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Measuring Boston's Service Delivery

BAR off to good start and expected to evolve

The City of Boston initiated an enhanced performance measurement system last August that will provide comprehensive information for decision-making and should serve as a catalyst for service improvement. The City's Boston About Results (BAR) program has been improved through the utilization of new technology and revision of the prior performance measurement system.

BAR is a web-based program that monitors the performance of over 50 city departments on departmental accomplishments compared to previously identified goals of the department and Administration. BAR integrates resources with expected outcomes for departmental activities, and therefore is a central device to inform budget discussions among policy and departmental officials.

The core components of BAR are the performance measures, the information on actual results, and the status indicators. The performance measures have been agreed upon between the BAR team (Mayor's Office and Budget Office) and the various departments, in order to establish challenging, achievable, and meaningful service standards. While BAR will not noticeably change the look of the Mayor's FY08 recommended budget, it has the potential of gradually changing how the City Council could evaluate the budget.

Although the BAR initiative should be applauded, further development of the system is necessary if the full benefits of performance measurement are to be realized. Future refinement of the existing system should put

greater emphasis on outcome and efficiency indicators.

For example, some of the current performance measures for the Fire Department are:

- Hours absent per employee
- Incidents responded to
- Percentage of calls responded to within 4 minutes
- Percent of fires in which cause is determined

Comparing these BAR measures with those adopted by cities with well-established performance measurement systems, reveals an opportunity for improvement. Examples of fire department measures employed by benchmark performance systems are:

- Percentage of fires confined to room of origin
- Expenditures per \$100,000 of property protected
- Percentage of citizens surveyed who rated fire prevention program good or excellent
- ISO insurance rating for the likelihood of fire and damage potential

The City has taken a good first step, but BAR should continue to evolve and improve. Support of the Mayor is critical, because pertinent measures have the potential to expose departmental weaknesses. Making BAR results available to the public via the City's website and involving citizens in the evaluation of certain services are primary goals for the future.