

**PART:
An Attempt in Federal Performance-Based
Budgeting**

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ABSTRACT

The Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) was the most recent attempt in U.S. federal performance-based budgeting innovations. This article investigates the development and implementation of the PART in the federal budgeting process. Over 1000 PART reports from 2004 to 2008 were retrieved from the PART official website. The effects of the PART ratings are examined in a set of regression models with a group of control variables that are known to influence federal budget decisions. The models show positive, but not statistically significant, results. Therefore, not enough empirical evidence is found that program appropriation was impacted by the PART ratings.

Keywords: PART, performance-based budgeting, normative budget theory, performance measurement.

Introduction

Performance-based budgeting is nothing new in public sectors. It derives from a very simple question – why spend limited funds on some programs or organizations when the performance measures reveal that other programs or organizations are more effective at achieving the political objectives behind the budget’s macro allocations? The historical development of performance-based budgets includes a series of four major government-wide performance budgeting initiatives attempted since World War II: the Budget and Accounting Procedures Act of 1950, the Planning-Programming-Budgeting System implemented in 1965, Management by Objectives initiated in 1973, and Zero-Based Budgeting initiated in 1977. Each was an analytical technique that embraced one of the major management concepts of its era with the goal of improving the quality and the influence of policy decisions. However, all of the reforms were insular, begun and conducted by the executive branch with Congress given no role and the public screened from view (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1997). Such reforms generally did not carry over from one presidential administration to the next.

Federal efforts in rationalizing budget decisions for the intervening decades resulted in the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) under the President’s Management Agenda’s budget and performance integration initiative (Kettl, 2000; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). The PART was designed as an effort to improve the efficiency of the federal government (see, e.g., Blanchard, 2008; Breul, 2007b; Redburn et al., 2008; Shea, 2008). But, the PART appears to appeal to a deeply entrenched desire within the public administration community to find a way to budget “by performance” or “for results” (White, 2012). The PART was intended to provide a consistent system to evaluate federal programs as a part of the Presidential budget decision process (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 2002) and sought to overcome issues in the Government Performance and Results Act implementation such as insufficient use of performance information in budget decisions (Dull, 2006).

The PART was a questionnaire consisting of approximately 30 questions (the number varies slightly depending on the type of program being evaluated). Federal managers were required to answer these questions about their program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management, and program results. Programs were given ratings based on the answers. These ratings were weighted to a given percentage for each section. The program purpose and design section was weighted to 20%, the strategic planning section was weighted to 10%, the program management was weighted to 20%, and the program results section was weighted to 50%. The ratings weighted to the given percentage were added together to produce an aggregate score that ranges from 0 to 100. This aggregate score was indicated in a qualitative rating as follows:

Rating Range	
Effective	85-100
Moderately Effective	70-84
Adequate	50-69
Ineffective	0-49

Federal programs were categorized into seven program types, including competitive grant, block/formula grant, regulatory-based, capital assets and service acquisition, credit, directed federal, and research & development programs. Some programs, which were categorized into multiple types, were called mix programs.

Table 1: Example of PART Worksheet (\$ amount in millions)

Agency	Program	Program Purpose	Strategic Planning	Program Management	Program Result	Rating	FY2006 Actual	FY2008 Request	Type
Health & Human Service	Foster Care	80	88	100	66	Moderately	\$4,325	\$4,581	Block/Formula Grant

Table 1 shows an example of the PART that was for Foster Care in Health & Human Service for fiscal year 2008. According to the information given in the table, Foster Care in 2008 gained the PART ratings 80, 88, 100 and 66 in program purpose, strategic planning, program management, and program results respectively. The qualitative rating, “moderately effective” was based on aggregate score of 77.8 that was calculated by a sum of weighted four ratings as follows:

$$(80 \times 20\%) + (88 \times 10\%) + (100 \times 20\%) + (66 \times 50\%) = 77.8$$

This study is based on information retrieved from the PART website (www.expectmore.gov), which includes general information about PART, statistical summary data of PART ratings, and details about individual PART assessments.

