



Government Accountability

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“The lack of accountability and efficiency not only robs money from critical programs, it also erodes taxpayer’s confidence that Washington can be responsible stewards of their money. When people lose faith in their government, it is hard to build the consensus needed to tackle our great problems: ensuring affordable, accessible health care for all, eliminating our addiction to foreign oil, securing our homeland, educating our children and rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure.” ~ President Barack Obama

While quality assurance is important to most private sector businesses, it is especially critical in the government sphere. Hundreds of government reports – from sources including the White House, Congress, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Office of Management & Budget (OMB), Inspectors General (IG) offices, and others -- confirm that the federal government’s call for accountability and transparency in public-private commerce has never been louder.

Surveys and media reports further reinforce that the American public wants its elected and appointed public officials to place greater oversight on government contractors. Amid all the drama surrounding the federal government’s recent \$1 trillion+ financial bailout and the \$900 billion+ Stimulus Funding Bill, it’s clear that Americans want assurance that government agencies are spending their tax dollars responsibly and wisely, not wastefully.

For many years the Federal Government has required an accountability mechanism in its contracting programs. Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 46, Quality Assurance, provides structure and guidance to ensure that the government receives fair value from contractors, assigning primary responsibility for quality with the contractor. It also defines minimum requirements for implementing a quality assurance program that validates a contractor’s quality control efforts.

Similarly, OMB Circular A-76 mandates an integrated approach to quality assurance. It is designed to ensure government accountability and transparency, whether the service provider is a contractor or government organization. Circular A-76 outlines guidelines to determine which commercial activities can be conducted by an agency internally vs. which must be subject to public/private competition. It also outlines the rules and requirements for the competition and post-award accountability for both government agencies and private sector contractors.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is proposing legislation to “insource” inherently governmental and mission-essential work. While this legislation may ultimately impact the level of outsourcing, it’s essential to note that the need for transparency and accountability still exists for insourced services. At a minimum, OMB Circular A-76’s post competition accountability provisions (which rely on the FAR’s approach to quality control and quality assurance) should be applied to any insourced activity.

President Obama has made government accountability and transparency a priority in his administration. He has vowed that his administration will work with agency leaders and the OMB to improve results and outcomes for federal government programs while eliminating waste and inefficiency.

Additionally, the President has promised to open up the insular performance measurement process to the public, Congress, and outside experts. His stated goal is to eliminate ideological performance goals and replace them with goals Americans care about – goals based on both congressional intent and feedback from the people that government programs serve. The President is also determined to ensure that programs are not only measured individually, but assessed in the context of other programs serving the same population and/or addressing the same goals.

In a recent speech, President Obama cited “reform, oversight, transparency, and accountability” as elements needed “for the American people to have confidence in what we’re doing.”

We believe it’s imperative for federal agencies heed this mandate by establishing comprehensive quality and oversight programs. For government agencies to gain (or re-gain) the trust of the American people, they need to focus on the quality, accountability, and transparency of both outsourced and insourced projects. Quality and oversight programs will allow agencies to collect and analyze needed data, rapidly respond to the results, and gain the highest return for each taxpayer dollar they spend.