

Systematic, holistic, yet transparent – Oregon’s approach to state-wide planning gets different sectors & interests tracking change in terms of a common set of specific outcomes. Having agreed what they wish to achieve, people can turn to more constructive issues – what is effective, & what is not.

by Mike Lewis & Sandy Lockhart, with
research assistance from David de Montreuil

the Oregon BENCHMARKS

Oregonians are getting results from this approach to governance. Can we too?

CHANGE MAY BE NECESSARY if we are to meet many of the challenges we face in society, but it sure is not easy. The complexity of shaping and guiding change seems to be getting beyond many of our institutions, including governments - or some might say, *especially* governments. The resulting stress on our citizens and on our public and private systems is increasing. Buck passing, cynicism, and gridlock around key issues create a fertile ground for conflict, too much of which seems to have little redeeming purpose and plenty of damaging consequences.

It is perhaps this context, rife as it is with partisan bickering, propagandistic pressure tactics, and acrimonious blaming for things going wrong, that is leading traditionally widely-divergent interests in B.C., Canada, and the United States to call for a more transparent, results-oriented way of conducting our affairs. The old battle slogans are ringing hollow. Simplistic solutions to the present and looming challenges are unacceptable to more and more people. And more people are beginning to recognize the connections between a healthy economy, social equity, and a quality natural environment. Old rhetoric and old solutions that rely on top-down decisions and top-heavy systems hold little hope of empowering our society to meet the myriad of challenges we face. Nor is a simplistic, the market-rules approach to life very helpful. We need a governance framework that is more transparent and accountable and which pulls us together to work around concrete outcomes.

The people of Oregon seem to be finding a way to do this. They call the process “benchmarking,” and it has great import for anyone committed to getting better results in our society. At the heart of the process is a 20-year strategic vision for the economic, social, and environmental future of the state. This vision is made specific through meaningful targets and measures that bring focus to action and resource allocation. These targets (outcomes) and measures (indicators) have evolved from the input of a broad cross-section of Oregonians.

What is really extraordinary, however, is the capacity of this system of “benchmarks” to stimulate and facilitate partnerships across sectors, regions, and interest groups in the interests of achieving concrete outcomes. During a visit to Oregon in the autumn of 2000, we were impressed by the number of effective, results-driven partnerships that have been forged and by the pervasive evidence of systems changing, for the better.

Moreover, the measurement of progress over time seems to be creating a feedback loop that is having a huge impact on government and private decisions. In other words, Oregonians as a society are actually learning from their collective experience.

They are far from solving all their problems, mind you. We believe the results of the Oregon Benchmark system nevertheless provide a more cohesive and collaborative foundation for a preserving and improving the quality of life for all citizens.

We cannot help but think what a difference this could make to people in B.C. and other parts of Canada and the United States: the difficult community and regional development challenges that resource-based and coastal communities face in our rural areas, and the endemic issues of marginalization so many our citizens are experiencing in our major urban areas.

**“OREGON SHINES”:
THE STRATEGIC VISION**

Back in the late 1980s the state of Oregon found itself rather abruptly cut adrift from its long-established economic mainstays. Like B.C., Oregon’s economy was heavily dependent upon primary industry. Forest products and the fishing industry were the dominant players. Shifts in market forces, resource depletion and degradation, and wider changes in public environmental sensitivities (notably, the issue of spotted owl extinction), all combined to virtually shut down a once thriving economic engine.

Confronted by a severe recession the state government of the day had no option but to embark upon a quest for an alternative vision. In 1989, Governor Neil Goldschmidt gave his officials six months to put in place a strategy that would counter the inexorable decline in the economy. Also, with strong support from the Oregon Business Council, he appointed a broadly representative task

force to help drive the strategic analysis and visioning. Over 200 carefully selected individuals become involved in the quest to develop a comprehensive, state-wide revitalization plan.

The strategic vision is set out in the 1989 landmark document, Oregon Shines. It projected three goals that were driven by an overall vision of transforming Oregon from a languishing resource-based economy into a one that would ride the high-tech wave in the global marketplace:

1. “To invest in Oregonians to build a workforce that is measurably the best in America by the year 2000, and equal to any in the world by 2010.”
2. “To maintain Oregon’s natural environment and un-congested quality of life to attract the people and firms that will drive an advanced economy.”
3. “Create an international orientation in Oregon’s business and cultural life that distinguishes Oregonians as unusually adept in global commerce.”

