched the subject and asked each department to identify five organizational strengths and five weaknesses. This assessment provided the impetus to refine the Performance Measurement System in order to improve the county's service delivery. The executive assistant, Russ Crider, informed them that Dr. David A. Ammons, then with the University of Georgia, had a good reputation in terms of assisting governments in the pursuit and development of performance measures.

Ms. Levetan hired Dr. Ammons as a consultant in 1997 to build measurement and measurement audit capabilities regarding the county's performance. Departments used the model outlined in *Municipal Benchmarks: Assessing Local Performance and Establishing Community Standards* by Dr. Ammons to develop performance indicators that directly related to their mission. Each department head was asked to do two things: to select and rank five performance indicators critical to their operation, and to rank the five most critical performance indicators of other departments' operations. Such rankings and cross-rankings served as a peer review process and provided the CEO with a system-wide perspective of what department heads viewed as important across county operations.

Ms. Morgan created a staff committee that became critical to the review of each department's performance measures. The Community Relations Commission executive director, Karl B. Williams, became the lead on this staff committee. The Community Relations Commission chairperson, Deborah Spector Victor, and Mr. Williams played key roles in the development of the county's performance measurement system. These two players started reviewing citizen complaints coming into the CEO's office in an attempt to better understand citizen perceptions of county operations. This effort coincided with Ms. Levetan's intent to respond to citizens directly about service, and to have each department respond accordingly to citizen concerns and complaints. She, along with Ms. Victor, held community breakfasts periodically to hear from citizens regarding their expectations and experiences of service from the county.

Other leaders in the performance measurement initiative included the Finance Department director and many of the department directors and associate and assistant directors. The CEO mentioned that the impetus for a more structured performance management system was to obtain the "fiftieth-floor view" of government operations—to determine what departments are doing, how they are operating, and how they can do better in service to citizens. According to Ms. Levetan, "In order to see how it was faring, DeKalb County, Georgia, set out to establish a performance management system that would assess each team, section, division and department of the government. Furthermore, local officials decided to base the measurements on the county's goals and those of its 'customers'" (Levetan 2000, p. 42). Ms. Morgan agreed that the intent behind development of a performance measurement system was to provide for a "level assessment" of departments and the individuals in them. She considered that the goal of the system was to conduct quantitative analyses that relate to the qualitative benefit of citizens. The finance director believed that the system would provide a tool for the county to better evaluate programs and thus allow for the provision of guidelines for each department, "looking at their processes and structure and coming up with benchmarks for guiding the progress of departments and the individuals in them."

The administration placed the responsibility for further development and refinement of the measures in the Finance Department in order to ensure that departments eventually related their performance to their budget requests. Gwen Brown Patterson, financial management analyst, is responsible for assisting departments in the development of performance measures and for training. To that end, Ron Burbank was hired to provide intensive training and a step-by-step method to design performance measures.

Just as in some of the other governments visited for the GASB study, the department directors, associate directors, and assistant directors and staff played differing roles regarding development and use of performance measurement in DeKalb County. Some of those interviewed were very comfortable talking about the measurement of their activities and how measurement had allowed them to reassess their work effort, efficiency, and effectiveness. This was particularly the case in departments like [Public Works](#) and Public Safety and the [Library](#), where measures of performance have been collected for some time and are easily quantifiable. Such study participants seemed fully at ease with the system as implemented and their subsequent use of measures for both budget justification and program management purposes. Ms. Morgan suggested that the military background of several of the key players in development of the county's performance measurement system helped with its progress as well. For example, representatives from the CRC, Public Works, and Public Safety had substantial military experience, providing them with familiarity with program evaluation via measurement.

