



GMAP Program Keeps Washington Government Accountable

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire is focused on results.

That's one reason she implemented the **Government Management Accountability and Performance** program, one of eight winners of CSG Innovations Awards. The program is a disciplined method of performance review that leaders can use to make decisions and achieve results.

"She personally reviews performance results from directors and holds those directors accountable," Larisa Benson, director of the GMAP program, said of Gregoire. "We focus on making our data timely and accurate. Meetings are real-time, problem-solving sessions."

The state agencies involved in GMAP meetings develop follow-up plans to help improve services to Washington residents.

"It's a change in the culture of state government from a focus on the processes to a focus on results," Benson said. "If a leader does it, it must be important. Every time (Gregoire) is in there, she reiterates that we are focused on results important to citizens. It's a balance between policy and management efforts."

GMAP meetings are focused on a specific topic and include every agency that has some impact on that subject. The topic areas covered in GMAP sessions are health care, vulnerable children, economic vitality, Puget Sound clean-up, government efficiency, public safety, transportation, Workfirst, a program designed to help low-income families, and education.

"We're not there to blame anybody, but if we have the data on the table and everybody in the room, you can't pass the buck. You have to stay there until you solve the problem," said Benson.

Agency heads can be part of multiple GMAP sessions. For instance, the secretary of the Department of Social and

Health Services participates in four different GMAP sessions each month—for health care, vulnerable children and adults, public safety and juvenile corrections.

Washington has seen some success because of the program, which has been in place since June 2005. The governor released a report highlighting a dozen significant achievements. Among them:

- Response to child abuse reports are faster;
- Error rates on tax returns and food stamps are among the lowest in the country;
- Job placement rates in some unemployment offices have almost doubled; and
- Fewer workplace injuries and claims have led to a reduction in workers compensation premiums.

"Fewer kids are being abused, more people are getting jobs, roads and bridges are built on time and on budget. We're preventing traffic fatalities," Benson said. "I'm not saying we've got it figured out. We've got a long way to go. We have been able to make some significant progress."

"We actually take action based on the results we're getting, which, I think, is why we're getting better results," said Benson. "The most innovative thing we're doing is that we're doing it by results, rather than agency by agency. If (agency employees) know we're going to follow through, they put their best efforts there."

The program is modeled after programs such as CompStat in the New York City Police Department and CitiStat in Baltimore.

"Nobody had done it at the state level or did it by results," said Benson.

"I tell people this is just common sense. It's just good management," she said.

GMAP started out with the governor's top priorities, and then added other policy areas as the GMAP staff expanded. The education initiative was launched in September. "That's a tough one," Benson said, "because we have a fractured accountability environment there."

GMAP continues to expand in policy areas, and is automating the reporting process to allow agencies more time for development. The program is also continuing efforts to deepen the use of GMAP principles in agencies. According to the Innovations Awards application, Washington agencies now hold internal GMAP sessions to improve accountability.

Benson offers this advice to other states considering a similar program:

"Start with what you have," she said. "Don't wait for the perfect measure. You'll never find the perfect measure. The best way to get better measures is to start using the ones you have. People will tone up the measures."

"The second thing is to take the time to understand the operating theory behind your programs. Start with why you're doing that program and how you know whether it works or not."

Fast Facts

- GMAP reports have three primary types of information: data, analysis and action plans.
- Agencies have implemented GMAP principles internally to drive accountability throughout their organizations.
- The governor's GMAP forums have expanded the number of policy areas from the original six to nine.