Literature Review

Even before the PART was implemented in 2002, PART advocates began to predict the success of the forthcoming system. Frank (2002) stated that “the PART provides a better way for the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) to measure the effectiveness of federal programs because it introduces an open and understandable review process (p42).” Mitchell Daniels (2002), the former OMB Director, said that the tool made it possible to objectively compare the performance of one program to that of another. The new tool was another important step in the OMB’s work to add more details to the budget decision-making process, said Bruce McConnell, a former chief of information policy and technology at the OMB (Frank, 2002). Donna McLean, former chief financial officer at the Transportation Department, said the PART was a “work in progress,” but it would help agencies improve program performance over time (Frank and Michael, 2003). Former House Appropriations Committee spokesman John Scofield said “we actually think a performance-based budgeting is an excellent idea” (Perera, 2005b: 71).

Mullen (2006) stated that the PART had several successes, including helping structure and discipline the OMB’s use of performance information over a broad range of programs, questions, and evidence. The PART also made the OMB’s use of performance information more transparent in terms of public reporting of judgments and sources, including explicit recommendations to change management practices and program design in response to the PART findings. This, in turn, stimulated agencies’ interest in performance and budget integration and in improving evidence regarding demonstrating program results.

Newcomer (2007) stated that the PART process pushed managers to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of their programs and substantiate them with evidence. It underscored the need for managers to report on how they assessed evaluation studies and applied them to inform program planning and corroborate program results. The move from simply measuring outputs and outcomes of federal programs to attributing results to the programs presented a significantly different challenge with much higher requirements for analysis.

Empirically, U.S. General Accounting Office (2004a, 2004b) found a statistically significant relationship between the Presidents’s proposed budgetary increases and the PART ratings for all 234 programs assessed in fiscal year 2004, despite explaining only a small portion of the variation. The General Accounting Office reports showed that the PART ratings had no relationship with 27 mandatory programs, however, a positive and statistically significant effect on funding levels for 196 discretionary programs, suggesting that federal discretionary programs with better ratings were more likely to receive a higher level of the proposed budget.

Gilmour and Lewis (2006a, 2006b) studied the 2003 Fiscal Year budget, which was the first full budget cycle in the Bush Administration. They found that the PART ratings had an important influence on OMB’s budget decisions, specially the programs with higher PART ratings received large budget increases. The impact seemed to be greater for small and

medium-sized programs than for large programs. However, the “results” component of the PART contributed less to budget decisions than other elements of the total PART score. Also, some evidence suggested that the PART ratings mattered more for “traditionally Democratic departments” than for other departments. They proposed that the PART was politicized to some extent. In short, they believed that the PART enabled the executive branch of the federal government to link program assessments to budget decisions, but that link still needed improvement.

Criticisms alleging PART’s ideological bias were common among practitioners. Its evaluations remained inconsistent in some cases and its ratings seemed to disadvantage certain programs such as block grants, and the tool’s application prompted unanswered questions regarding the validity of its program reviews (Brass, 2004; Radin, 2003, 2006; Singer, 2005). “Focusing on performance generally has not been good politics,” said Clay Johnson, the former OMB’s deputy director for management (Perera, 2005a). The OMB somewhat opaquely referred to staff “knowledge of the programs” and “professional judgment” (Breul, 2007a; U.S. OMB, 2002).

Most scholars also did not hold a positive expectation of the PART. Donlan (2006, 2008) questioned whether the OMB’s evaluation was valid and believed that the institutionalized obstacles which foiled the Hoover Commission in the late 1940s, the Grace Commission in the early 1980s, and the “Reinventing Government” in the 1990s also obstructed the PART. Dull (2006) stated that even though the PART “is ambitious and carefully crafted, (but) ... doomed (p. 187).” Moynihan (2005) applied dialogue theory in analyzing the ambiguity of performance information and related resource allocation choices. He illustrated a variety of ways in which different individuals could examine the same program and came to different conclusions about performance and future funding requirements. Moynihan criticized the finding in the U.S. General Accounting Office (2004a, 2004b) and Gilmour and Lewis (2006a, 2006b) because their finds had limitations with the nature of the available data by using the change of the budget and failing to consider the funding constrains.

