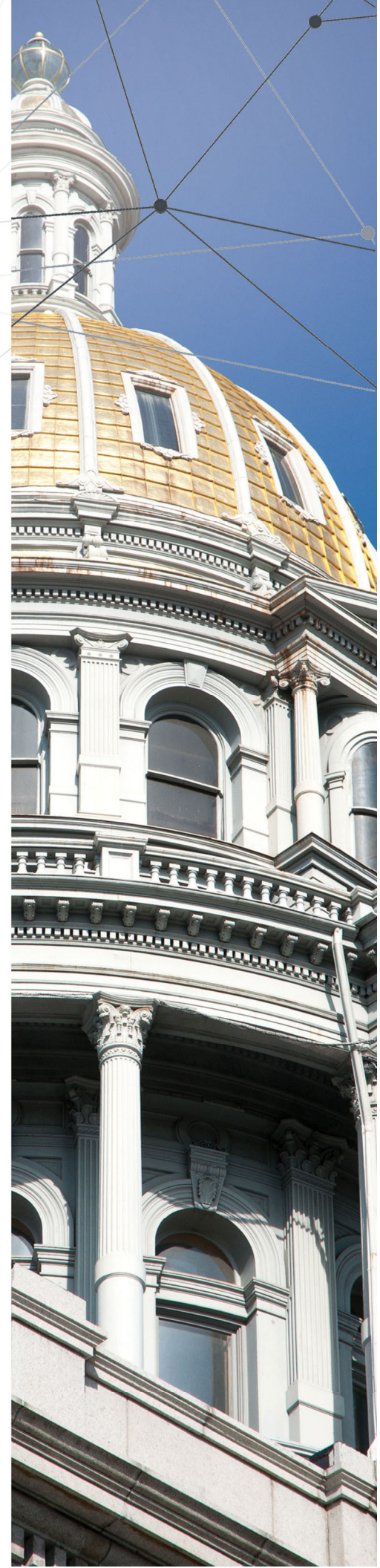




UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

COLORADO EVALUATION
AND ACTION LAB



Looking Back, Thinking Forward:

Leading Performance Improvement Initiatives in Colorado State Government

*Report One of a six-report series exploring the performance
improvement initiatives of the Hickenlooper administration*

Report Highlights:

Colorado's state government actively instituted and expanded efforts to improve government through performance management, process improvement, and talent development during the Hickenlooper administration (2011-2019).

For this report, 13 governmental leaders were interviewed, including Governor Hickenlooper and those who helped to shape and guide his vision for performance improvement.

Government leaders considering performance improvement initiatives can learn from Colorado's successes and challenges identified by interviewees.

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Abstract

Colorado's state government actively instituted and expanded efforts to improve government through performance management, process improvement, and talent development during the Hickenlooper administration (2011-2019). The administration's major performance improvement initiatives included: the SMART Government Act; the Governor's Dashboard; Lean process improvement; and the Performance Management Academy, among others. The efforts to make government "effective, efficient, and elegant," the so-called "3 E's," were guided by a focus on goals and results alongside a reinvigorated desire to better serve the state's diverse customers.

For this report, Report One in a six-report series exploring the legacy of the Hickenlooper administration's performance improvement initiatives, 13 governmental leaders were interviewed, including Governor Hickenlooper and those who helped to shape and guide his vision for performance improvement. Interviewees were affiliated with the governor's office, the lieutenant governor's office, the Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB), and various other departments. In addition, one interviewee was a former legislator involved in these initiatives.

Interviewees identified the administration's key successes, which included implementing Lean process improvement; investing significantly in human capital; and creating systemic alignment around strategic goals. Interviewees also noted substantial challenges, which included difficulties in measuring and quantifying governmental activities; allocating limited resources to support the initiatives; and fostering and embracing cultural change.

It is clear that interviewees continue to embrace the potential value of performance management and process improvement initiatives. The focus on customers and performance is seen as natural and essential in a resource-constrained public sector with increasing demands for accountability and transparency.

Reflecting on the State of Colorado's experience, this report offers recommendations for government leaders considering performance improvement initiatives. Primarily, governments should leverage existing expertise, systems, and activities to either start or build upon performance improvement initiatives and focus on identifying effective and committed individuals to lead and elevate the work at all organizational levels. Recommendations for government leaders considering performance improvement initiatives suggest much can be learned from Colorado's experience.