Citizens and the media were not cited in interviews as instigators of the performance measurement system, although the input of citizens through client surveys of government services was viewed as vital to success. That is, citizens, albeit indirectly, are considered to influence advancement of performance measurement and the performance management system given their participation in these surveys. Virtually everyone we talked with conveyed strong commitment to citizen needs and concerns for good service from the government, thus necessitating continual contact with clients and citizens about such needs and concerns. Most expressed regret that the feedback to citizens was less than satisfactory, however. The consensus among those interviewed was that information about the county's performance was not yet effectively communicated, either internally or externally. This was perhaps one of the chief concerns regarding the particular system as implemented in this government. Regardless of the fact that some "cross-ranking" of measurement had occurred, few interviewees understood the applicability of performance measurement past their own division and department. And while most department and division directors or deputies could directly link performance measurement to the advancement of management practices within their purview, they did not indicate usefulness of the system to the "advancement" of their budgets.

## USES AND EFFECTS OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

*What intended and expected uses and effects of performance measurement were articulated?*

*What actual uses and effects of performance measurement were identified?*

### **Resource Allocation and Policy Decisions**

Then-CEO Liane Levetan remarked that initial consideration of a performance measurement system for the county was for purposes of understanding more clearly what each department was doing. The finance director believed that the system was an initiative by the administration in response to questions by the Board of Commissioners on “why the budget grows as it does annually and incrementally every year.” However, this director concurred with the CEO that “administration wants from our performance measurement system to get out of it more reliable internal measures of efficiency.” The finance director did not view that the system initially was an attempt to infiltrate annual budget decisions, or for use to benchmark the county against other, comparable governments, although he expressed a desire that both of these activities would occur over time.

A commissioner interviewed for this case did emphasize that much of the board’s interest in performance measurement concerned assessment of program and service provision and efficiencies of operation with an eye toward improved constituent service. For example, the commissioner provided the example of an assessment in Public Works of meter readers and their attention to standards of performance that require individual goals of meters read per week. One assessment of readers’ performance found little distinction between those covering neighborhoods in which houses are sixty feet apart and those covering neighborhoods in which houses are an acre apart. The commissioner noted that in this case concentrating on measures of performance and considering those measures against certain standards brought to light inefficiencies of this particular government operation and led to reestablishment of goals and shifts in expectations of performance.

Generally, department directors and other staff interviewed considered that the intent of implementing a performance system was to better understand what their agencies were doing. It is important to recognize that most did not consider the intent behind the system as negative. That is, they did not consider the intent to be to cut budgets or programs. Most believed that collection and consideration of performance measures would figure heavily in the day-to-day management of their division or department. Further, they viewed presentation of performance measures as a necessary component of their budget request that could further budget *justification*. One department director elaborated that performance measurement with respect to budgeting consisted of “how close we are to the budget projection.” This reflected consensus among most we spoke with regarding the usefulness of performance measurement and collection of measures *over time* for comparability purposes, either of a budgetary or a management nature. According to the finance director, most program staff did not take on the performance measurement as an “onerous task” but rather one in which results would be aggregated and centralized. From his vantage point he said, “We have used aggregated data to actually see how

agencies are doing internally and have used this information to give them feedback.” A few of those interviewed did suggest that the performance measurement initiative was a nominal effort, according to one, “simply another charge from the CEO, one more set of reports to provide, just another bunch of expectations of department heads.”

One interviewee thought that with time, performance measurement use would increase the effectiveness of management and operations, but he did not expect overall budgetary decisions to change. On the other hand, this same official considered that if the system were developed separately from the budget, it would be harder to institutionalize it. In his words, “if performance measurement is tied to the budget, people will do it.” Several others claimed that department managers and staff do use performance measures for decision making and monitoring what is being accomplished. One interviewee suggested that divisions could benefit internally by using performance measures to clarify what is an acceptable level of service (considering client/citizen perspective via customer surveys). Still another indicated that although performance measures might not always be used to make allocation decisions, they are used to provide justification for spending after the fact, once such decisions are made.