Research Question

Most previous studies on the PART were limited to discussion of theory. Some empirical studies in the PART (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2004a, 2004b; Gilmour and Lewis, 2006a, 2006b) were conducted when the PART was under implementation with limited data. Now that the PART has ended, it is a suitable time to evaluate the PART itself with more data. This study considers the following question: did the PART rating impact the program’s congressional appropriation?

Methodology

The effects of the PART ratings are examined in a multivariate regression model. The criterion in designing the regression model is to include the tested determinants, which were declared statistically significant to influence federal budget decisions in previous studies, including U.S. General Accounting Office 2004a, 2004b, Gilmour and Lewis

Table 2: Data Description and Sources

Variable	Description	Source
Δ Appropriation	Percentage change in appropriations from previous year (inflation adjusted)	www.expectmore.gov
PART	PART rating	www.expectmore.gov
Program Size (PS)	Dummy variable for program size. Small and medium size is 1 (less than \$500 million), and large size is 0 (more than \$500 million).	www.expectmore.gov
Program Type (PT)	Dummy variables for program types. 7 dummy variables are created in the model. (Mix program is dropped to create the dummies.)	www.expectmore.gov
Δ Lobbying Amount (LA)	Percentage change in lobbying amounts after PART evaluating (inflation adjusted)	The databases of the Senate Office of Public Records (2008b) and the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives (2008b)
Δ Staff Number (SN)	Percentage change in staff number in FTE from previous year in the evaluated program	The Federal Employment and Compensation of the Analytical Perspectives of the Budget of the U.S. Government (U.S. OMB 2004-2008)
Divided Government (DG)	Unified government (2004-2007) is 1, and divided government (2008) is 0	U.S. Senate (2008a) and U.S. House of Representatives (2008a)
Partisanship (PA)	Dummy variable for partisanship. Program in a Democratic agency is 1, and program in a Republican agency is 0.	Gilmour and Lewis (2006a and 2006b)
Earmarks (ER)	Dummy variable for earmarks. Program in bureaus with earmarks is 1, otherwise is 0.	The Office of Management and Budget website (U.S. OMB 2008), Congressional Research Services (fas.org), and Citizen Against Government Waste (cagw.org).

2006a, 2006b. The multivariate regression model is

$$\Delta \text{ Appropriation} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PART} + \beta_2 \text{PS} + \beta_3 \text{PT} + \beta_4 \Delta \text{LA} + \beta_5 \Delta \text{SN} + \beta_6 \text{DG} + \beta_7 \text{PA} + \beta_8 \text{ER} + \varepsilon$$

The primary data for this study were gathered from the OMB PART website, www.expectmore.gov. Among the 1004 programs listed in the fiscal year 2009 PART worksheet, some programs were no longer funded, some had been re-evaluated, and some budgeting reports were not available. In total, 977 data were valid in this study.

Table 3: Data Descriptive Statistics (Dummy variables are excluded)

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Δ Appropriation	7.51%	75.19%	-1	11.1
PART	65.63	18.7	10	100
Δ LA (appropriation in millions)	2,643.80	19,712.20	-917	505,062
Δ SN (in FTE)	78.9	136.2	1.1	671

The data were tested with the basic ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model first. Since the data used in the model cover multiple years and programs, they are panel data. Panel data sometimes exhibit correlation of regression disturbances over time or between subjects which violates assumptions on no autocorrelation and homoskedasticity. This study uses the Wooldridge test for checking serial autocorrelation and the Breusch-Pagan test for checking the presence of heteroskedasticity.