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Related Research Reports

This study is part of a broader project looking at performance improvement initiatives in Colorado during the administration of Governor John Hickenlooper, 2011-2019. With this project, we play the role of outside observer looking back on the administration's performance improvement initiatives in order to document the experiences, elevate successes, identify challenges, and inform current and future public officials in Colorado and beyond. The following reports are all available on the website of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab at the University of Denver, which supported this work:

Report One: *Looking Back, Thinking Forward: Leading Performance Improvement Initiatives in Colorado State Government*

Report Two: *Making it Work (Better): Implementing Performance Improvement Initiatives in Colorado State Government*

Report Three: *Institutionalizing Performance: Colorado's SMART Government Act*

Report Four: *Public Display of Performance: The Governor's Dashboard in Colorado*

Report Five: *Leaning In: Lean Process Improvement in Colorado State Government*

Report Six: *Good Government in the States: Placing Colorado in the National Landscape of Performance Improvement Initiatives*

Note

Throughout the report, all quotations (if not cited) indicate a direct quote from an interviewee.

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Introduction

John Hickenlooper began his time as Colorado's governor pledging to "measure every aspect of our new administration to be sure it's doing what it's supposed to do."¹ After counting the 663 steps between Denver's City Hall, where he served as mayor, and his inauguration site at the state capitol, Governor Hickenlooper proceeded to bring his customer-oriented, business mindset to managing state government. Collectively, his efforts to renew public trust in government centered on performance improvement, which included strategic planning to measure and communicate progress toward established goals, operational process improvement, and developing and leveraging talent.

With this project, we play the role of outside observers looking back on the performance improvement initiatives and good government efforts of the Hickenlooper administration. This report, Report One of a six-report series, documents the experiences and perspectives of governmental leaders involved in these performance improvement efforts. The purpose is to elevate successes, identify challenges, and inform current and future public officials in Colorado and across the country.

"We will measure every aspect of our new administration to be sure it's doing what it's supposed to do."

- Governor John Hickenlooper

Interviews were conducted with more than a dozen leaders involved in performance improvement initiatives who helped shape and guide the governor's vision. Appendix A includes details on the data sources and methodology. Throughout the six-report series, we refer to the collective performance management and process improvement activities of a state as *performance improvement initiatives*. More narrowly, Poister, Aristigueta, and Hall (2014) define *performance management* as the "strategic daily use of performance information use by managers to correct problems before they manifest in performance deficiencies," and *performance measurement* as "the collection of data on key performance indicators."²

The report addresses the following topics:

- Underlying philosophy and principles of the performance improvement work;
- Primary elements and evolution of performance improvement efforts;
- Sources of ideas and promising practices;
- Activities with the greatest impact on making government work better;
- Challenges encountered during the design and implementation of the performance-oriented initiatives;
- Factors contributing to departments' engagement and success in performance improvement; and
- Advice to future state leaders, in Colorado and outside, about undertaking performance improvement initiatives.

While this report focuses on the perspectives of governmental leaders who launched and led performance improvement initiatives in Colorado, Report Two in this series focuses on the perspectives of the governmental staff responsible for *implementing* these initiatives, whose opinions sometimes diverge.



Together, these reports paint a clearer picture of the Hickenlooper administration's record of performance improvement initiatives.

Underlying Philosophy and Principles

According to state leaders, a data-driven focus on goals, outcomes, and results underlay the Hickenlooper administration's performance improvement work. Other prominent principles guiding the initiatives include making government effective, efficient, and elegant; focusing on the customer; aligning goals across the enterprise; and simply making government work better.

In his first State of the State Address in 2012, Governor Hickenlooper explained the "3 E's" that would guide the state's performance improvement efforts during his time in office by stating:

Effective. Let's measure every aspect of government to be sure it's doing what it's supposed to do. Let's look at outcomes to judge whether our programs are successful.

Efficient. Services should be delivered in ways that are timely and effective. We will review every program, identify waste and duplication and measure for efficiency.

Elegant. When I say elegant, I'm not talking about fashion—you can tell that, just look at me. I'm talking about the delivery of state services in a way that elevates both the state employee and the person receiving state services. When someone applies for a driver's license or inspection they shouldn't feel disrespected by the interaction, and neither should the state employee. This is the essence of customer service.¹

The administration's performance improvement efforts arose from the simple belief that government needs to work better to regain the public trust. When we interviewed Governor Hickenlooper, he told us about his motivation to enter public service:

It really was the overriding sense that people didn't believe in government, and if people don't believe in government, then it can never succeed. So this last 16 years has been one kind of organized, spiraling initiative to try and find the ways that people would believe in government.

