

ROLE 5: ASSIST ELECTED OFFICIALS OR CITIZENS

Practice 5b. Report performance: Produce and issue external periodic performance reports.

Prince William County, Virginia, Internal Audit (within the County Office of Executive Management: www.pwcgov.org/oem): The Prince William County Internal Audit Division has, since 1995, prepared an annual Service Efforts and Accomplishments (SEA) Report. Internal Audit staff devote about 1,700 hours to this practice each year. The initial SEA report covered three service areas. The County has added services to SEA reports, and established a two-year reporting cycle that, for 2002 and 2003, covered 17 service areas representing 57 percent of the County's Fiscal 2003 General Fund Budget (excluding a "School Transfer"). The 2003 report included seven service areas: Community Improvement & Maintenance, Criminal Justice, Library, Planning, Youth Residential Programs, Solid Waste, and Stormwater Infrastructure Management. The 2002 report included ten service areas: Adult Detention Center; Building Development; Fire and Rescue; Fleet Management; Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services; Police; Public Safety Communications; Public Welfare; Real Estate Assessments; and Tax Administration. The 2003 report includes the prior year's service area chapters as an appendix, so one document contains the most recently published SEA data on all 17 service areas. In preparing the annual Audit Plan, Internal Audit discusses with the County Executive new areas to add to the SEA Report. Staff constraints limit Internal Audit to adding no more than one or two services areas each year. The service areas are selected on the basis of visibility, strategic importance, and quality of performance information available for that service area. Internal Audit and agency management select measures they feel are representative of the service area and that are mostly available in internal information systems.

In each service area chapter of the SEA Reports, Prince William County groups measures in three categories: *spending and staffing*, *outputs*, and *results*. The County reports cost per capita of all service areas except for fully fee-supported services under "spending and staffing," and made a point in the 2001 and 2002 Executive Summaries that "it should be noted that spending per capita is a measure of the effort the community puts into a service area; it is not an efficiency measure since it does not compare outputs with inputs." (This distinction is consistent with *GASB Concepts Statement 2 on SEA Reporting*). The County does report efficiency measures comparing outputs (or outcomes) with inputs, and lists most of them under "outputs" or "results" in the service area chapters. In the 2003 SEA Executive Summary, and in "Overview" sections of the "2003 Service Area Chapters," summary tables are provided with highlights of comparisons over time and sometimes with other jurisdictions in "Spending" (generally per capita), "Efficiency" (defined as the level of output achieved for a given level of spending), and "Results" (defined as the degree to which key program objectives are achieved).

The purposes of the SEA Report are to: improve public accountability, improve service delivery, foster a competitive spirit through inter-jurisdictional comparisons, increase trust in government through greater transparency, and promote learning through interaction with peers in other jurisdictions. The 2001–2003 SEA Executive Summaries all noted that "the SEA report is uniquely able to provide objective information that addresses many key questions that concerned citizens, elected officials, and management raise. Examples of these questions include:

- Does Prince William County spend more on a given service area than other jurisdictions?
- If so, are the citizens being provided more service or a higher quality of service?
- Is a given service area providing more or less service this year than in prior years?
- Is a given service area effectively accomplishing its key objectives?"

Spending per capita, efficiency, and a number of other SEA measures are reported in comparison with four other local governments. For all services, Prince William compares itself with Chesterfield, Henrico, and Fairfax Counties. They were selected by Internal Audit because Chesterfield and Henrico Counties are the Virginia jurisdictions closest to Prince William in population, and Prince William residents are often concerned with comparisons with neighboring Fairfax County. The 2003 Methodology section also notes that "each SEA agency was allowed to select one additional comparative jurisdiction of its choice. The only restriction was that the selected jurisdiction must be either a Virginia or [Washington] D.C. metro jurisdiction." All told, the 2003 report uses eight comparison local governments, seven from Virginia and one from Maryland. An appendix compares selected demographics of Prince William County with those of all these jurisdictions. Other types of comparisons are also reported, as noted below.

Each service area chapter of the SEA reports has an "Overview"—usually three or four pages—that starts by summarizing the service mission, program organization, resources, and projected key activities for the next fiscal year. In the 2003 report, each Overview section then has the "Spending," "Efficiency," and "Results" summary table noted above, and concludes with explanatory comments, such as on uses of the data, expected future improvements in SEA reporting for that service, and comparison communities surveyed. Each service area overview is followed by additional pages (e.g., 20 added pages for Police in 2002) with more detailed trend and comparative information. In detailed sections, five- or six-year line graphs compare Prince William County trends with other jurisdictions, and sometimes compare Prince William "actual" trends with the County's targets for that measure. Bar charts showing Prince William's five- or six-year trends over time are also shown for some measures. Brief explanatory comments are also provided for some measures. Selections of specific measures to report have been made cooperatively among the Internal Audit Division, County agencies, and the County Executive.

Some SEA report "results" indicators are measures of citizen perceptions (e.g., percent of citizens feeling safe in their neighborhood) and satisfaction (e.g., percent satisfied with overall police performance) from the County's annual citizen survey (see 3b). The County issues a separate report with full survey results. Internal Audit estimates that one-third of the division's staff-time is related to SEA reporting, excluding time to verify data (see 2a).

Relevant publications available from the County Office of Executive Management web site (www.pwcgov.org/oem) include:

- *FY 2003 Citizen Satisfaction Survey*, August 2003
- *FY 2003 Service Efforts & Accomplishments Report*, January 2004