Table 4: OLS Regression Model output

Variable	OLS Estimation
PART	0.08 (0.33)
Program Size	
Small & Medium (0,1)	-3.11 (1.16) ***
Program Type	
Block/formula grant (0,1)	1.93 (2.06)
Capital assets & service acquisition (0,1)	6.33 (2.54) **
Competitive grant (0,1)	4.45 (2.22) **

Credit (0,1)	-1.9 (6.98)	
Directed federal (0,1)	6.02 (2.34)	***
Research & Development (0,1)	4.21 (2.50)	*
Regulatory-based (0,1)	5.12 (2.31)	***
Δ Lobbying Amount	0.00 (0.00)	*
Δ Staff Number	0.33 (0.12)	***
Divided Government (0.1)	0.09 (0.04)	**
Partisanship (0,1)	1.66 (1.33)	
Earmarks (0,1)	0.02 (0.06)	***
Constant	30.11 (40.32)	*
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Autocorrelation	0.03 (0.85)	
Heteroskedasticity	46.36 (0.00)	
<u>Adj. R-squared</u>	<u>0.13</u>	

- Note: 1. Level of Significance (two-tail)* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01, # p<.0001;
 2. Figures in parentheses are standard errors;
 3. Serial correlation is tested by the Wooldridge test and p-value is in parenthesis.
 4. The Breusch-Pagan test for heteroskedasticity is based on basic OLS and p-value is in parenthesis.
 5. In “Program Size”, “Large program” is dropped to create a dummy variable. In “Program Types”, “Mix program” is dropped to create dummy variables.

In Table 4, the Wooldridge test does not show that autocorrelation exists in the data set; however, the Breusch-Pagan for heteroskedasticity indicates that the hypothesis of constant error variance is rejected. Since ignorance of heteroskedasticity leads to biased statistical inference, this study uses estimated general least square (GLS) (Wang, 2008) and heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC) standard error estimate (Hayes and Cai, 2007) to correct heteroskedasticity. The HC estimate contains four methods, HC0, HC1, HC2 and HC3, which differ in how those squared residuals are used in the estimation process. All four methods generate very similar outputs. Hereby, only HC3 output is listed in Table 5.

Table 5: GLS Model and HC3 model output

Variable	Estimation	
	GLS	HC3
PART	0.06 (0.02)	0.04 (0.05)
Program Size (0,1)		
Small & Medium	-6.89 (2.44) ***	-4.47 (1.72) ***
Program Type		
Block/formula grant (0,1)	1.95 (2.17)	5.02 (4.00)
Capital assets & service acquisition (0,1)	5.89 (2.01) **	7.38 (3.59) **
Competitive grant (0,1)	4.90 (2.12) **	6.78 (4.01)
Credit (0,1)	-2.01 (6.81)	-10.70 (6.98) **
Directed federal (0,1)	5.97 (2.03) ***	7.51 (3.12) ***
Research & Development (0,1)	4.66 (2.89) *	6.21 (4.67)
Regulatory-based (0,1)	5.58 (2.01) ***	9.45 (4.53) **
Δ Lobbying Amount	0.00 (0.00) *	0.00 (0.00)
Δ Staff Number	0.33 (0.12) ***	0.92 (0.14) **
Divided Government (0,1)	0.02 (0.00) **	0.00 (0.00)

Partisanship (0,1)	0.87 (0.56)	1.11 (1.98)
Earmarks (0,1)	0.06 (0.05) ***	0.00 (0.00) **
Constant	10.60 (3.53)	18.26 (6.89)
Adj. R-squared	0.96	0.11

Note: 1. Level of Significance (two-tail)* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01, # p<.0001;

2. Figures in parentheses are standard errors;

3. In “Program Size”, “Large program” is dropped to create a dummy variable. In “Program Types”, “Mix program” is dropped to create dummy variables.

Discussion and Limitations

From the Table 5 outputs we find that although both models show a positive relationship between the PART ratings and change in appropriation, the impact is far from being statistically significant, with p-values equal to 0.7363 and 0.6131, respectively. This means that not enough empirical evidence was found to indicate that program appropriation was impacted by the PART ratings. The result is disappointing but it matches many scholars’ expectations. Performance-based budgeting sought to link performance measures to resource allocations, but such links were often weak (Moynihan, 2003). Past budget reform failed to significantly influence the budget decision process in part because Congress rarely used the information in the Congressional authorization and appropriations processes (Blöndal et al., 2003).