**1999 BUDGET CALENDAR  
DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA**

<b>BUDGET PROCEDURE</b>	<b>ACTION BY</b>	<b>TIMETABLE</b>
Detailed Training Sessions	Finance Staff	Aug. 5 & 6, 1998 10:30 a.m.
Budget Kickoff Meeting	CEO and Finance	Aug. 10, 1998 9:00 a.m.
Deadline for Submission of Human/Community Services Agency Requests to Finance Department	Requesting Agencies	August 21, 1998
Deadline for Submission of Completed Capital Projects Request to Finance Department	Elected Officials and Department Heads	Sept. 1, 1998
Deadline for Submission of Completed Operating Budget Request to Finance Department	Elected Officials and Department Heads	Sept. 21, 1998
Capital Projects Recommendations to Finance Department	Capital Projects Budget Committee	Oct. 16, 1998
Human Services Coordinating Committee Recommendations to Finance Department	HSCC	Oct. 16, 1998
Review of Initial Revenue Anticipation and Overall Budget	CEO, Executive Assistant and Finance Staff	Nov. 4, 1998
CEO's Budget Review	CEO, Executive Assistant, Finance Staff and Department Officials	Nov. 4- Dec. 15, 1998
Submission of CEO's budget to Board of Commissioners	CEO	Dec. 15, 1998
Board of Commissioners Budget Review: A) Initial Review of Overall Budget B) Department Reviews	CEO and Board of Commissioners Board of Commissioners, Executive Assistant, Finance Staff	Dec. 15, 1998 Dec. 15, 1998- Feb. 23, 1999
Public Hearings	CEO	Dec. 15, 1998- Feb. 23, 1999
Public Hearing (Board of Commissioners Meeting)	Board of Commissioners	Feb. 9, 1999
Revise Tentative Budget based on Public Hearings and Final Revenue Anticipations	Board of Commissioners Finance Staff	Feb. 9-23, 1999
Public Hearing and Budget Adoption	Board of Commissioners	Feb. 23, 1999

**Table 1: Typical Budget Cycle of DeKalb County, Georgia**

As explained above, then, some consider conduct of performance measurement to be a budget exercise (compilation and justification prior to spending), whereas others see usefulness of such measures for overview, planning and projection (management of day-to-day operations). Looking at the annual budget report for 1999, however, indicates that performance measures may not necessarily be presented in such documentation. That is, although activity measures are a required component, those generated regarding agency or department activity *results* as explained in the mission statement for each department are not always apparent. In her memo to members of the [Board of Commissioners](#) outlining her 1999 budget recommendations, then-CEO Liane Levetan explained that the basic principles that she applied to her recommendation included “continuation of the development of performance based *workload* measurements” (DeKalb County Annual Budget 1999, p. 9). Table 2 presents the components of each department budget presentation as illustrated in the 1999 DeKalb County annual budget.

**Table 2: Components of Departmental Budget Presentation in the 1999 DeKalb County, Georgia, Annual Budget**

<b>Budget Report Component</b>	<b>Inclusive of:</b>
<i>Organizational Flow Chart</i>	Department and division names
<i>Mission Statement</i>	Explains what department seeks to accomplish for citizens; describes intended results of program activities
<i>Program Description</i>	Description of department, division, and staff functions and activities
<i>Major Accomplishments in Current FY</i>	Lists accomplishments
<i>Major Goals for Upcoming FY</i>	Lists goals of functions, services, and activities
<i>Major Budgetary Impacts</i>	Previous, upcoming, and future fiscal-year budgetary additions/deletions, including number of positions, funds, and activities so changed
<i>Activity Measures</i>	Lists actual data for current fiscal year and two years prior; lists estimated data for upcoming fiscal year. <i>Measures of department and division activities not necessarily representative of performance results.</i>
<i>Summary of Expenditures and Appropriations by Cost Center</i>	Listed by cost center or division
<i>Summary of Expenditures and Appropriations by Major Category</i>	Listed by object of expenditure, like personal services, supplies, etc.
<i>Authorized Positions by Cost Center</i>	Listed by cost center or division

A small minority of those interviewed felt that the performance measures they generated were used to make the budget report look good, rather than to help make good budget decisions. One department manager did provide illustration that such measures could influence spending decisions: “We have a little resource guide that cost us X amount of dollars [to produce] and so

when we explain both the demand and the need and lay it down to the Commissioners, they give us another Y dollars.” Another referred to the conduct of performance measurement as a necessary task to get more resources and budget increases: “We realized that we did not have enough resources. So we presented a briefing at the mid-year budget using photos and input from a team, showing performance measurement data. We laid out a picture story on the problems that we have and the problems we are experiencing trying to meet our objectives. Thus we were able to get eight positions unfrozen and \$50,000 in one element of the program and another \$150,000 in another element of the program. Therefore, I think with using performance measures and communicating it in the budget and to the commissioners and making them approve them in the mid-year budget, we are going to get some results.”

