

PRI RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY PILOT PROJECT

Final Report Highlights

Why did the Program Review Committee (PRI) conduct this study?

- Legislation enacted during 2009 (P.A. 09-166) requires PRI to undertake a pilot project that assesses selected human services programs using the Results Based Accountability (RBA) approach currently in use by the Connecticut General Assembly's Appropriations Committee.
- By January 15, 2010 PRI must report findings to the Appropriations Committee on:
 - How the selected programs are performing according to RBA principles, with any recommendations for modification or termination; and
 - Whether this pilot project should be continued, expanded, or modified.
- The project also provided an opportunity to evaluate RBA as an alternative to the state's statutory sunset review process.

What is Results-Based Accountability (RBA)?

- RBA is a comprehensive, data-driven way of assessing the effectiveness of programs, agencies, and systems within a larger context of population-level, quality of life results.
- At the program level, the RBA framework focuses evaluation work on answering three questions: 1) How *much* are we doing; 2) How *well* are we doing it; and 3) Is anyone *better off*?

Which programs were selected for the PRI pilot project?

- The project examined DCF Family Preservation and Supports (FPS), focusing in-depth on four programs – ***Intensive Family Preservation, Intensive In-Home Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services (IICAPS), Parent Aide, and Supportive Housing for Families*** – as well as ***Flexible Funding***, a resource used by DCF to provide families with individualized services and support.
- FPS programs are intended to help at-risk children safely remain with or return to their families; they contribute to this quality of life results statement: "*Connecticut children grow up safe, healthy, and ready to lead successful lives.*"

How was RBA used for this study and what were the main findings and recommendations?

At the population level: The project identified and examined five key indicators of whether the state is making progress toward its child well-being quality of life results statement.

- Progress is mixed, with improvement in some areas but declines in others plus a persistent trend of ethnic/racial minority children trailing white children.
- Child and family well-being results are not tracked across state agencies.
 - The Select Committee on Children should: 1) maintain a report card based on the indicators in this report to monitor progress; and 2) improve and expand population-level data on outcomes for children and families.
 - The legislature should mandate an initiative to bring together and share client-level results data about child and family well-being across state agencies and service systems.

At the child welfare system level: Three system performance measures that show the state's progress toward ensuring the safety and stability of children who are at risk of maltreatment and out-of-home placement were developed and reviewed.

- Trends on all three measures appear positive but the data have shortcomings and current economic conditions may stymie progress.
 - DCF and the Select Committee on Children should make a series of improvements to system level data especially regarding child maltreatment and fatalities.

At the program area level: The 20 DCF categorical programs that, with Flexible Funding, comprise the Family Preservation and Supports program area, were reviewed as a whole using the RBA approach and generally accepted child welfare best practices.

- Best practices, including use of evidence-based service models and robust quality assurance and improvement processes, are not solidly in place throughout all DCF Family Preservation and Supports programs; agency management is stronger for behavioral health than child welfare (primarily child protection) bureau FPS programs.
- Good quality cost and outcome data generally are not available, which means cost-effectiveness cannot be determined; if programs *do* prevent or reduce the length of out-of-home placement for at-risk children, cost avoidance can be significant and improved well-being great.
 - DCF should develop a plan for moving child welfare FPS programs to evidence-based models that best fit families' needs and ensuring adequate management and oversight of those programs.
 - A number of specific steps should be taken to acquire better cost information and quality, long-term client outcome data.

At the program level: The performance of four core FPS programs and Flexible Funding was evaluated by applying RBA principles.

- Overall program area findings also applied to specific programs: Those with better management and evaluation capacity (IICAPS and SHF) had more and higher quality data to use for ongoing quality improvement, while weaker management and poor data are impediments for others (Intensive Family Preservation (IFP), Parent Aide, and Flexible Funding).
 - Flexible Funding is valued and appears effective, but DCF should streamline accounting to improve consistency and strengthen oversight.
 - DCF should assign strong program leads (i.e., managers) to the IFP and Parent Aide programs to improve oversight and performance.
 - Continued data development and research should be undertaken in a number of program areas to promote accountability and guide changes to improve client services and outcomes.

What should happen next for RBA within PRI Committee and DCF?

Within the Program Review Committee:

- PRI staff found RBA to be a promising process for assessing and improving government performance that focuses attention on program and population level outcomes.
- Availability and quality of data, however, will continue to be challenges in any efforts to monitor or evaluate state programs, agencies, and systems.
 - The PRI pilot project should be continued for at least one more year in order to test the approach in another agency or budget area and assess the full impact of the work completed to date.
 - As RBA has greater potential for making state government work better, the decision to repeal or reimplement the state sunset law should be postponed until July 1, 2012.

Within DCF:

- Elements that seem to promote an agency's effective use of RBA as a quality improvement tool are not in place at DCF.
 - DCF should provide RBA training for its staff, designate a top manager as the agency lead for RBA implementation, and establish an implementation team to oversee its RBA strategic planning efforts.