The PART could be regarded as an extension of the long-lasting normative budget reform attempt by the federal government. Because the PART was a Presidential initiative that focuses on the budget process in the executive branch, few appropriations staff members used it in their decision-making process. Some members of the appropriations committees believed that the PART impinged Congressional authority (Gruber, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) so most lawmakers depended on the traditional budget justification documents for resource allocations and paid little attention to the PART ratings. Moe (1987) argued that myopic focus on the market ignores essential elements of politics and values that were essential to public administration because public administration could not be a value-neutral doctrine (Waldo, 1948).

Why was it difficult to implement performance-based budgeting? One reason is that budgeting is inherently political and legislators are reluctant to cede their budgetary discretion to a “rational” performance-based budgeting system. But the Government Performance Project found other reasons legislators were often reluctant to use performance measures. Distrust of performance data prepared by the executive branch led

many states to create or extend a performance auditing function to verify data. In addition, legislators were less likely to use performance measures if they were not involved in creating the measures. Thus some states were increasingly involving legislators in choosing such measures.

By most counts, more than half of all U.S. cities collect performance measures of some type (Cope, 1987, 1992; GASB & NAPA, 1997; Poister and Streib, 1994, 1999). Although many states said that they used this data at some level, there was no standard definition or process for what it entailed. The link between performance measures and resource allocations was weak. Performance measures were not used systematically; rather, they were just one of many factors considered by legislators when approving budgets. Moreover, legislators were more likely to cite performance measures when they aligned with constituent interests.

“Under one scenario for performance-based budgeting, resource allocations depend on the previous year’s performance. In theory, then, agencies that achieve a large portion of their performance targets receive more funding, while agencies that perform poorly see their funding cut (Moynihan, 2003: 2-3).” But that usually does not happen. In its response to a 2001 survey by the Government Performance Project, the state of Hawaii offers an even more compelling reason:

When resources are limited or insufficient, the link between performance measures and resource allocations becomes blurred. Even if a program “performs well,” commensurate funding may not be forthcoming if it is considered a marginal function of government. Conversely, less cost-effective or “poorly-performing” programs may continue to be funded if these are “essential” government functions— such as education, welfare or prisons (Moynihan, 2003: 2).

Indeed, the legislators often take into account performance measures when poor performance outcomes are identified and tied to requests for *increased* funding. In Oklahoma, for example, the number of uninsured children was used as an indicator of health care access. Elected officials quickly determined that this number was unacceptably high and reallocated state funding from Medicaid — the U.S. government’s health care entitlement program for poor people — to target young children and pregnant women (Barczak, 2004).

In quantitative research, the selection of determinants in the regression model impacts the research output. In PART research, no unanimous agreement on the related determinants exists. Budgeting is a complex process. Many factors could influence the Congress appropriation. In this research, the author only adopted the determinants tested by the previous studies. The data integrity also impacts the outcome’s reliability. The data were gathered from the same resources to enhance the reliability of the analysis. In this research, the author mainly gathered the information from the official sources such as the OMB website. Some information, however, could not be found in the sole source such as the earmarks information. In this case, three sources were used. It was found that some information was different from one another.

Conclusion

By studying the relationship between the PART ratings and the program appropriation from 2004 to 2008, no significant result is available to support that the PART contributed to performance-based budgets. Such a result is predictable because of the obstacles in fulfilling performance-based budgets.

Like its ancestors, the PART brought about smaller scale changes than initially promised, in part because the federal political system was likely to militate against any kind of radical changes (Joyce, 1993a, 1993b). In a sense, however, if a promise of these reform efforts was a provision of information or methods that allowed budgeters to allocate resources in a better way, it was likely to be a continuous desire (Radin, 2006) since the continuous enthusiasm for the normative budget reforms were in part rooted in the lack of budgetary theory that was what V. O. Key (1940) sought and the lack of facts that was what Lewis (1952) tried to find (Melkers & Willoughby, 1998).

Although the PART did not reach the promised result, it brought the idea of performance measurement into the federal level and tried to apply the performance-based budget principles into the practice. On the plus side, this assessment tool helped establish the result-oriented evaluation in the public sector, assisted users in gaining experience in performance-based budget design and paved the path for future studies on normative budget theory.

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