On the surface, these strategic goal statements do not seem particularly compelling. However, if the goals and the pre-

scribed means of achieving them are put in context, both the ends and means appear to diverge significantly from past Oregon approaches.

Oregon’s workforce, while often skilled in the “learn on the job” sense so common in resource-based economies, had never before viewed their lower than average U.S. education levels as a problem. Thus the focus on education, training, and workforce development was a fresh priority. Similarly, the state’s economic planning establishment had never before considered quality of life issues relevant to their mandate. Together, a relatively low population density and an economic dependence on resource exploitation had kept environmental and social issues safely outside the realm of economic development.

However, by the late 1980s the state’s capacity to ignore bad environmental management, both natural and social, had reached its limit. Quality of life issues, both urban and rural, came into increasingly open conflict with the traditional approach of accommodating powerful economic interest groups. So linking quality

Figure 1



of life enhancement to workforce adjustment was not just a way to ameliorate growing internal conflicts. The linkage also came to be seen as a central strategy for “attracting the new outside [high tech] industries” that were to be the means by which Oregon would meet the “globalization challenge.”

But as radical a departure as these strategic goals may have been from Oregon’s historic pattern, the “Oregon Shines” vision did not differ significantly from

economic theory which at that time was chasing government out of many spheres of economic and social intervention. The “Oregon Shines” call for substantial but outcomes-oriented government interventions was a direct challenge to conventional economic wisdom.

THE MEANS TO THE ENDS

Seen in these terms, both the strategic goals and the tactical prescriptions of the Oregon Shines initiative did have an inno-

high-level task forces, seconded and assembled to advise a government on how to fix a problem, table their reports and are then dismantled, often leaving their recommendations institutionally orphaned. The Oregon Shines task force, by contrast, recommended the creation of an “Oregon Progress Board” (OPB), which the state legislature established in 1989. This diverse and bipartisan group of nine business and community leaders, chaired by the governor, energetically set about constructing the targets and indicators that have since become known as the “Oregon Benchmarks” (OBM).

The OPB’s executive director, office manager, and a policy/research analyst immediately took on the first draft of the benchmarks. They examined a wide range of existing statistical sources for data relevant to the three goals, and organized some 279 selections under seven major headings (see Figure 1, previous page):

- Economic Performance
- Public Safety
- Education
- Social Support
- Community Development
- Civic Engagement
- Environment

A broad cross-section of community, business, and institutional leaders reviewed the first draft. So did every legislative committee. The OPB revised its work significantly and then issued the 1991 Progress Report. Widely distributed, this report became the basis for ongoing input from many quarters.

Inspired in part by this process, in 1992 the Oregon Business Council invested US\$250,000 in a scientifically sophisticated and comprehensive study of the “Values and Beliefs of Oregonians.” The results became an important reference point in subsequent refinements of the benchmarks.

The Values and Beliefs Study and the current draft of the benchmarks were

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(largely rhetorical) vision statements expressed elsewhere in the United States and Canada - including B.C. What really set Oregon’s statement apart is summarized in three critical statements about means:

- “Form institutional partnerships among groups that have traditionally operated independently or even antagonistically toward one another.”
- “Invest in public facilities that directly affect business operations and costs and in services that enhance the quality of human environment, including schools, public safety and parks.”
- “Contain costs of doing business through [state support contributions in such areas as] workers’ compensation rates, unemployment insurance and energy rates.”