Our discussions with state officials reinforced that awareness of the "3 E's" was high and served as a succinct way to capture the principles of the administration's performance improvement work. One interviewee captured the formative role of the "3 E's":

I think what has been great about this administration is that from the very beginning of taking office, the governor had those three words—efficient, effective and elegant...it was his attempt at getting to the customer piece and making what government does be realistic and human centric...it was all driving towards the vision of making government work better and transparent.

Interviewees, though, most frequently pointed to a data-driven focus on goals, outcomes, and results as a primary underlying principle of the state's performance improvement efforts. Table 1 presents an ordered list of these principles identified by state leaders when asked about the "primary underlying principles and



philosophies of the state's efforts." A former legislator pulled together a number of the commonly mentioned philosophies when stating that:

With really good performance-based management, you get really clear focus, and you get alignment up and down the entire system...state government for too long has been this idea where bureaucracy is about rules and regulations, not about how do we deliver for customers. And this is supposed to, hopefully, shift that mentality.

Table 1: Themes in Primary Philosophies and Principles Identified by Interviews

(1) Data-driven focus on goals, outcomes, and results	Most Common
(2) 3 E's (effective, efficient, elegant)	Common
(3) Customer orientation	
(4) Alignment	
(5) Make government work better	
(6) Accountability	Less Common
(7) Transparency	
(8) Restore public trust in government	
(9) Culture change/continuous improvement	

Note: The order of the rows represents the relative frequency of response with the first row indicating the most common principle, rows 2-5 capturing commonly mentioned principles, and rows 6-9 capturing those mentioned repeatedly but less often. Principles with only a single mention were omitted.

Other prominent principles guided the administration and often reflected the "3 E's" including a strong orientation toward all customers, whether state residents, businesses, local governments, the federal government, or other state departments and employees; careful alignment of goals, from the governor's office to departmental executive directors to front-line employees delivering services; and simply making government work better. A former state official clearly expressed the focus on the customer:

...in the end, it all sort of boils down to the customer. We felt like that was our one innovation in doing this, at a state level, the customer was our one innovation, and that one thing that you could get every single employee to rally around. Everybody has a customer, everybody sits across the table or on the other end of the phone, or on the other end of an email from somebody who is receiving a service. We felt like we could get people to rally around the concept of: if you serve that one person better, more efficiently, more effectively, give them what they actually need, then, as a government, we could achieve some of the larger things that people get into government to achieve in the first place.

Another interviewee described how alignment around goals is essential to improving performance:

One of the things that has been important to us...is to make certain that all of it is aligned. All of the work that we do. So, what's the governor's priorities? What are our priorities? What are our funders', federal government, and others' priorities? What are the needs of our clients? How do we develop measures that we can manage to and utilize? And then, how does all of that then connect to our budget proposal, legislative proposals, our program development, etc.? And making certain that all of it is aligned.



A secondary group of principles reflected the need for state government to be accountable and transparent to its many stakeholders. Being accountable and transparent were often associated with effective means to increase public trust in government. A department executive director commented:

This 'effective, efficient, elegant' mantra, I mean, that was the vision that [the governor] put out there, that this is what government should be. And the perception is that it's not. And so how do we do both? How do we make it that way, and then also get the public to perceive it that way?

Finally, the need to develop a lasting culture of continuous improvement in state government was perceived by some to underlay their work. The objective, according to one interviewee, was to create “a much more innovative culture, and one where you give departments more flexibility to be able to find innovative ways to solve problems.”

It is expected that the leaders involved would be able to speak clearly about the underlying philosophy, principles, and purpose of these initiatives. Results from the state employee engagement surveys of front-line staff, described in detail in Report Two, highlight how these principles did not always resonate with staff involved in the performance improvement initiatives.

Evolution, Primary Elements, and Sources of Ideas

The administration's early years focused on building a foundation for the later initiatives, while the evolution of performance improvement work reflected the administration's changing personnel and resource availability. Peer governments, popular management books, and professional experiences of state officials informed and shaped the initiatives in the three areas of performance management, process improvement, and talent development.

We have described the underlying, intangible principles and philosophies that guided the performance management efforts of the Hickenlooper administration. This section details the tangible elements, or what was actually done, of the performance improvement work and how they evolved over time. Pew Center on the States' Government Performance Project provides a baseline from which to examine Colorado's emerging performance improvement system. According to the 2008 State Management Report Card, Colorado received a “C+” overall grade. More telling is that four of the five weaknesses identified were Strategic Direction, Budgeting for Performance, Managing for Performance (all in the Information category), and Training and Development (in the People category).³ Only 14 states received a lower grade than Colorado's “C” for the Information category, which lagged the average state's grade of “B-” within this category.