Interviewees from some departments mentioned that performance measures make it easier to support requests for additional resources, and that regular reporting prevents having to scramble to provide justification for what was accomplished during the prior fiscal year. This reinforces the finding that although some may question the utility of performance measures for influencing resource allocation decisions before they are made, performance measurement has demonstrated value for supporting and justifying those decisions once they have been made, and for forcing staff to think about who is served by programs and how citizens are served. Department heads interviewed indicated that they too used performance measures to identify where programs needed additional resources to become more effective, and to determine where to put more resources. Further, some departments indicated that benchmarking information is useful for decision making, in particular if the results show that functions are understaffed. Performance measures provided the rationale for asking for additional resources.

### **Strategic Planning, Performance Monitoring, and Performance Improvement**

The county’s performance system was geared toward improved program results and specifically to enhance customer service. As well, use of an outside consultant for training purposes, and an ongoing commitment to in-house training and communication about performance measurement conduct and presentation of measures, illustrated dedication to advancing communication internally about government management and operations. The performance measurement system was expected to affect day-to-day program management by supporting planning, performance, and program monitoring with an eye toward improved service; administrators would use measures heavily for internal operations assessment and communication both with the agency and to central administration. There was less enthusiasm for how far the system had evolved regarding external communications. For example, the finance director noted that he would appreciate having measures to be able to make comparisons with other like governments. He suggested that “if I knew that [Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina](#) had the same activity levels for similar services, that would provide me with more helpful information [than is presently available].” His reference, then, is to general agreement about measures across governments for comparative purposes. Others expressed concerns about public access to measures that might make an agency “look bad” at any given point in time.

On the other hand, most interviewed were extremely comfortable with the nearly daily development and consideration of performance measures for planning, management, and internal communication purposes at least within their own department. For example, the assistant director of the local Private Industry Council (PIC) used measures constantly to assess DeKalb’s performance in job placement and retention. Programs under PIC purview include use of federal

pass-through (JTPA) moneys for job training and placement. National measures used for planning and performance monitoring and to determine improvement strategies are generated on a periodic basis for benchmarking and include adult employment rate, adult average weekly earnings, welfare employment rate and average weekly earnings, and youth-entered employment rate and employability enhancement rate. According to the assistant director, “we must meet wage standards that are sent down to us. We have had to watch this, given that we must meet performance standards regarding wage rates. When we can’t meet standards, or we exceed standards, then we tweak programs” in order to consistently be a top performer. Because of “exceptional performance,” DeKalb PIC has received greater recognition as well as dollars. “The change in service area and new programming resulted in DeKalb receiving an additional \$2 million annually for employment and training programs” (*Destination DeKalb* 1998, p. 24). Further, the PIC is now part of The Enterprise, “an organization created by the U.S. Department of Labor to recognize groups with outstanding performances and a demonstrated commitment to quality improvement and customer satisfaction” (Levetan 2000, p. 44). Both the director and assistant director of the Library concurred with PIC officials regarding the usefulness of performance measures for planning, performance monitoring, and performance improvement. The director talked of using measures of library use to better schedule staff across various branches and to “tweak” programs to better serve citizens.