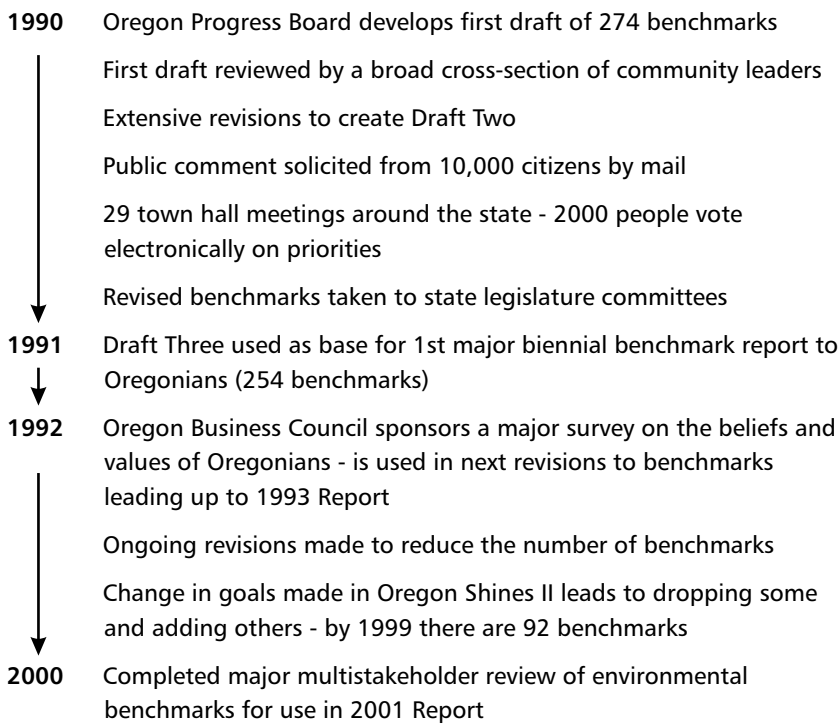
These were extraordinary steps for any state government to take. They were a departure not only from Oregon’s own past practices, but from the supply-side

vative edge. However, neither of these features represents what was most conspicuously original in Oregon Shines. What has given the Oregon experiment its wider currency is the way in which progress towards realizing the strategic vision is continually monitored, measured, and evaluated through establishing specific targets (outcomes) and indicators.

Once established and regularly compiled, the idea was that these targets and indicators would provide all concerned with a regular report card on the achievement of Oregon’s vision. What’s more, they would support and encourage a holistic analysis of change. From the beginning they were to include social, environmental, and economic outcomes and indicators so that the costs and benefits in all three realms could be tracked, evaluated, and compared. This is the very essence of both the promise and impact of “Oregon Shines.”

Another innovation was the creation of a “caretaker” of the strategic vision. Most

Figure 2 BUILDING THE BENCHMARKS



then packaged into a framework for use in 29 town hall meetings around the state. Over 2000 citizens made an electronic selection of the most important benchmarks. Every committee of the legislature then once again reviewed what was becoming a rolling draft. (See Figure 2, "Building the Benchmarks.")

EARLY APPLICATIONS

In addition to the publication of the first Progress Report, two other developments in 1991 dramatically elevated the profile and importance of the benchmarks process. First, Oregonians elected a new governor, Barbara Roberts, who was an enthusiastic and articulate booster of the benchmarks as a tool for improving government performance. Second, the citizens approved Measure 5, the Oregon manifestation of the American tax revolt.

These events really got the ball rolling. In 1992, Governor Roberts was forced to cut the state budget by 20%.

With the Progress Report in hand, Roberts told state agencies that they could win back budget appropriations by linking their priorities to the Oregon Benchmarks. In one fell swoop, every organ of government became attentive to the theory and emerging practice of benchmarking. (After a long hiatus, this linkage has recently been revived. An executive order of the current governor requires all agencies that receive government resources to establish organizational performance measures and link them to the Oregon Benchmarks.)

During this early period the OPB's small but committed staff worked tirelessly to promote and explain the Benchmarks both in- and outside of government. Duncan Wyse, the first executive director, made speeches to over 23,000 people before his departure in 1995. Beyond a doubt, the remarkable place the OBM and the OPB have come to occupy in Oregon society is attributable in part to this level of activism.

**OREGON SHINES II:
LEARNING FROM RESULTS**

In April 1996, the third Governor to preside over the evolution of the benchmark system, John Kitzhaber, created a second Oregon Shines Task Force. Its job was to work with the OPB to assess progress towards the Oregon Shines strategic vision and to recommend necessary changes. The time had come to reflect on the whole process in a way that would engage people state-wide in re-formulating the goals that would shape the next 20 years.

An extraordinarily thorough process of public consultation commenced. The Task Force distributed the benchmark data accumulated since the first report in 1991 as a basis for wide public reflection and comment.

The track record itself offered both good and bad news. (See p. 8, "Good News, Bad News.") The good news was unequivocal. The overall thrust of achieving, by the year 2000, a transformation from an almost exclusively resource-based economy to one driven by the new high technology, globally competitive industries, had succeeded beyond any reasonable expectation.

Certainly, this was in part to extraordinarily strong and prolonged growth in the U.S. as a whole. However, Oregon had made an outstanding recovery relative to other resource-based regional economies, and led the whole country with respect to the extent of the transformation.

