

Appendix A

Gleanings from Mark Friedman Seminar:

“Results Based Decision Making and budgeting”

April 23, 1999

1. Behind all the talk about “outcomes assessment,” “results accountability,” “performance management,” etc. is looming the question of whether public organizations can reconnect with skeptical taxpayers.
2. For starters, organizations must talk in terms that are meaningful to the public, i.e. plain English.
3. The definition “success” that is implicit in most public programs is unrealistic and doomed to breed public discontent. We say, “here’s problem A and we are going to solve it with program B.” In place of this “problem-program” mentality, we need a problem-partners-progress mentality.
4. Partners for public organization managers include anyone else whose activities or programs are needed if one’s own outcomes are to be achieved. Like it or not, your success is tied to their activities. Focus on the most closely related programs.
5. Success should be defined as “beating the baseline” or “turning the curve” rather than as “point-to-point improvement” Slowing the growth rate of bad stuff, or making some initial progress toward good outcomes should be talked about as success, even if it leaves us short of where we eventually want to be.
6. Good indicators have three qualities: communication power (i.e. a broad range of audiences “gets it”), proxy power (the indicator is central rather than peripheral and “brings along the rest of the data herd”), and data power (available on a timely and cost effective basis).
7. Where communication power is high, proxy power is high, and data power is low, you have your “data development agenda”.
8. Concentrate on a few “headline indicators that say what was achieved and what it means to the community. Other indicators are not thrown away or wasted, but at all costs avoid data swamps (i.e. long compendia of indicators with little clear connection to policy changes, local action, etc.).
9. On the other hand, managing a single measure is a recipe for disaster, since it is often easy to artificially inflate performance on one indicator by dumping the costs elsewhere (e.g. a school rewarded for achieving high attendance that gets there by kicking out all the problem kids.)
10. The indicator of whether all this is working for you is whether you increase the amount of time you spend in positive talk about positive goals with positive outcomes. This is not simple “good spin,” but comes as attention to outcome indicators disciplines activity, planning, budgeting, collaboration, etc.