

Preface

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In 1998, two of America's top experts in public management agreed that government's use of performance management deserved a searching and critical review. Those experts were Richard P. Nathan, director of the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, and Paul Light, then a program director at The Pew Charitable Trusts. This book is one of the products of their agreement.

As the bibliography in this volume demonstrates, the literature on performance management and measurement in the public sector is extensive. Most of the authors writing in this field advocate increased use of performance management systems, and see them as indispensable tools for improving management and accountability in government. Light and Nathan, however, were concerned that too little attention had been given to the problems of "managing for results," as performance management is sometimes known. As detailed in the cases and analyses in this volume, performance management initiatives in government face difficulties in implementation in the best of circumstances. At their worst, they create incentives for unexpected or even undesirable behavior by agency managers and front-line personnel.

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To look more deeply into the problems and possibilities of performance management systems, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Rockefeller Institute brought together a group of experts in public policy and management to discuss these issues. An effort was made to include critics as well as enthusiasts. In addition to Nathan and Light, members of the Task Force included:

- ✿ Walter Broadnax, dean of the School of Public Affairs at American University in Washington.
- ✿ Patricia Ingraham, professor at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, and director of the Government Performance Project.
- ✿ Donald Kettl, professor at the University of Wisconsin and director of the LaFallotte Institute.
- ✿ Allen Schick, professor at the University of Maryland and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

As the Task Force was being assembled, the editor of this volume joined the Rockefeller Institute as a senior fellow, and was added to the Task Force and assigned responsibility as project director for its activities.

Members of the Task Force met twice to discuss performance management, once in Albany at the Rockefeller Institute, and the second time in Washington at American University. In these meetings, the Task Force members were joined by performance management experts in government, including Jonathan Breul of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and J. Christopher Mihm of the U.S. General Accounting Office. Also invited were many of the authors of cases and essays included in this volume.

On behalf of the Task Force, the editor also interviewed performance management experts on Congressional staffs and in nongovernmental organizations specializing in this area. An early product of this work was a monograph on the status of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) (Forsythe 2000). Presentations on performance management and GPRA were also made at a conference organized by the Council on Excellence in Government and

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several professional organizations. The *Public Administration Times* published a summary of the monograph. Finally, Forsythe and Nathan published an article in a collection edited by Mark Abramson to provide background for the incoming Bush administration (Forsythe and Nathan 2001).

While the work of the Task Force was under way, its members and other authors were preparing case studies and analytic essays for this volume. The question mark in the title is intended to remind the reader that the efficacy of performance management in American government is a question for discussion, not a settled issue. With that in mind, considerable care was taken to encourage dissenting voices on the topic, and case studies explored problems in performance management — JTPA and Empowerment Zones, for instance — as well as success stories. The logic of this point and counterpoint is developed in detail in Richard Nathan's introduction to the volume. The volume concludes with a chapter essay by the editor exploring the practical pitfalls and possibilities of performance management, using experience from state and local governments to outline the hurdles faced as the federal government continues to implement GPRA. The aim of these chapters — and the book as a whole — is to give the reader a richer understanding of when and how top managers succeed or fail in their efforts to use performance management systems to improve the functioning of government.

The editor would like to acknowledge many debts accumulated during work on this volume. This book could not have been completed without the generous support of The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Elaine Casey and Michael Delli Carpini provided encouragement and helpful advice as well as funding. While the Task Force members contributed critical intellectual guidance and the authors' contributions are obvious, several other people also provided knowledge and advice that shaped the final product in important ways. In addition to Jonathan Breul and Chris Mihm, Paul Posner of the GAO and Barry White of the Council on Excellence in Government were indispensable advisors. While most of the chapters in this volume are original, special thanks are also due to authors — Harry Hatry, Beryl Radin, and Virginia Thomas — who

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gave permission to reprint several important essays, and to their publishers.

Richard Nathan conceived this project, and provided invaluable advice at every single stage, from inception to final editing. His contributions are so extensive that a less generous colleague would have insisted on — and deserved — billing as a co-editor. As a consulting editor, Sandra Hackman applied her formidable skills to every original essay in the volume, challenging authors to clarify their thinking as well as their writing. Like Nathan, she did much of the editor's work, and deserves more credit than this acknowledgement. Ellen Blake's assistance as a project manager provided momentum to keep the book moving forward, and Rose Sullivan stepped in to help when Ellen moved on to another assignment. Michael Cooper, the director of publications at the Rockefeller Institute, expertly guided the project through its final production stages. Francine Spinelli painstakingly produced the bibliography. I am indebted to all of these people. Without their assistance, this volume would never have been completed.