The bad news was hardly less blatant. According to the benchmarks, little or no progress had been made toward preparing all Oregonians to participate in the social and economic benefits of the new economy. Indeed, in some critical areas of quality of life and social infrastructure, the OBM indicators registered serious decline.

To summarize the results, the OPB issued a public "report card." Where there was progress, the report card awarded an "A" or "B"; what was essentially un-

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

The following are examples of targets and indicators reported on by the Oregon Progress Board (drawn from 1999 report). It was this kind of data, about what was working and what was not going so well, that gave the Oregon II Task Force food for thought with respect to the usefulness of the original "Oregon Shines" goals.

Within the "Economic Performance" cluster, an "A" letter grade went to the benchmark indicator "Attracting New Companies." "B+" was awarded for progress in attracting the independent "Professional Services" so essential to high-tech business. However, none of the other benchmarks in this cluster achieved more than a "C." One benchmark, that of "Employment Dispersion," even received an "F." While the new high-tech industries had evidently brought conspicuous affluence to the Interstate 5 corridor, the benefits had not migrated elsewhere. Indeed, OBM income data revealed that many counties experienced significant declines in family incomes over the same period.

Of course, some of the quality of life enhancing measures in the original strategic vision did benefit all Oregonians. For example, a high mark went to efforts to increase the ability of citizens to participate in private medicare insurance. (An important thing to accomplish in a country so committed to private health care.) Similarly, some (by no means all) environmental protection benchmarks indicated marked improvement.

The bad news was most telling in the data related to the social health of Oregon. Indicators of deep poverty all revealed worsening conditions over the decade of macroeconomic transformation: homelessness (D+), general crime statistics (F), juvenile arrests (F), use of illicit drugs (F), incidence of child abuse (F), families for whom childcare is affordable (F), incidence of elder abuse (F), urban congestion (F), availability of low income housing (D).

A SAMPLE OF THE OREGON BENCHMARKS

Benchmarks cut across economic, social, and environmental factors that Oregonians believe are most critical to their quality of life. There are seven major categories within which the benchmarks are lodged: economy, education, civic engagement, social support, public safety, community development, and environment.

Below are just three examples of the 92 benchmarks currently in use. The format of their presentation in the biennial reports is very helpful. The trend analysis related to the benchmark is presented first. This is followed by three sections, which help the reader understand why the benchmark is important, factors influencing the benchmark, and how Oregon compares to others. Finally, there is a section on what works and other sources of information. All in two pages or less.

Economic Benchmark: Example

Employment Dispersion: This relates to the percentage of Oregonians employed outside the Willamette Valley and the Portland tri-county area. For the year 2000 and the year 2010 targets of 26% have been set for the other counties in Oregon.

The state has been robust overall, but many of the rural areas have higher unemployment and slow growth. Reliance upon agricultural exports renders many parts of the rural economy susceptible to crisis elsewhere. The importance of rural economic diversification is highlighted by keeping this benchmark in focus.

Score in 1999 Benchmark Report – F

Social Benchmark: Example

Teen Pregnancy: Pregnancy rate per 1,000 females age 10-17. For the year 2000 the target is 15 and for 2010 it is 10. The 1997 rate was 18.9 per 1000 in this age group. This translates into 3,200 teen pregnancies and 2000 babies born to mothers below the age of 18 each year.

Teen pregnancy is seen as an important measure of the state social health. Research indicates that Americans who finish high school, reach age 20, and get married before they have a child have only an 8% chance that their child will grow up in poverty. Those who do not reach these three milestones before having their first child will face a 79% chance their child will grow up in poverty. Sons of teen mothers are more likely to run afoul of the law and daughters are more likely to become teen mothers themselves.

Score in 1999 Benchmark Report - C

Environment Benchmark: Example

Wetland Preservation: Percentage of wetlands in 1990 still preserved as wetland. 100% of Oregon's wetland base in 1990 has been preserved. Small losses through wetland permitting processes have been more than made up for by voluntary restoration projects.

Wetlands provide multiple ecological and public benefits including habitat for plants and animals, reduction of flooding, maintenance of water quality and stream bank stabilization.

Score in 1999 Benchmark Report - A

OREGON BUSINESS

The Oregon business community has been actively engaged in the benchmarks process from the beginning. Even before the Oregon Shines strategic vision was complete, business pressed the governor and the legislature to establish a means of tracking progress. The Values and Beliefs Study completed in 1993 by the Oregon Business Council and the active participation of business in the Oregon Shines II Task Force reflects an impressive level of corporate citizenship.