Performance improvement work rarely begins with a blank slate. The Hickenlooper administration started with a statutory requirement for implementing a performance management system under the State Measurements for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent (SMART) Government Act, detailed in Report Three. The associated annual performance plan requirement for departments began in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012-13.

The effort to improve performance also built on recent precedent, as the previous administration, under Governor Bill Ritter, “vowed that we would do things differently in state government; we would find more effective and modern ways to do business.”⁴ Governor Ritter introduced the Colorado Government



Efficiency and Management (GEM) Performance Review in May 2007. The GEM Review used ideas for improvement from state employees and an inter-departmental team to oversee the effort. The GEM Review resulted in 91 recommendations across the areas of Working Smarter and Saving Money, Going Green to Conserve Dollars, Controlling Health Care Costs, Improving Public Safety, Improving Efficiency Through Information Technology, Improving Customer Service, and Improving Collections and Recovering Funds. The estimated impact of the recommendations in 2008 was a financial saving of \$205.4 million over five years. While the GEM Review was effective in identifying cost saving opportunities, the review was a discrete project and did not focus on creating a system to support performance management or a culture of continuous process improvement.

Evolution of Performance Improvement Efforts

As interviews demonstrated, change is hard and time-consuming. Leaders agreed that the performance improvement work evolved throughout Governor Hickenlooper's time in office. In many cases, the early years of the administration focused on building a foundation for the later initiatives, whether addressing adverse findings in financial or performance audits, seeking additional flexibility in personnel administration, or upgrading information technology systems at the department level to provide the needed data for making daily operational decisions. The evolution of performance improvement work reflected the changing personnel and resources available throughout Hickenlooper's two terms. Based on the administration's activities and conversations with key actors in the initiatives, it is clear that the accomplishments and progress around performance improvement would look starkly different if Governor Hickenlooper had been limited to a single term. As one leader discussed:

Henry [Sobanet, Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB) Director], Roxane [White, Chief of Staff to the Governor], and the governor collectively got the boat in the water. It was with the idea of 'let's do some things that will be important for moving our work forward, for measurement, for goals, for goal setting, etc.' And so they built those three pieces [performance management, process improvement, talent development]. I don't think if you ask them, they would say, 'Oh yeah, we were building a high performance government system. And there is going to be 10 programs under each one and ultimately look like this.' I think that's the way it had to evolve, because there is no cookie cutter, every-state-should-just-do-this approach.

Elements and Activities of Performance Improvement Initiatives

During the second term, officials in Lieutenant Governor and Chief Operating Officer Donna Lynne's office served as the central leadership team designing, guiding, and overseeing performance improvement initiatives. The performance team grouped the state's performance improvement efforts into the three areas of 1) performance management, 2) process improvement, and 3) talent development, which are "the three ways that we've continued to build out the vision that Governor Hickenlooper first started with efficient, elegant, and effective." The three areas are far from mutually exclusive, which is believed by interviewees to be a strength of the work. Broadly speaking, each category of activity was anchored by a specific initiative. According to a key leader in the efforts:

In many ways, the SMART [Government] Act fits under performance management—it is defining goals, and having specific measures that we track that drive performance. The Lean program fits under operational improvement—it's providing tools to front-line and mid-level managers to actually drive improvement that matters to them and to customers. And the [Performance



Management] Academy fits under talent management—it's actually training people to do the things that we've asked them to do.

The elements most commonly identified by interviewees are presented in Table 2, categorized by primary focus of the activities and discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Table 2: Inventory of Performance-Oriented Activities by Category⁵

(1) Performance Management	SMART Government Act -Setting Goals -Strategic Plans -Budget Link to Performance Governor's Dashboard/Vision 2018
(2) Process Improvement	Lean Program (SOLVE) -Lean Champions Regulatory Reform -Pits and Peeves -Cut the Burden
(3) Talent Development	Performance Management Academy Lean Fellows Talent Challenge Tom Clements Better Government Award Employee Engagement Action Plans and Surveys Amendment S (Personnel Reform)