The associate director for [Roads and Drainage](#) in the Public Works Department also used performance measures for strategic planning and management of programs. This division is chiefly responsible for infrastructure development, maintenance, and planning for the county. The associate director discussed monitoring response times regarding citizen complaints about road maintenance, storm-water management, and traffic engineering in order to streamline the method by which citizens could contact the division and then expect response as well as results. He viewed this advance in expediency positively—allowing the department to more effectively schedule repair work and for planning regarding new or changing initiatives. During 1998, in particular, this division was tested regarding response times, given their focused support to the Dunwoody, Georgia, storm recovery that required clean-up and other crew activity into 1999. Use of measures for benchmarking, like at PIC, is evident as well: “We try to identify reasons why we miss a target. We also contemplate tightening up a standard if we get over 95 percent; for example, instead of 24-hour turnaround, [can we implement] 12-hour turnaround?” By looking at measures for response times and completion rates; our consideration of measures “drove us to buy a pothole filling machine. And, although it was new on the market it drove us to look for one, find one and then acquire one.”

The deputy director of [Emergency Medical Services \(EMS\)](#) in the Public Safety Department talked of tracking telephone calls and response times to more effectively schedule his EMS response teams. At the time of this study, the EMS was successful in instituting use of an advanced Emergency Medical Dispatch System to more efficiently field calls, and when required, to prepare callers for arrival of the service team. The Animal Control Division had a similar emphasis on thorough training of employees for services like animal registration, cruelty investigations, medical and emergency services, and law enforcement related to animal control in the county. Measures tracked in this division of Public Safety that can be found within the Executive Level Performance Management Indicators Report (June 2, 1999) include:

- Average response time per call in minutes for both priority and general calls
- Percentage of calls resolved on the first response
- Number of calls received

- Number of animals handled
- Number of animals euthanized

Client survey results illustrative of customer satisfaction with division response are also included in this report. Each measure is assessed regarding whether it relates to the county's primary goals. Also, a plan of action based on the outcome of data collected is presented. Interviewees in both EMS and [Animal Control](#) stressed the importance of performance data not only for scheduling workers across shifts, but also for substantive assessment of operator responses to callers as a check on adequacy of training received.

At the onset of implementing the performance measurement system in DeKalb County, departments needed to “find out who their customers were.” Differences in the ability to focus on customers then influenced a department's ability to move forward toward improvement of results. For example, divisions like EMS could easily determine their customer “base” and then work toward improved customer satisfaction rates. Other departments were not as lucky, however. Regarding the airport, for instance, “the county had to decide if its customers were only the owners, pilots and passengers that used the airport or if they included the residents of surrounding neighborhoods” (Levetan 2000, p. 42). According to the director of the CRC, “some department heads and associate department heads have used information to adjust processes, change work requirements and are able to state that ‘We are doing X.’ For example, one department, after trying to recover from the tornado, was doing so many permits (a requirement). They decided to reduce the man-hours from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm to 8:00 am to 12:30 pm so that they could actually fully review and completely process permits that were coming in.” In other words, most of those we talked with in DeKalb found performance measurement development and use to be helpful, even if in stages, from initially finding out what said program actually did, to how citizens perceived program service, to using the measures for planning, staffing, and better management in general.

### **Accountability and Communication**

Citizen and customer satisfaction is a major focus for the county's performance measurement efforts, and this is viewed as a legitimate vehicle for gauging the county's performance. The CEO mentioned that a major reason for instituting a performance measurement system is that it requires “listening to what citizens say.” Another official added, “You have to create measurements to see how well you are doing and that is from the standpoint of how well you are producing service and *how well it is being received by the citizens*. You need feedback from more than just the service that you [are] providing but also how well they think you are performing.” The citizen survey raises awareness of the county's efforts. As another interviewee put it, “performance measurement is a mechanism so management can be held accountable for reaching the desired service levels.”

Accountability using measurement in DeKalb County has been fostered in several ways—through the review and ranking process required in the development of performance measures; through team meetings internal to departments regarding performance measurement development, choice, and assessment; and through the performance measurement audit process that is required. One official indicated that internally, performance measurement has created a climate that values accountability and has given the county government a language to

communicate about it. In addition, progress toward achieving outcome goals of the county and by department is provided as part of the annual budget process.