This leadership from the business community continues. Under the banner of its Oregon Agenda (1998), the Oregon Business Council has made the goals of Oregon Shines II the foundation of its public policy agenda. Working with other business associations and public policy leaders, the Council completed recommendations for four areas they consider priorities for focussing business efforts to improve Oregon's quality of life: grade school, higher education, transportation, and watershed health and salmon restoration.

For each priority they express a vision and specify pertinent benchmarks. Most, if not all derive from or link to the Oregon Benchmarks. They then explain the importance of each priority and what it will take to make progress on it. Lastly, they helpfully pose a series of pointed questions for state legislators to consider in their 2001 sitting. All in all, what they refer to as the Oregon Business Agenda is a powerful witness to the impact of the Oregon Benchmarks system.

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changed received a "C"; and regression got a "D" or "E."

As a direct consequence of the benchmarks system – defining comprehensive targets and indicators, measuring them, and then reporting back – it was clear that Oregon's "transformation" was actually in the direction of a dual economy. The attraction of high-tech industries had failed to "spin off" and "trickle down" into the benefit of the wider community as anticipated. While external investment in the new economy had exceeded expectation, internal investment in local community enterprise had all but dried up! There were few local sources of amelioration for the pockets of poverty and pathology resident in both rural towns and major cities.

These effects come as no surprise to anyone who has studied the actual consequences of global economic transformation, as opposed to theoretical projections. The gains posted in terms of conventional, macroeconomic indicators tend to be concentrated geographically, demographically, and sectorally. The same concentration holds true for the social repercussions of this change: displacement and marginality. The result has been, and continues to be, attenuation of the middle segment in the social-economic opportunity structure. The benchmarks bear out the cliché about how the global economy is making "the rich richer and the poor poorer."

For the Oregon Shines II Task Force, there could be little doubt as to how priorities had to shift in the coming years. It described three new goals and directed the

OPB to track the outcomes that would express them:

- quality jobs for all Oregonians
- safe, caring and engaged communities
- healthy, sustainable surroundings

This fundamental re-formulation of priorities introduced a whole new agenda in which the principles and practices of community-based development would be of major importance. The same Task Force Report also recommended removing a few benchmarks that did not produce useful insights and adding others that might reflect the new priorities.

The process of revision and refinement continues. Indeed, under the sponsorship of the Oregon Progress Board, scientists and a range of citizens have just completed a major review of the environmental benchmarks. The necessary revisions will form part of the 2001 Progress Report.

A FERTILE GROUND FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

The Oregon Benchmarks have had impacts at many levels. (The sidebars Oregon Business, Portland-Multnomah Progress Board, United Way of Columbia-Willamette, and The Oregon Option offer some examples). There have also been important new tools created that build on the positive effect of the Oregon Benchmarks on partnership development. These tools focus on using outcome-based planning (or "evidence-based" planning, as some call it) as a means of empowering communities to set their priorities and then shape the

Figure 3



Figure 4



way in which public and private resources address these priorities.

The revised Oregon Shines II priority concerning safe, caring, and engaged communities, motivated largely by the poor economic results in rural counties and a number of distressed urban neighborhoods, led the governor to enact “Community Solutions” legislation in 1998. The central goal of the legislation is to get key infrastructure related agencies to work together to shift their orientation from program delivery to solving community problems. Five key state agencies are compelled by the legislation to work with communities around the priority or problem they deem to be most important to their development. (See Figure 3.) In two years, nine Community Solutions Teams from the five key agencies have worked on 70 projects.

Community Solutions Teams have become the foundation for a second initiative: “regional partnerships” in which the Department of Economic and Community Development plays a

leading role. Using the Oregon Benchmarks as the backdrop, key players from county and local governments, the private sector, and citizen-led non-government organizations are setting out to establish regional priorities and benchmarks to guide a more integrated effort to mobilize and focus resources at many levels. Figure 4 illustrates this innovative effort at regional partnership building.

There are other examples of benchmark applications that reveal impacts at the community and regional level. Notably, the entire benchmark approach has been adapted to the planning and decision-making framework that Tillamook County is applying throughout its jurisdiction. (See page 13, this issue.)

