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The Tools We Need to Measure Quality in Government.

Auditable standards for public-sector quality improvement efforts are the key to their sustained and effective implementation.

It is conventional wisdom that “if you can’t measure it you can’t manage it.” [Lean](#) and other quality-improvement efforts in government are doomed to be showcase events, removed from mainstream management practices, unless they are supported by auditable standards that make results measurable and reportable.

Providing auditable quality standards for government at all levels is the goal of a new initiative from the American Society for Quality’s Government Division, which I chair. The standards provide for the numeric rating of the maturity of processes, systems and scorecards for every government office, agency and jurisdiction. They make possible an annual and objective scorecard on government quality initiatives in the same way that the annual financial audit provides a report card on the use of fiscal management standards.

These standards are the key to the sustained implementation of quality in government. Because the standards are measurable and uniformly reportable, they will allow the public to compare quality implementation across government, evaluate whether agencies are efficient and effective, and determine whether elected officials and executive offices support quality efforts.

Auditable standards also align with fundamental good-management technique and support any other quality disciplines already in place. For example, any government that takes the time to document its practices using the [ISO](#) or [Baldrige](#) frameworks can easily “hold the gain” through annual use of these standards.

There are three parts to the auditable quality standards that encompass the three levels of leadership:

- Process management, which aligns with the public-facing work processes at the level of the front-line supervisor.
- Systems management, which provides a structured framework for evaluating the management of overall organizational systems and applies at the executive level.
- Aligned leadership objectives, which make clear whether elected officials have agreed on prioritized outcomes and objectives for government as a whole and aligned them with the goals and objectives of executive leadership.

The latter two standards recognize that government is a system made up of elected leaders on the one side and hired workers and managers on the other, and that the fundamental value of government — what it achieves — can be controlled only by elected leaders. It is vitally important to recognize that government managers and front-line employees can only consistently deliver high levels of efficiency and effectiveness when the elected branch of government joins in the partnership.

Without auditable standards, quality in government cannot be measured. If broadly adopted, these

standards hold the potential to enable quality initiatives to engage and empower government on a sustainable basis.

The writer is the author of a new book on the subject of this article, "Quality Standards for Highly Effective Government."

BY RICHARD E. MALLORY | MAY 26, 2014

VOICES is curated by the Governing Institute, which seeks out practitioners and observers whose perspective and insight add to the public conversation about state and local government. For more information or to submit an article to be considered for publication, please contact editor John Martin.

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