Performance measurement and use has fostered better communication internal to the government in a variety of ways. Certainly employees are more involved than ever before in the consideration of measures by virtue of their role in the conduct of citizen and customer surveys. And several department heads noted that team meetings were used to get employees to talk about measurement and measures, creating a heightened understanding of the complexity of creating measures related to program results. In Animal Control, for example, the deputy director claimed that direct communication about services with clients has fostered greater concern among staff regarding “the way that we treat our citizens. I am not sure that the citizens notice this [yet], but we are more concerned with our service.” Another official recognized better cooperation among departments because of the need for everyone to use customer surveys—“customer satisfaction should be interdepartmental.” Various methods of communicating among departments about performance improvements included the use of team meetings, pointed articles in the employee newsletter circulated periodically, and overt recognition via formal awards to departments and individuals. The CEO expressed that awards were somewhat simplistic but meaningful to employees and made people “feel good” to get such recognition.

External exposure of the county’s performance has been slower and has been perceived as less effective. One reason may be a belief that citizens generally do not care how the government is performing except during crises or regarding purely personal attention. One official stated that “residents don’t care a hoot about efficiency normally. They’re really only concerned about what is in fact happening to them right now.” Another official admitted that, during a focus group process with citizens, she did not hear any evidence that the general public was aware of DeKalb’s performance measurement initiative. The same official indicated that she had not seen performance measurement directed toward citizens although it has been used for internal management, not external accountability. However, another stated that performance information should be made available to the public, “even though the public might be ho-hum about it.” External exposure of DeKalb’s efforts did appear, however, in *The Champion Newspaper* (September 2000, Section A), and the CEO authored an article for *American City and County* (Levetan 2000).

Several officials explained their interpretation of the role of the media in reporting performance measures, particularly results from the citizen survey. One official indicated that “ultimately [performance measures] should be for the public, [but] measures never get published in the newspaper unless the numbers are negative. Most of the interest is at the county management level because it is an audience that cares very much about [performance results].” The official acknowledged that reporters say that positive highlights are not news. Given typical media focus on government inefficiencies, the official expressed concern about the difficulty of getting information to the public so they can use it, and in a format that captures media and community interest.

## PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

*How have performance measurement quality issues been addressed?*

From the onset of this performance measurement system, most agreed that they considered it to be an evolving process requiring input from many different players, department directors and staff, central administration, and citizens. Ms. Levetan claimed that the performance measurement “would not conclude with my tenure in office, but would be ongoing.” The focus of the system on customer satisfaction (the comprehensive use of customer/client surveys) means that this initiative will always be evolving, reflective of public perception about the role and performance of the government. One interviewee related that “you have to create some type of measurements to see how well you are doing and that is from the standpoint of how well you are producing a service and how well it is being received by the citizens. You need feedback from more than just the service that you are providing, but also how well citizens think you are performing.” Another talked of understanding “what the data means and what it does not mean.” Essentially, those interviewed expressed a need to know *what* to provide, *citizen perceptions* of current service provision and also possible *methods* of service/program provision, *the best way* to provide the service/program, and then *planning* for the cost of provision at various levels of operation. One of those interviewed expressed that the quality of measures and usefulness of the system was inherently related to how employees interpreted the development, collection, and presentation of measures vis-à-vis citizen needs and desires. “The greatest problem with such a system is understanding that it’s used for continuous improvement in programs, and not killing the person who gathers the data.” Generally, however, most found that measurement development, redevelopment, and applicability to the task at hand were a requirement of government services. The ranking of appropriate measures provided a good check on applicability and overall quality of measure. Also, continued input from staff regarding activities conducted and how such activities should be measures served as a check on measurement quality.

*Have organizations changed to accommodate performance measurement?*

### Written Guidance

DeKalb County prepared managers and others responsible for gathering data for implementation of the performance measurement system through the initial training noted earlier in the chronology. Familiarity with measurement and measures was fostered by having department directors rank the importance of performance indicators related to their department’s activities as well as other departments’ activities. Guideline documents requiring performance measurement presentation that were used in this system include:

- Executive Level Performance Management Indicators Report
- Performance Measures Introductory Report

The first phase of the performance system concentrated on information gathering, as promoted by the CEO. Virtually everyone we talked with divulged a history of collecting activity measures related to their work. Introduction of this system in DeKalb allowed employees to better quantify their activities and the results of those activities “to institute a process whereby departments had to respond yearly to how they were doing as compared to a previous year or previous report.”