SOME PROGRESS NORTH OF THE 49TH

These applications of an evidence-based approach are beginning to find their way into the Canadian context. For example, there are some similarities between the

Community Solutions Teams and the proposed B.C. Regional and Community Development Act. The B.C. Ministry of Community Development issued a discussion paper that called for an evidence-based approach to public policy in order to address fundamental inequalities in communities’ social, economic and environmental conditions. The paper received a lot of attention across the province.

More generally, recent projects undertaken through B.C.’s Round Table on the Environment, the B.C. Health Goals, and BC Stats’ work on local health region indicators all appear to be heading in a direction consistent with the outcome-based approach. Other work is also occurring nationally. One prominent example involves the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. It has been engaged in a Quality of Life Indicators project that aims to achieve better outcomes in 16 of Canada’s largest urban centres.

Many other initiatives are cropping up all over Canada, but they remain frag-

mented. Nowhere are there leaders elevating the strategy to the level necessary to get the kind of impact discernible in Oregon.

A WORK IN PROGRESS

One of the most exciting features of the Oregon process is that it is continuing to evolve. There is an built-in “rolling evaluation” of Oregon’s strategic vision and plan that appears to serve its citizens well, particularly on account of its capacity for self-correction. Several features are salient:

1. It is a “work in perpetual progress,” rooted in a combination of expert critical analysis (including the measure-

ment of OBM performance) and widespread public input and feedback.

2. It models a transparency that encourages and empowers social learning, participation, and public input.
3. The focus on outcomes creates a wider cultural acceptance and participation in achieving concrete results and has led to the creation of incentives, formal and informal, that facilitate results driven governance and action.
4. It creates the backdrop against which diverse segments of Oregonian society can more readily co-operate and co-ordinate their actions.
5. It strengthens the capacity of government and other sectors to manage the

challenges of becoming a more sustainable society.

While the innovative new institutions that promote and manage this process are a creation of government, they are also at arms length from partisan politics. Three successive administrations with divided executive and legislative party allegiances have supported and benefited from these arrangements. At the same time, citizen involvement in the process has been extraordinarily devoid of the “blame government” and “nothing makes a difference anyway” attitudes so characteristic of contemporary Western society. With some exceptions, the civil service has accepted its new role as a

PORTLAND-MULTNOMAH PROGRESS BOARD

The vision and emerging practice of the OPB inspired the Portland-Multnomah County to form the Portland-Multnomah Progress Board (PMPB) in 1993. With assistance from the OPB, PMPB developed the means to identify, monitor, and report on an array of benchmarks (now 76 in number) that reflect issues of particular local importance: families, education, urban vitality, health, environment, governance, economy, safety, participation, and special needs. Roughly half are selections from the current roster of Oregon Benchmarks; the rest the PMPB has developed through various types of public input, surveys, and data from the Census Bureau and other federal sources.

In addition to biennial reports, PMPB undertakes detailed studies that act as a catalyst for action on the part of government, business, and community groups. Such reports as “Children’s Readiness to Learn,” “Educational Success for Youth,” and “Salmon Restoration in an Urban Watershed” have all helped the agencies responsible to develop better benchmarks and goals.

PMPB also works closely with city agencies in the adoption of performance outcomes for policy and management goals. The annual auditor’s report depicts “City Government Performance” in terms of established benchmarks and goals in the interests of making public servants and services more efficient, effective, and accountable.

What has it taken to make this work? Three things are critical. First, there is top-level leadership. Second, the system is understood as valuable and meaningful to the community and officials. Third, OPB has provided a source of technical assistance and support.

UNITED WAY OF COLUMBIA-WILLAMETTE

Two factors have pointed the United Way of Columbia-Willamette (UWCW) in the direction of benchmarking. The national United Way has been re-assessing policies and priorities. An increasing number of inquiries from financial supporters about the results of their investment impelled the national organization to explore outcomes-based accountability. An added incentive has come from Oregon’s huge, ongoing experiment in systems change through benchmarking. The United Way’s Portland office was therefore optimally located to structure a pilot program based on measurable outcomes.

The result is “Success by Six,” a program to support the well-being of children and families. It is directly linked to the school readiness benchmark, the “percent of children entering kindergarten who are judged to be ready to learn.” However, the overall goal is to co-ordinate partnerships, strategies, and resources in order to achieve optimal results. All the outcomes relate to collaborative partnerships between about 15 agencies, including four counties, which have established committees to co-ordinate resources, develop plans, and manage operations. In the three years since Success by Six hit the drawing board there has been marked progress towards several specific outcomes.

