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# Commonwealth of Virginia

## Virginia Performs – Virginia's Performance Leadership and Accountability System

Category

Data, Information and Knowledge Management



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**Virginia's Performance Leadership and Accountability System**

## **Executive Summary**

Virginia Performs is a performance leadership and accountability system that encompasses an integrated array of state agency plans, objectives, performance measures and societal indicators. It forms the basis for strategic planning, performance-based budgeting and productivity improvement for Virginia's state government.

To promote transparency and provide citizens with a means to track Virginia's quality of life and state government performance, Governor Timothy M. Kaine, as Chair of the Council on Virginia's Future, launched [Virginia Performs](#). This Web site is the public face of the performance leadership and accountability system. Since launch, *Virginia Performs* has grown in scope, function and capability. Today, it is a vital component of executive management, as it:

- Serves as a catalyst for better strategic thinking and policy, enterprise solutions, performance-driven decision-making, and improved outcomes;
- Supports strategic, regional, and local planning; and
- Provides the information and analysis needed to better inform, communicate, and engage citizens about Virginia's progress and its future.

State agencies report and use data on *Virginia Performs* to improve outcomes, increase productivity, create savings and improve management. One agency saved more than \$3 million by monitoring targets and making adjustments in underperforming areas.

*Virginia Performs* aggregates data from multiple national and state sources and displays the data in easy-to-use text, graph and map formats. Now citizens and elected leaders can go to one source to see how Virginia - on state, regional and local levels - is doing on a variety of measures from high school graduation to crime and land preservation.

Virginia was among the first states to develop and sustain a comprehensive approach to performance leadership and accountability.

- Agency key measures now focus on mission-critical outcomes and are connected to a vision and long-term goals for Virginia.
- Outcome data is integrated into policy and budget decision-making.
- Administrative measures have been streamlined and simplified.
- Agency productivity measures have been added to promote efficiency.
- Societal-level, quality-of-life data is now aggregated.

*Virginia Performs* identifies those areas in which Virginia is doing well and those that need improvement, which is a particular benefit for policy makers. It is improving management and service delivery outcomes, enhancing the information needed for budget development, and increasing the transparency of state government operations.

## Description of the business problem and solution

Prior to 2006, performance management in Virginia had multiple moving and unconnected pieces.

- Agency plans and metrics were unconnected to long-range statewide goals.
- Many measures were focused on process rather than outcomes and often were unrelated to the agency's mission.
- Administrative measures existed in a separate silo.
- Agency reporting was often inconsistent and fragmented.
- Productivity measures were almost non-existent.
- Societal-level, quality-of-life data resided in multiple and disparate locations and was often difficult to retrieve and aggregate.
- Little coordination occurred among the elements, creating redundancy, confusion and agency frustration.
- Enterprise views to support decision-making were difficult to obtain.
- The system lacked transparency for policy-makers and citizens.

Among the Governor's top priorities is ensuring that state government is well managed and focused on delivering results. But because challenges cannot be solved by one leader or even one branch of government acting in isolation, the Council on Virginia's Future (CoVF) was established in the *Code of Virginia* by the General Assembly in 2003 and re-authorized in 2008. The Council is chaired by the Governor and includes senior General Assembly members, citizen and business leaders and Cabinet members. Virginia Performs is one of the Council's signature initiatives; CoVF oversees the design and development of the system.

Governor Kaine's direction to staff was to "simplify the system and focus it on performance outcomes." In response, the Governor's Performance Management Team and CoVF, assisted by a multi-agency work group, developed an integrated performance leadership and accountability system.

A *Virginia Performs* Web site was designated to be the public face of the project. The site was first launched in January 2007. Its requirements included capability to house and display all levels of strategic plans and performance data, provide a mapping application for viewing and comparing data at regional and local levels, create a portal for state agencies to enter and manage data, and provide an integrated enterprise view and transparency for policy-makers and citizens.

The project evolved in several phases managed by work plans, key deliverables, designated staff responsibilities, targets and milestones including:

- Formulation of a conceptual framework
- Selection of key agency measures focused on outcomes
- Selection of societal-level quality of life indicators (high school graduation, infant mortality, etc.) to track long-term goals

- Agency training on objectives, measures and successful performance management
- Data collection, analysis and reporting
- Content development
- Web site design and development

Approximately 84 state agencies now enter data directly into the Web site to report progress on standardized performance measures (key, service area, productivity and administrative measures).

Technical Web site design and development cost for outside vendors was approximately \$150,000. The project required eighteen months to launch including concept development, training, data collection, analysis, content development and Web site design and development. The Web site is fully WAI-compliant for easy access by people with disabilities.

Presentations to various leadership groups and complementary communications products have served to increase the visibility and usage of *Virginia Performs*:

- During each legislative session, all members of the General Assembly are given a “Guide to Virginia Performs” and customized “snapshots” of data about their districts to use in communicating with their constituents. Updated digital versions of the “snapshot” were recently e-mailed to all legislators.
- An e-newsletter provides regular updates on various aspects of Virginia Performs.
- The Virginia Report, which is based on data from *Virginia Performs*, is submitted to the General Assembly annually, giving an assessment of Virginia’s progress on high-level indicators. The Report also includes an assessment of agency performance on some of the 200 key measures aligned with those same high-level indicators.
- Special “Issue Insights” provide a timely and in-depth look at issues from *Virginia Performs*, such as educational attainment and business climate.

## Significance

Virginia was among the first states to develop and sustain a comprehensive approach to performance leadership and accountability. In Virginia, governors are limited to one four-year term, so a comprehensive approach is particularly significant for creating continuity between administrations.