### **Training and Facilitation**

Orientation classes on performance measures and the establishment of the CEO’s Performance Focus Group strengthened the resolve of those internal to departments to implement measurement and its use. As a result, each department appointed a point of contact for all matters related to performance measures. Forty-nine people in the ranks of midlevel managers, administrators, and other staff who gather data for the CEO’s report were trained in further classes, and the members of the Performance Measurement Staff Resource team designed and completed the performance measurement linkage to county’s Primary Goal Matrix. Even those who were experienced with using performance measures expressed optimism about the usefulness of the training. One assistant director said that the formal training allowed her to share her experiences with other departments and enabled her to learn about newer forms of performance measurement and advanced statistical methods of analysis. The training facilitated improved interdepartmental communication by fostering conversation among division and department directors about government service, performance, and measurement.

Another avenue to facilitate the process of developing measures was through meetings with functional teams. This allowed employees to “get energized and start thinking about measurements.” Also, such meetings allowed employees to fine-tune lists of measures, perhaps adding ones not presently used, changing or “tweaking” current measures, or discarding them. One interviewee suggested that there was a tendency “to make measures obtainable, but yet tough enough to make an impact.”

### **Technology**

Advanced technologies and the ability to quantify measures easily help to ensure successful implementation of the performance measurement system. The EMS within the Department of Public Safety was able to take advantage of quantitative data to streamline staff schedules, and use qualitative data of staff responses (for example, telephone conversations) to better prepare staff for field assignment. Likewise, the director of the Library talked of using quantitative data of library usage for staff scheduling across branches, to streamline branch management overall, and regarding particular branches, as well as using such data to make substantive changes to branch stocks to better accommodate specific audiences. The example provided earlier of the introduction of a pothole-filling machine is an instructive one regarding the influence of technology advancement on performance; the service now requires only two people in the field rather than the previous staff of five that had been required to do the same task.

## **Staff Support and Other Organizational Changes**

According to one person, “the greatest problem with such a system is understanding that it’s used for continuous improvement in programs, and not killing the person who gathers the data.” Ultimately, the achievement capability of the department should not be underestimated: “You have to present measurements in a way that are not threatening to the workforce.” This is needed, as told by an associate director, to keep the staff enthusiastic about the performance measurement effort. “The key things to any process are understanding the process and understanding the sincerity of a process rather than the fears associated with such process, especially when you are causing the work force to change.” In fact, most did not interpret the implementation negatively, either in its intent or as it affected their own workload. Those we interviewed considered that performance measurement, data collection, and performance reporting were simply part of doing business. “It helps to find out where you are and then using that information to get you somewhere else, [hopefully] to a better place.” Several stressed the need for communicating about performance among themselves (across departments) for effective implementation. Noted one, “We conduct a review and analysis within my own organization, and we use that as a form of review and analysis. We either review the data and see what we are doing and then try to analyze what needs to be better and/or what needs to be improved in things that are going okay.” The government recognized performance advancement in divisions and departments via certificates of excellence and through spotlight articles in the county’s internal newspaper to government employees. However, most suggested that talk of performance across departments was not consistent, and communication of performance advancements to the public was slight, if that.

## **EVOLUTION OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**

*What barriers have been identified to making effective use of performance measurement?*

The preceding discussion illustrates slight human barrier to the implementation of the performance measurement system in the DeKalb County government. Most recognized the usefulness of collecting information about their work performance, collecting such information over time, and assessing results against certain standards or benchmarks for performance. “Statistics identify bottlenecks in a program where you can then concentrate on providing the necessary resources or training or whatever is necessary to unstop that bottleneck.” As noted, most were simply readdressing measurement. They were comfortable collecting information and were now required to rethink what they were measuring and how measures could be improved, and conduct more focused reporting of these measures as a way to feed the information up through the organization. None claimed to lack the staff necessary for this component of the measurement system. Several did question how data was used as it moved up the organization, and only a very few considered that the use of performance measures helped advance their appropriations directly. However, as indicated, many slight and not-so-slight management changes are illustrated here that can be directly linked to the performance measurement system initiated.