UWCW took roughly half its benchmarks straight from the OPB and has developed the rest with that Board’s support. Participants believe that adoption of the Oregon Benchmarks has improved communication and made it easier to form partnerships. Equally important, the use of benchmarks has meant that verifiable results are clearly defined and link directly to goals. Benchmarks also enable the UWCW to compare performance across its vast array of programs, sites, and partners.

“partner in problem-solving” rather than an administrator of fragmented programs that too often confound their intended purpose.


Really notable is the extent to which the benchmarks and their caretaker institutions and process have become integral to Oregon’s political culture. Schools and the police have articulated their own benchmarks as subsets to the Oregon Benchmarks. Private and voluntary sector organizations are framing their strategies and measuring their progress in a similar fashion. County and local governments have initiated their own benchmark planning frameworks, all of them with direct links to the state-wide Oregon Benchmarks. And ... the innovation appears to be broadening and deepening. The benchmarks are being used and adapted in so many settings that even the key leaders at the state level are no longer aware of everything that is going on. Clearly, the idea of outcome-based governance of public and private resources is slowly but surely taking hold in Oregon. It is now being adapted in Tasmania, in a parliamentary jurisdiction much like those of the Canadian provinces.

With some assistance from the former B.C. Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers, the Centre for Community Enterprise (CCE) is organizing workshops involving leaders in a wide range of civic, business, and government interests in this province. The Ministry is supporting this project based on the results of earlier research into the relevance of Oregon evidence-based plan-

ning, particularly for community and regional development. It is also interested in exploring how to mobilize resources more systematically in order to address the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing B.C. communities.

NEXT STEPS

The workshops are already generating a great deal of interest. We anticipate this will grow with each event. We also anticipate that leaders from different sectors will agree that a made-in-B.C. adaptation of the Oregon Benchmarks deserves our serious attention. This summer, CCE will organize a meeting to discuss the merits of such an action. If warranted, we would then make preparations to take a common message to Victoria early in the autumn.

We are not starting from scratch. There have been initiatives over the last decade we can build on. However, they have had little discernible impact on the way we go about conducting our public, community, and private affairs. The lessons from Oregon are timely! 

MIKE LEWIS is executive director of the Centre for Community Enterprise, and SANDY LOCKHART and DAVID de MONTREUIL are respectively an associate and contractor of the same organization.

For additional information, including this article and the Tillamook County case study in portable document format (PDF), visit the dedicated page “Oregon Benchmarks” at cedworks.com. If you are interested in organizing a workshop in your constituency, or require more detailed information, contact Mike Lewis directly (tel) 250-723-1139, (fax) 250-723-3730, (e-mail) ccelewis@island.net.

THE OREGON OPTION

Even in their early years of implementation, the Benchmarks’ focus on outcomes became, in the words of Governor Barbara Roberts “a magnet for collaboration.” Her observation was reinforced unexpectedly by developments in distant Washington, D.C.

By 1993, Washington, D.C. was moving in a direction similar to those of Oregon. Both Democrats and Republicans were interested in more effective and efficient bureaucracy. They described a “new federalism” that would reduce the federal apparatus and place greater onus on states and localities to solve their own problems. To this end, President Clinton established the National Performance Review and appointed Vice President Al Gore as its head.

Early in 1994, at a major conference on the re-design of government, Oregon officials presented their benchmarking process. The feds were impressed. Between May and December of that year they formulated the “Oregon Option.” A Memorandum of Understanding between Washington and the Oregon state government called for the partners “to identify desired results and work together to achieve them, making an effort to eliminate barriers and create a new service delivery system with an emphasis on simplicity, coordination, and prevention.” It seemed that Roberts’ “magnet for collaboration” had drawn in a large partner.

While it did not live up to the expectations of many people (particularly on the OPB), this agreement did have an impact. Federal programs have loosened their financial strings. Federal agencies have reduced the regulatory burden, or even waived it given adequate performance measures. Local activists and county officials believe that the Oregon Option continues to be a key means for leveraging collaboration and coordination between federal and state agencies in relation to local initiatives (like that of Tillamook County). In the eyes of one person we interviewed, the Oregon Option has enabled local people to persuade reluctant bureaucrats that they now have the security necessary to act in new ways. After all, our contact affirmed, “they want meaning in their lives too.”