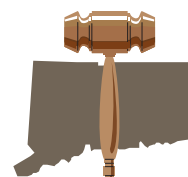


Results-Based Accountability for Connecticut Legislators



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What is RBA and how does it differ from other approaches?

The world of management, budgeting and planning seems to generate popular new approaches every few years. Most of these approaches are over-sold and short-lived. This history leads to well-justified cynicism about new approaches. As Mark Friedman, who developed Results-Based Accountability (RBA), says in his workshop, “If you’re not at least a little cynical about this subject, there’s something wrong with you.”

RBA breaks with past approaches in a number of important ways. **It makes a crucial distinction between consideration of quality of life result for a population and the performance of a program or agency.** This distinction makes clear that state government, while an essential player, is not solely responsible for quality of life in Connecticut. The RBA framework brings a simple, ciplined language to a field often troubled by jargon that only the experts understand. It uses time-honored budget and performance baseline techniques to assess progress on quality of life indicators and program performance measures. It also supports a constructive dialogue about actions needed for improvement, including no-cost and low-cost alternatives. It’s not a panacea. Budgeting is about tough choices. **Using RBA is likely to provide us with better choices. But that’s no guarantee that we will make better choices.**

RBA puts the focus on the ends, not the means. First, it addresses quality of life conditions for all residents of Connecticut, including fundamental citizen and voter concerns for such things as safe communities, healthy children, and a clean environment. Second, it addresses the end conditions, or client outcomes, for the customers of state-funded programs and how the customers of these programs are better off if the programs work the way they should.

RBA enables policy-makers, funders, and program administrators to identify how well they are doing against an historical trend line and to judge progress in terms of whether they are “turning the curve” or beating the baseline. “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you always got.” **If the projected performance is not acceptable, the RBA methodology helps stakeholders identify what changes will be needed to move the trend line in the right direction.**

How does RBA work in the legislative context?

RBA is on its way to becoming a critical planning and policy tool for the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, as well as for municipalities and non-profit organizations throughout Connecticut. **Although RBA is valuable in helping legislators assess the effectiveness and impact of the program they fund, it is but one of several important analytic approaches (or lenses) that legislators use in making decisions about objectives and fund-**

ing for various programs. Political considerations are always part of any legislative decision process, and budgeting is inherently a political process. Decisions will naturally be based on political philosophy, practical political concerns, and the priorities of the executive and legislative leadership. Other considerations, as illustrated in the diagram below, include program history and funding, program evaluations when available, and the overall budget climate (surplus or deficit).

How does RBA add value to the budget process?

The budget process is complicated and unpredictable. RBA is not an attempt to simplify or rigidly systematize the process. First and foremost, RBA provides a straightforward, easy-to-understand approach to framing discussions about the quality of life results legislators are trying to achieve for the people of Connecticut. Through the identification of quality of life results and the selection of indicators of those results, **RBA supports two primary levels of discussion: how the constellation of efforts across programs affects a particular quality of life result, and then, through the reporting of key performance measures for each program, how each program is performing for its customers, the citizens of Connecticut.**

RBA is a catalyst for these discussions and supports the related examination of overall funding for a particular quality of life result (both within and outside of the state budget). Through the reporting of indicators and program performance measures, RBA also reveals where new and better data are needed, and it provides for a data development agenda to guide investment in data improvements. Finally, RBA supports investigation and discussion of how a particular indicator or program measure may be improved by “turning the curve.”

RBA does not impose a mechanical or formulaic approach to using performance information in the budget process. Funding decisions will always be made using the array of considerations described above. However, by elevating the consideration of results, RBA provides legislators with a critical tool for determining whether and how the public is better off because of the expenditures that have been made and where future appropriations may have the most impact.