(1) Performance Management

Performance management activities centered on meaningful and productive compliance with the **SMART Government Act**, detailed in Report Three. As mentioned, the adoption of the SMART Government Act preceded the Hickenlooper administration, but was extensively revised with guidance from OSPB and the administration's leadership in 2013. In practice, departments created annual performance plans with actionable goals, typically one- and three-year goals, alongside metrics to gauge progress. These plans were available to the public online. Measuring outcomes, setting goals, and creating plans were the most common responses given to capture the performance-related activities of the administration. As one former elected official observed:



Setting goals and measuring against those goals and monitoring are the benchmarks of and keys to any performance management. I think Hickenlooper has tried to do that more than any other administration. So, having clear measurable goals has probably been the biggest thing, and then getting departments to really work on simplified strategic plans. I think there's too many times where people do strategic plans that are a hundred pages and go on a shelf.

Quarterly and annual reviews of the performance plans were conducted by the executive team with regular meetings to discuss progress and challenges taking place between department executive directors and the Chief of Staff to the Governor in the first term, and later with the Chief Operating Officer. The performance plans served as the basis for the SMART Government Act hearings where department executives report out to the General Assembly's committees of reference on the department's plan, regulatory agenda, and budget request including related legislative agenda.

The "measure everything" mantra aligned well with the revised SMART Government Act requirements. Even though the individual department performance plans and evaluations are public-facing, they are siloed and fail to provide a friendly and simplified view of how the state is performing on key priorities. The **Governor's Dashboard** detailed in Report Four, also referred to as Vision 2018, attempted to address these issues by summarizing performance of state government across the areas of Economic and Infrastructure Development, Environment and Energy, Health, Quality Government Services, and Workforce Development and Education. Quarterly metrics review meetings were held to monitor progress with the final dashboard of Governor Hickenlooper's tenure including 23 goals and 61 metrics across the priority areas.

(2) Process Improvement

Process improvement was largely synonymous with the application of the **Lean** methodology for the state's leaders, detailed in Report Five. Lean is an approach to process improvement popularized by Toyota's experience in reducing manufacturing waste. Colorado began active use of Lean in 2011 and later branded the work as SOLVE, a "five-step common-sense approach to understanding problems and doing something about them."⁶ The SOLVE acronym represents the five steps of the approach: 1) **S**cope the Opportunity, 2) **O**rganize the Resources, 3) **L**ean It!, 4) **V**erify the Impact, and 5) **E**nsure Sustainment, but state employees continue to refer to the approach as Lean. The applied problem-solving focus of Colorado's adoption of Lean is apparent from the following explanation by a former OSPB official:

So we started with Lean, we started with the idea...that government improvement is going to come through the empowerment of people at the line level to fix problems with a consistent set of tools that have been proven to work, but also fix the problems that they knew existed, that they can see existed, and that centered really around their customers.

Lean activity received a boost early in the administration from an infusion of \$2.5 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 funds that provided the resources to train employees, hire consultants, and implement projects. OSPB established a network of employees, named **Lean Champions**, as points of contact for process improvement work in each department and for sharing information across departments. Between October 2011 and June 2013, OSPB helped administer 81 projects.⁷ From 2011 to 2019, nearly 1,200 projects were completed or in progress across 20 departments and offices.⁸ According to interviewed leaders, the goals of process improvement using Lean never included the threat of job loss even when efficiencies were identified through projects. However, Report Two details that staff did raise this concern.



Throughout the administration, and especially prominent early on, interviewees noted that regulatory reform improved processes through streamlining interactions with the public, whether individuals or businesses, and reducing unnecessary rules. In 2014, Governor Hickenlooper highlighted the reform work noting that, “through a state-wide effort called **Pits and Peeves**, we have also reviewed, modified or repealed nearly 11,000 state rules—many of which were redundant and flat-out dumb.”⁹ Subsequently, Governor Hickenlooper claimed that these regulatory reforms “saved businesses nearly eight million dollars and over two million hours” in 2017 alone.¹⁰ The reform efforts, spearheaded by the Department of Regulatory Agencies, made early stakeholder engagement in rulemaking and continuous review of rules the norm in state government. As of November 2017, more than 24,000 rules, 92% of all state agency rules, had been reviewed with 6,500 modified and 4,500 repealed.¹¹

(3) Talent Development

The third category of performance improvement efforts, talent development, supports the other two and is deemed essential for creating lasting changes in performance management and process improvement. Interviewees directly and indirectly showcased the prominence of good people driving positive organizational change. The annual **Performance Management Academy** became the centerpiece for talent development focused largely on department leadership. The six-day training program covered a range of topics at the heart of performance management and process improvement including Operational Excellence, Customer Focus, Strategic Planning, Operational Planning and Evaluation, Lean Process Improvement, and Implementation and Culture. According to one interviewee instrumental in launching the Academy:

What bothered me so much was that if you go based on revenue, the state of Colorado was Fortune 100 with no systematized management training or leadership cultivation...I just thought it was shocking that if you're going to try and do efficient, effective, elegant, you have to train your senior leaders in some kind of common language. And so, we started this Performance Management Academy, and I think it ended up being a time to come in and learn the basics of strategic planning, the basics of Lean, how to do this SMART Act stuff, create a common language so that when you're talking to each other you know what you're doing.

The well-received training, assessed in part by high net promoter scores used to measure participant satisfaction, reached around 75 people each year and was later replicated by some departments in an effort to broaden and deepen employee exposure to the content. Notably, the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) offered its own four-day Academy “to build the leadership capacity of 2nd and 3rd line leaders”.¹² The training efforts satisfied the SMART Government Act requirement to train leadership in a continuous process improvement methodology, like Lean. An estimated 3,000 employees, or roughly 10% of the state’s workforce of about 30,000, trained in Lean as of the end of FY 2016-17.¹³

The Academy enabled the state to train key employees and senior executives in performance measurement, Lean process improvement, and evidence-based policy making. Some leaders in the Hickenlooper administration viewed the Academy as a major achievement of the state’s efforts.

Separately, the creation of the **Lean Fellows** program allowed the expertise and skills of employees to be leveraged beyond their individual departments, while simultaneously recognizing and honoring the good work of the Fellows. The Fellows served as informal consultants and resources to departments and staff interested in undertaking process improvement projects.



A more recent initiative to scale up equipping employees with the skills needed to undertake performance management and, especially, process improvement projects is the **Colorado Talent Challenge**. The Talent Challenge, announced in late May 2017 and funded with \$500,000 in matching funds, integrated rudimentary performance contracting into the request for proposal. The external trainers receive increased compensation, up to 20% more, if pre- and post-surveys reflect established benchmarks of improvement in participant and supervisor perceptions. Departments apply for a 50% match from the governor's office for employees to participate in Lean training delivered by two private firms, Government Performance Solutions and Honsha.

State leaders repeatedly highlighted the need to publicly recognize the successes in performance management and process improvement efforts. Such recognition contributes to a culture of continuous improvement. The semi-annual **Tom Clements Better Government Award**, for example, acknowledges “the work of individuals and teams who elevate the performance of state government, resulting in significant impacts upon customer service and great performance outcomes.”¹⁴

The Hickenlooper administration also instituted a biennial **employee engagement survey** in 2011, focused on the satisfaction of employees in working for the state and retention concerns. The survey results at the department level served as the basis for action plans to address priority areas of concern. The surveys covered dimensions that reflected the administration's focus on performance management, work process, customer focus, and innovation. Moreover, the surveys captured the work environment and whether employees had adequate leadership, teamwork, skills, opportunity, engagement, involvement, and resources to be successful in their daily activities. Indices comprised of related questions were created to represent each of Governor Hickenlooper's goals of efficiency, effectiveness, and elegance in government and allowed progress to be tracked over the course of the administration (see Report Two for more details).

In the first term, the administration successfully helped modernize parts of the state's **personnel system** at the ballot box. Attracting and promoting talent in state government was the goal of pushing for a more flexible personnel system. According to interviewees, the passage of Amendment S removed Colorado's personnel rules from the Constitution, making them easier to update, and provided some discretion in hiring and rewarding employees based on merit. Governor Hickenlooper made the magnitude of the changes to the personnel system apparent when explaining the historical context in 2013:

*After 11 failed attempts over 40 years—and with the help of former Govs. Bill Owens and Bill Ritter, the General Assembly, and in partnership with state employees—Colorado voters passed Amendment S...finally bringing the state's outdated personnel system into the 21st century.*¹⁵

Administration Priorities

The prominence of these performance improvement activities within the Hickenlooper administration can be viewed through the governor's inaugural and annual State of the State speeches. Table 3 presents the performance-related topics covered in each speech. General themes of “good government” were raised in all but one speech, while the public focus on regulatory reform waned in the later years of the administration after Colorado emerged from the Great Recession. Personnel reform for greater flexibility to attract and retain talent employees was a clear priority during the first administration with the passage of Amendment S by voters in November 2012 serving as the watershed achievement. Process improvement using the Lean approach garnered consistent attention from 2012 to 2014 with the



governor calling attention to the number of projects taking place in addition to highlighting specific projects. The governor's initial pledge to "measure everything" explicitly resurfaced in his speeches with the introduction of the Governor's Dashboard in 2017.