Virginia Performs provides that comprehensive approach for the Commonwealth:

- Agency key measures now focus on mission-critical outcomes and are connected to a vision and long-term goals for Virginia.
- Outcome data is integrated into policy and budget decision-making.
- Administrative measures have been streamlined and simplified.
- Agency productivity measures have been added to promote efficiency.
- Societal-level, quality-of-life data is now aggregated in a single SQL server database.

- Building on the productivity measures, a Productivity Investment Fund has been created to stimulate innovation.

Agencies now work with the Governor's office, the Department of Planning and Budget and others to set performance targets and measure progress. Once goals are set, agencies are required to report progress on the *Virginia Performs* Web site regularly, so elected leaders and citizens can see how government is working and monitor results.

Agency heads use the data to help manage their agencies and improve service delivery. The Governor uses the data to monitor progress and identify areas related to his priorities that need additional investments to reach their performance targets. Its data now is a backbone of the planning and budget process utilized by the executive branch for delivery to the General Assembly. The Commonwealth's biennium budget, which totals more than \$76 billion, now depends on performance data.

Consistent with NASCIO priorities for transparency, budget and cost control, and analytic applications, and also with the Commonwealth's IT Strategic Plan which aligns technology with the Commonwealth's business practices and priorities, the online platform of *Virginia Performs*:

- Informs citizens, business leaders and government officials about important quality-of-life issues and state government performance;
- Permits users to observe and analyze the interaction of variables from different data sources (e.g. poverty and third grade reading scores or unemployment and educational attainment) by region and locality; and
- Expedites and improves government decision-making, budgeting, transparency, and accountability.

### **Benefit of the project**

*Virginia Performs* affords an integrated and detailed view of Virginia and state government to benefit decision makers and taxpayers. It is a dynamic, interactive Web site. Decision makers see the results of investments in their priorities and citizens can obtain information about the quality of life and the progress of their state government.

*Virginia Performs* has standardized and streamlined the performance reporting process for state agencies by aggregating performance data on the Web site. Virginia government officials now use data to improve outcomes and make targeted investments in programs that meet their objectives and reductions in low-performing programs.

For example, when the Governor introduced his budget for the 2008-2010 biennium, he included increases for outpatient mental health treatment for children in direct alignment with agency key measures that are tracked on *Virginia Performs*. When the Department of Health observed an increase in infant mortality—a key measure—it allocated additional funds to ten health districts that accounted for 50 percent of the infant deaths. Other examples:

- The Department of Corrections replaced private food service contracts at several prisons when the data showed that the services could be provided more cost-effectively in-house, for a savings of \$851,000.
- The Department of Health saved \$3.2 million by canceling a contract for a wellness program that had not reached its target for employee participation.
- The Department for Aging saved \$78,000 by cutting grants to community organizations that were underperforming in delivering home care to the elderly.
- The “Scorecard” on the Web site showed only a “maintaining” trend in foster care and Virginia ranked “worst” among the states in the number of children who were “aging out” of the foster care system. Seeking to change the trend to “improving,” the Governor included targeted investments in foster care in his biennium budget. These investments coupled with increased monitoring of foster care data have succeeded in reducing entries into foster care by 12 percent and the foster care population by 8 percent between 2007 and 2008.
- The Governor established a goal of preserving 400,000 acres of land by 2010. As reported on *Virginia Performs*, almost 327,000 acres have been preserved as of March 31, 2009.

Citizens who wish to relocate to or within Virginia might be interested in local factors such as personal income, employment growth, crime, and graduation rates. Before *Virginia Performs*, they would need to collect data from such disparate sources as the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Virginia Department of Education, FBI Crime Reports, and other state and national sources. Now the data is aggregated and citizens can see how Virginia is performing from region to region and compared to other states, track progress in their communities, and monitor activity on important issues. Site visits have consistently averaged approximately 200 per day, but statistics show that the site is now being viewed more in depth and for longer periods of time.

Council staff have responded to numerous requests for presentations, information and technical assistance from business and education groups, local governments, other states and other countries.

This interest is leading to the development of similar performance leadership and accountability systems, such as [Scotland Performs](#), which was launched with technical assistance from Virginia in June 2008. In partnership with local leaders, the first regional prototype, [Hampton Roads Performs](#), was launched in February 2009, using some of the same indicators and others unique to the region. As demonstrated by these projects, the system is sustainable and transferable.

Commonwealth leaders utilized *Virginia Performs* data extensively in Virginia’s summer 2007 response to the Pew Center on the States’ Government Performance Project. Over a hundred cites to the Web system were included across every category of Virginia’s response, including Money, People, Infrastructure and Information. Overall, the Commonwealth received an overall grade of “A-”, placing it with only two other

states atop the Center's rankings. Significantly, the Commonwealth was one of only four states which received an "A" grade in the Information category.

The Center's "[Grading the States 2008](#)" report issued in March 2008 specifically cites Virginia Performs as one of the reasons Virginia continues to be a leader among the states.

Its issue brief titled "[Trade-Off Time: How Four States Continue to Deliver](#)" said "...Virginia Performs has created a culture of evidence-based decision making that allows Virginia's leaders to systematically tackle the state's budget crisis and increase agency productivity." The report went on to say, "The Virginia Performs system also has laid the foundation for greater continuity in Virginia's fiscal and policy decision-making—important in a state with a one-term limit on governors."

Virginia Performs is improving management and service delivery outcomes, enhancing the information needed for budget development, and increasing the transparency of state government operations. It identifies those areas in which Virginia is doing well and those that need improvement, which is an incomparable benefit for both policy makers and citizens of the Commonwealth.