Technical and conceptual difficulties exist in the sense that there seemed to be a sustained effort to keep measures simple and reasonable. Several directors stressed that quantitative data

does not always provide you the true cost of operations, or the direct cause for certain results. Nonetheless, there was just slight suspicion that the measures were meaningless past “the end of one’s nose.” Rather, the system seemed malleable from the start, flexible in the sense that certain measures were not necessarily “forever” and redevelopment and reconceptualization are always an option to staff when considering how to measure what they do. Similarly, resource constraints regarding system implementation seemed minimal. None claimed to have lost or gained personnel due to measurement requirements.

*What lessons have been learned from the performance measurement experience to date?*

DeKalb County provides some lessons we can learn about implementing a successful performance measurement and reporting system:

- *Consistent leadership:* The CEO is credited with providing a consistent leadership role regarding the start of this process. Several interviewees admitted that they were apprehensive about the performance measurement initiative the first time they heard of it, but eventually got on board given Ms. Levetan’s insistence on adopting a coordinated system. This leadership permeated directly down to department directors, who took on the role of “clearinghouse” for the performance measurement in their department.
- *Shared ownership:* Acknowledgment of the entire staff hierarchy was necessary for success as well. This did occur. As one director said: “Initially it was ‘top down’ but later on as the program progressed, involvement of workers brought about major changes.” Although they often emphasized the need for directors to set the example with their own behavior, they said that all levels of the organization should be involved in the change process.
- *Appropriate training:* Another common theme raised by managers is the need for extensive training and reinforcement both to build understanding and acceptance and to build the capacity of employees to measure performance. The use of the consultant to help “jumpstart” the process was very important to the success of this system. As one director said: “Initially we started out a lot not based on facts but rather on feelings. But as we got more involved, it was more objective and that yielded results.”
- *Consideration of citizen needs and demands:* According to one, the government sought to answer residents’ questions about its performance. Alternatively, the government wanted to understand what citizens wanted from their government.

*What are future expectations for the use of performance measurement?*

Several expressed the hope that the focus on government performance would generate a dialogue with citizens. One interviewee speculated about greater interaction between citizens and government employees and board members regarding departmental planning. And several people made reference to making performance information more accessible to citizens, through web pages and performance reports that are separate from the budget document. Although there appears to be optimism among interviewees who responded to questions about future expectations, many expressed a desire simply to improve the system as presently used. Some

suggested that stronger communication links about performance, performance improvements, and results both across departments (internal to the government) and with citizens (external to the government) are needed. It was suggested that performance measurement should be used more at the higher, more strategic levels of the government, and particularly regarding resource and allocation decisions. For example, the hope was expressed that the result of continued development of measures would not be increased productivity, but rather better allocation of dollars and creation of a more level playing field, where allocation of resources is based not on the loudest voice, but rather on strategic outcomes to be achieved. Another official said: “There are two goals of future use of performance measures: 1) to identify areas where the resources that we have and where we need to go beyond just working with our own resources and 2) to look at technology and new ways of doing things.”

Most agreed that the system had not had time to have a dramatic impact on citizens’ perceptions of government performance. However, they consider that the system has reasonable and obtainable goals related to measurement, the development of measures, and impact on activity performance. They consider that the continual feedback and ability to change measures and the ranking of the importance of performance indicators to be an added benefit of this particular system. Further, a few pointed out that although the present process really lacks a direct link with appropriations, the effort does lead to organizational changes at the operational level, and over time this requires the redirection of funds (for additional positions, equipment needs, etc.). There was a sense in this government and among these employees that the performance measurement effort did indeed provide the “fiftieth-floor view” of their activities as well as citizen consideration of these activities. Interestingly, this seemed to energize most of those interviewed; they were sincerely positive about the future applicability of performance measurement in their government.

## **SOURCES**

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