Table 3: Prominence of Government Performance in Governor Hickenlooper's Major Speeches

	Inaugural Speech	State of the State Speech				Inaugural Speech	State of the State Speech			
	2011	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015	2016	2017	2018
Good Government (3 E’s, customer-focus, innovation)	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Regulatory Reform	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Personnel Reform and Talent Development			X	X	X	X				
Process Improvement (Lean)			X	X	X					X
Measurement and Governor’s Dashboard	X								X	X

Hickenlooper's final State of the State speech in 2018 revisited the impact of regulatory reform ("We cut or modified almost half of our rules and regulations."); measurement ("And we measured our progress on everything that matters."); Lean process improvement and talent development ("We trained thousands of employees who completed 600 LEAN process improvements"); and more general good government ("We're one of the most innovative and transparent state governments in America. My mother used to say: 'use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without!' Those are pretty good words for a state to live by.").¹⁶

It is clear that Hickenlooper's focus on performance improvement was paramount, and his commitment translated to the leadership level of his administration. The extent to which his commitment translated beyond the leadership level to the staff and implementers of these initiatives is discussed in detail in Report Two.

Sources of Ideas and Promising Practices

The ideas that informed the state's performance management and process improvement work came from a variety of sources discussed by interviewees. Leaders looked to other governments and national organizations for practices to emulate or tailor to the Colorado context. Early exposure of key personnel to Denver Health's successful use of Lean under Dr. Patricia Gabow was a catalyst for embracing the process improvement methodology at the state level. As one interviewee described the moment:

I will tell you, I joined that effort [observing Lean at Denver Health] a little bit skeptically, not fully understanding how you take factory improvement efficiency, and bring that into bureaucracy. So it was five days and, not too far in, the light bulb kind of went off around 'Oh, you can learn a lot from this and bring it into bureaucracies.' Customer focus, standardizing work, just doing things



'better, faster, cheaper'...So we came back from that very excited, and there was ARRA [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009] money left over...to do good things with.

Beyond Denver Health and Governor Hickenlooper's work as Mayor of the City and County of Denver, the experiences of Governor Dannel Malloy in Connecticut, Governor Bill Haslam in Tennessee, and Ken Miller, Missouri's Director of Performance Improvement, were looked to during the first term including some staff-to-staff exchanges. Later, the State of Washington's use of metrics, goals, and analytical capacity in the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Michigan's data dashboard and strong employee engagement, and Indiana's data analytics proved influential, as detailed in Report Six.

Intertwined with looking outward for ideas and practices related to performance were the past professional experiences of the people in Colorado's state government, whether in the administration, the departments, or General Assembly. As previously noted, the foundation of Colorado's performance management ethos was made permanent in 2010, with passage of the SMART Government Act, detailed in Report Three. This preceded Governor Hickenlooper's tenure, but the legislation reflected lessons learned by a sponsor from experience working on the President's Management Agenda, implemented by George W. Bush, and the Act was revised extensively with the support of the administration in 2013. Governor Hickenlooper's past as a business owner and tenure as Mayor of the City and County of Denver, which overlapped the Great Recession, provided a pragmatic orientation toward reducing regulations and maximizing efficiency.

At the department level, Executive Director Reggie Bicha and Director of the Office of Performance and Strategic Outcomes Melissa Wavelet's history developing KidStat at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families was leveraged to establish CDHS's C-Stat performance management system. Other executives brought a comfort with business philosophies to departments from their previous private sector experiences, including to the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). As the Governor's Dashboard was being assembled, one department leader reflected on the parallel with their own federal government experience where they were "working for OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and helping the first time we ever implemented a scorecard with federal agencies and watching that transformative behavior, that friendly competition among agencies."

As OSPB took the early lead in performance efforts prior to the centralized role of the lieutenant governor's office, it benefited from looking inward and taking advantage of the experience of state employees who had previously worked in departments, like the Department of Public Safety and Department of Revenue, with reputations for effective performance management programs. The naming of David Padrino as Colorado's first chief performance officer in 2015 and Donna Lynne's dual roles of lieutenant governor and chief operating officer beginning in 2016 infused the administration with individuals comfortable with management philosophies regardless of sector.

