

BALANCING THE TICKET? PROGRAM EVALUATION IN A PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT WORLD

Professor Jim McDavid
Professor of Public Administration
University of Victoria
British Columbia
CANADA

Speaker Biography

James C. McDavid is a Professor of Public Administration at the University of Victoria, British Columbia and Co-director of the Local Government Institute in the School of Public Administration. He specializes in program evaluation, performance measurement, performance management and the production of local government services.

He has conducted research and evaluations focusing on Federal, state, provincial and local governments in the United States and Canada. His published research includes articles and books on program evaluation, performance measurement, performance management and comparisons of local government service production across Canada.

In 1996, he co-authored an article on local government contracting with Eric Clemens, which won the J.E. Hodgett's Award for the best English language article in *Canadian Public Administration*.

He was a University of Victoria Distinguished University Professor from 2004 through 2008.

His textbook, *Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement: An Introduction to Practice* was published by Sage Publications in 2006.

He has just completed an SSHRC-funded research project to examine the ways the BC Legislators use the annual performance reports for ministries and Crowns that are mandated by legislation.

Currently, he is heading up the Secretariat for the Consortium of Universities for Evaluation Education (CUEE) here in Canada. CUEE is a group of universities that are committed to increasing the availability of graduate evaluation programs and courses to students and practitioners in Canada. The Consortium is working with the Canadian Evaluation Society and Treasury Board Canada on this initiative.

Presentation Overview

In the past 10 years, performance measurement and outcomes-focused performance reporting have become dominant features of performance management in Canadian jurisdictions. The ubiquity of requirements to measure outcomes have been matched by the expectation that performance results will figure in both decision-making and public accountability. The enthusiasm of advocates, including the accounting and the public auditing community in Canada, has given way to a more balanced and even skeptical view of the performance measurement enterprise. The Federal Government of Canada has embraced performance measurement and reporting for departments and agencies and continues to do so. But recently, there has been a concerted effort to rebalance the ticket – elevating program evaluation to some of its former status among assessment approaches supported by Treasury Board policies. This effort is mirrored in other jurisdictions in Canada where provincial governments are moving away from their reliance on performance measurement to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of programs and policies. But what are these jurisdictions moving towards? Program evaluation, as it was practiced in governments in Canada, in the 1980s and 1990s, required staff and support resources – evaluations consumed resources and took time. The

resurgence that is happening looks different. Evaluations are expected to occur without new resources, and they are expected to contribute to real time decision-making. Is program evaluation up to this challenge? Do we have to re-think what program evaluation is in a performance measurement world?

Summary of Presentation

The presentation will situate the recent (April 2009) Federal Government of Canada (Treasury Board) policy to require program evaluations of all programs in department and agencies by highlighting events and trends in the Federal Government in the past four years.

The presentation will illustrate the parallels between the growing importance of evaluation in the Federal Government of Canada and trends in other Canadian jurisdictions.

But what does this resurgence of program evaluation mean in fiscal circumstances where budgets are being capped or reduced and there is no new money for the evaluation function?

Is program evaluation, conducted with very limited resources, capable of addressing key issues like program effectiveness?