

Results of the Agency Assessment of the RBA Process During the 2010 Legislative Session

In the weeks following the end of the 2010 legislative session, agencies that had participated in the RBA initiative during the session were given an opportunity to complete an on-line survey. The survey was designed to help the Appropriations Committee, the Office of Fiscal Analysis and the Charter Oak Group better understand the agencies' experience with the RBA materials and the processes that the agencies used to prepare for the RBA hearings and produce their report cards. Included in the survey were questions about the training, the technical assistance, the agencies' understanding of RBA in general, and their perceptions of RBA's value. Thirty-eight agencies, commissions and other governmental entities were asked to participate in this year's initiative and to complete the survey.

28 individuals filled out the survey.¹ The survey asked about the extent of the agency's participation. The majority, 57 percent of those responding, indicated that their agency produced report cards for three programs. Three respondents indicated that their agencies actually chose to produce 5 or more report cards. Within the agencies, over 50 percent had 6 or more people involved in the preparation of those report cards. Twenty-four respondents indicated they had attended the formal training that was offered. Moreover, 21 of the 28 respondents indicated that they received technical assistance from one of the Office of Fiscal Analysis/Charter Oak Group technical teams in preparing their report cards.

We asked several questions about the helpfulness of the training and technical assistance. As evident from the tables below, seventeen respondents (61 percent) indicated that both the training and the technical assistance were either moderately or extremely helpful. Nineteen respondents (68 percent) indicated that the exchange of specific questions prior to the budget hearings was moderately or extremely helpful.²

How helpful was the training in preparing your agency's report cards?		
	Frequency	Percent
Not at all helpful	6	21.4
Somewhat helpful	5	17.9
Moderately helpful	8	28.6
Extremely helpful	9	32.1
Total	28	100.0

¹ The instructions called for only one person from each agency to respond to the survey. However, since the survey was anonymous, we do not know if there was a single individual from each of 28 agencies or whether some agencies had multiple individuals taking the survey.

² None of the apparent differences among the responses to these three questions are statistically significant.

How helpful was the technical assistance you received in preparing the report cards?		
	Frequency	Percent
Not at all helpful	8	28.6
Somewhat helpful	3	10.7
Moderately helpful	9	32.1
Extremely helpful	8	28.6
Total	28	100.0

How helpful was the exchange of specific questions between the committee and your agency to your preparation for the hearing?		
	Frequency	Percent
Not at all helpful	4	14.3
Somewhat helpful	5	17.9
Moderately helpful	11	39.3
Extremely helpful	8	28.6
Total	28	100.0

In terms of “better off” measures, there were two questions that suggested ways in which agencies benefited. One question asked about the value of the report card process over and above preparing for the hearing. The other question was about how well the report card served the agency in telling its story about its program. The data below indicate that the report card added moderate or great value for 61 percent of agencies. The report card also enabled 61 percent of the agencies to tell the story of their program moderately or extremely well.

Aside from the value in being prepared for the hearing, how much value did your agency gain from preparing the RBA report cards?		
	Frequency	Percent
No value	3	10.7
Some value	8	28.6
Moderate value	11	39.3
Great value	6	21.4
Total	28	100.0

Overall, how well did the RBA report cards serve in telling the stories about your programs?		
	Frequency	Percent
Not at all well	4	14.3
Somewhat well	7	25.0
Moderately well	15	53.6
Extremely well	2	7.1
Total	28	100.0

We also asked about the respondents' overall understanding of RBA and the amount of connection the agencies see between RBA and the budget process. As evident in the table below, respondents had a better overall understanding of RBA than they did of the connection between RBA and the budget process. Eighty-six percent indicated a moderate or strong understanding of RBA.

How would you rate your overall understanding of RBA?		
	Frequency	Percent
Very little understanding	2	7.1
Some understanding	2	7.1
Moderate understanding	15	53.6
Strong understanding	9	32.1
Total	28	100.0

In response to the second question, only 36 percent of respondents indicated that they see a moderate to strong connection between RBA and the budget process. This may be due to a lack of understanding on the part of the agencies. It also presents a challenge to the Appropriations Committee and the technical resources to make a clearer connection between the two.

How much of a connection do you see between RBA and the budget process?		
	Frequency	Percent
Very little connection	6	21.4
Some connection	12	42.9
Moderate connection	5	17.9
Strong connection	5	17.9
Total	28	100.0

In addition to the information from individual questions, there was one noteworthy set of associations among questions. Those respondents who found the training more helpful replied that their agency gained additional value, over and above preparing for the hearing, by developing the report cards and were more likely to see a strong connection between RBA and the budget process. While these findings are only associative, not causal, these data suggest a couple of insights:

- There is need to use the training and other venues to make a stronger case of the connection between RBA and the budget. Many who feel they have a good understanding of RBA nonetheless did not see a strong connection between RBA and the budget. This may be due to misunderstandings even among those familiar with the majority of RBA concepts. It may also be due to the fact that the connection to budget may be indirect and, therefore, not easily seen. Moreover, in some cases, budget decisions may be driven by other considerations than the quality and impact of a program as reflected in the RBA report card.
- Training may be most successful when it not only helps agencies prepare for the hearing but also helps them see ways to add value to their own agency's operations and services.
- Based on the rating of helpfulness described above and the open-ended comments listed below, sharing the questions before the hearings is a practice that should continue.

Many respondents took the time to write comments into the recommendations section at the end of the survey. There were several repeated themes:

- Technical assistance is valuable. Respondents think it is 1) always better sooner rather than later, and 2) more is better than less.
- More and earlier communication is important. The choice of programs and the criteria for judging programs are best provided as early as possible in the process.
- Additional training ideas included: joint training with agencies and legislators, a nuts and bolts training for beginners, and training that focuses more on the conceptual aspects of RBA.
- The eight questions are especially useful in preparing the report card.
- The sharing of questions before the hearing is particularly helpful.
- Some concern was expressed about whether RBA is "here to stay." One respondent suggested it would be good to reassure the agencies about this.
- It is a good idea for the OFA and Charter Oak Group technical resources to acknowledge that RBA is not always so "simple."
- Sticking to the same report card format and process will help over time.