GPRA Revisited: The GPRA Modernization Act of 2010

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By Tim Jaques, PMP

January 4 was a busy day for President Obama. Fresh back from Hawaii, the President sat down at his desk and signed 35 bills into law. With his pen stroke, H.R. 2142, the "GPRA Modernization Act of 2010," became the law of the land. This new legislation promises more oversight by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and will deliver mandated consequences for agency priorities that are not met. This bill refines the 1993 Government Performance and Reporting Act, or GPRA, with a new set of measurement and reporting requirements designed to ferret out wasteful government spending. While it is difficult to predict how the bill will be implemented, the GPRA Modernization Act may very well prove to be the foundation for more centralized regulation of federal project management.

The bill includes several measures intended to make agencies more accountable for program planning and outcomes:

- agency Chief Operating Officers and Performance Improvement Officers will be required to eliminate redundant programs;
- agencies will be required to post program performance scorecards online every quarter;
- the strategic planning horizon is reduced from five years to four years, and the date by which agencies must post their program plans is extended; and
- a "Performance Improvement Council" will be established to monitor and recommend improvements to performance management and evaluation of program performance.

There are new consequences for missing project targets. Agencies that miss performance targets in the prior fiscal year must submit a performance improvement plan for each unmet goal with measurable milestones. If an agency has not met performance goals for three consecutive fiscal years, OMB must submit recommendations to Congress on actions to improve performance within 60 days, including proposals for reauthorization, possible proposed statutory changes, possible executive actions, or identification of the program for termination or reduction in the President's budget.
So what does the GPRA Modernization Act mean for the project management community? By increasing accountability for results, the bill makes strong project management a priority.

1. **The bill gives OMB new teeth**. This bill increases the focus on deficient program and projects. OMB has been steadily building a foundation for identifying underperforming investments at the agency level. OMB now has another tool in its arsenal to pull funding from these investments.
2. **Project focus will become a priority**. The legislation will drive smaller, more focused projects. Never mind OMB's directive on large financial systems projects, the GPRA Modernization legislation will spur executives to focus on smaller projects that won't put an agency on the OMB hit list.
3. **Cross-agency projects will take center stage**. There will be continued emphasis on improving cross-agency investments, which often suffer from a lack of communication and coordination. The legislation directs agencies to produce evidence of results from cross-agency initiatives.
4. **Project governance will help keep agencies on track**. Internal governance processes will continue to be refined, as agencies address the GPRA Modernization requirements.

With the national deficit at historic levels, agencies and oversight bodies will be looking for wasteful projects to cut. "This is a significant step forward in our efforts to rein in spending and reduce government waste," said former Representative Barron Hill (D-IN), one of the original co-sponsors of the bill. "This bill outlines a clear-cut plan that federal agencies must adhere to in order to ensure taxpayers' money is being spent effectively and with real accountability." The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the bill will increase the administrative workload in order to carry out some of the new legislative requirements. In all, CBO estimates that the bill will increase federal spending by more than $75 million over the next five years.

About the Editors

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