

Chapter 4

Measuring and Improving Information-Based Government Websites: A Suggested Framework

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a flexible framework for measuring efficiency, effectiveness, and citizen satisfaction with public sector websites. The framework uses research methods that measure the extent to which online information advances organizational objectives, reaches its target audience, and meets users' expectations for service and quality. By gathering and reporting on this information, public sector website performance can be continuously improved. The framework is presented in a format that facilitates its evaluation. The design, implementation, and use of the performance measurement framework are described in detail by presenting logic models that describe possible activities and expected outcomes of each phase.

INTRODUCTION

Public sector organizations face unique challenges when measuring the success of their corporate websites. Unlike the private sector, where the result of online communications can often be measured in dollars and cents, governments and other public sector organizations must find ways to measure their website's performance which also take into

account their citizen-focused mandates to work towards a "public good".

This paper presents a flexible framework for measuring the performance of information-based, public sector websites. It uses the principles and theories of results-based management to provide a practical framework focused on:

- User satisfaction (by measuring the extent to which the website meets user expectations);

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- Effectiveness (by measuring tasks that contribute to the advancement of the organizations mandate); and
- Efficiency (by measuring the cost of managing the website in relation to other activities).

Over the long term, this framework will facilitate narrative, results-focused reporting on trends that demonstrates and measures improvement over time. In the case of the federal public service in Canada, a multidimensional performance measurement system called the Management Accountability Framework exists to evaluate federal departmental performance. The original four areas of management included in the framework are shown in Figure 1. In 2010, federal departments and agencies were evaluated on twenty areas of management, including Citizen-Focused Service, one of the original four. The performance measurement framework presented here will provide organizations with a method to measure the types of long-term outcomes that must be reported on within the Canadian Management Accountability Framework as well as those relevant to public sector organizations in other countries.

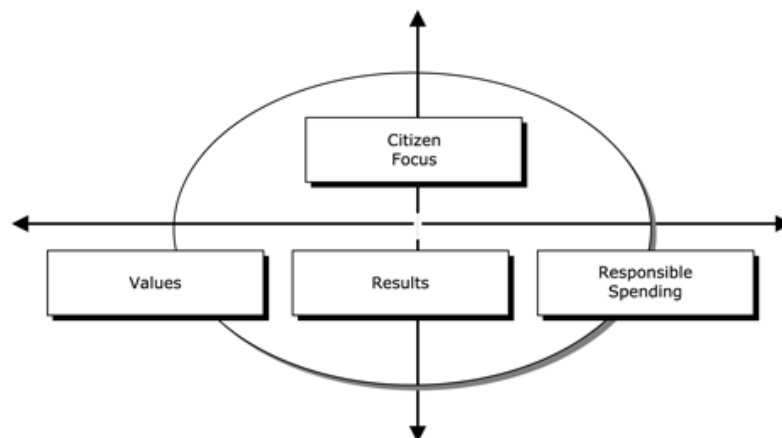
However, it is important to note that this framework is not:

- A cross-channel performance measurement strategy;
- An exhaustive list of everything that can be collected or that organizations may want to collect to answer specific questions;
- A dashboard for technical web managers that measures server load, quality assurance, privacy or security;
- An evaluation framework that measures relevance or impact of online communication and services; or
- The only way.

BACKGROUND

The Government of Canada has long supported the use of results-based management as a conceptual framework as well as a suite of tools. The term results-based management describes the process of gathering information, analyzing and reporting findings to improve decision-making. These principles were used to create the web

Figure 1. The four original management priorities to be measured by federal public sector departments and agencies in Canada were to focus on citizens first, garner results, reflect public sector values and spend responsibly. (From: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca>. Used with permission.)



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