Indeed, many of the underlying principles and philosophies of the administration's performance improvement work came from the private sector via consultants, appointed staff, and popular books on management practices. During Governor Hickenlooper's first term, Chief of Staff to the Governor Roxane White would read management books and pass along a select group to the governor for his own reading. Ultimately, these books contributed to how the cabinet approached their new roles. White joked that executive directors were not always thrilled to receive management books as holiday gifts, but the books, including *Managing Transitions: Making The Most Of Change* (William Bridges), *The 4 Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals* (Chris McChesney, Jim Huling, and Sean Covey), and



Who: The A Method for Hiring (Geoff Smart and Randy Street), reflected the priorities of supporting successful change management, establishing an outcome-focused organization, and attracting and developing talent.

In interviews with state officials, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* (4DX) and the work of Ken Miller (*Extreme Government Makeover: Increasing Our Capacity To Do More Good* and *We Don't Make Widgets: Overcoming the Myths That Keep Government From Radically Improving*) were most frequently mentioned as influential sources of ideas for the state's performance improvement efforts. The focus of 4DX on setting wildly important goals, or WIGs, aligned with the performance planning required under the SMART Government Act and reflected an outcome-focused and data-driven orientation. The writings of Ken Miller, referred to by one former state official as "the patron saint of all things performance," were especially admired for respecting and elevating the government worker and making sure performance measurement and reporting are more than just exercises in "kabuki theater." Another interviewee summarized the blend of ideas that shaped Colorado's unique performance improvement efforts, commenting, "We went our way and our way was Lean, 4 Disciplines of Execution, and Ken Miller. Those would be our inspirational philosophies."

Although Colorado benefited from the ideas and experiences of others, the state's visibility in performance improvement was elevated through both its own activities and Governor Hickenlooper's time as the National Governors Association (NGA) Chair (2014-2015). In that role, he selected *Delivering Results* as his NGA Chair initiative.

Successes, Challenges, and Advice

State leaders reported that process improvement projects using Lean methodology had the greatest impact on Colorado's government performance and identified effective department leadership as a primary source of differentiation in successful performance improvement outcomes across agencies. Despite an array of measurement difficulties challenging Colorado's performance efforts, leaders continue to embrace the potential value of performance improvement initiatives.

State leaders were interviewed regarding the successes and challenges of designing and implementing performance improvement initiatives in Colorado under the Hickenlooper administration. Based on their experiences, interviewees shared the factors they believe contribute to the successful implementation of performance improvement activities at the department level. Interviewees were also asked to provide advice to future government leaders, both within Colorado and outside, about undertaking performance management and process improvement initiatives.

Successes

A majority of interviewees pointed to the process improvement projects implemented using Lean methodology as having the greatest perceived impact on improving government. Aside from the sheer number of projects, some leaders believe that Lean methodology empowers employees to continuously better their work process for customers and themselves.



For some, using Lean methodology to drive the performance improvement envisioned in strategic plans is the critical contribution of the administration's performance efforts:

Our 'aha moment' was to take Lean and process improvement stuff to improve the processes of your strategy goals. No one had ever combined the two, to our understanding. So you can just run around and do Lean projects, but what's really cool is if you pick our most important work and...you take Lean and apply it to that. So the [Performance Management] Academy ended up trying to connect those dots for people: take Lean toolkit and apply it to your processes that drive your performance plan. That was the 'aha moment' of our unified work.

Although not universal, a few interviewees believed that initially going wide with Lean, meaning supporting projects across an array of departments, generated non-threatening examples to be emulated in the future and exposed a larger number of employees to the methodology.

Training and talent development followed as the next most frequently mentioned successful performance improvement initiative. The interviewees argued that talent development initiatives have an outsized impact on operations and culture, particularly in service-intensive organizations like state government:

Human capital is one of your biggest, if not the biggest, asset in a services organization like government. So, we're being strategic with our human capital; there's a lot of room for improvement there for governments.

Strategic plans and the planning process at the department level also reportedly impacted the quality of government. Practices contributing to this impact include the establishment of a smaller number of key goals ("If you're not focused, you're not doing anything well, you're just too many masters, and it pulls you in too many directions."); alignment of goals within departments and across state government ("We found a way to do strategic plans that are connected to people's daily work."); as well as improvement in the plans themselves over time ("And now they take pride in them [performance plans], their strategic goals and performance measures that they're excited about, or their employees know about, they have color, really, people can look at them and want to read them."). Leaders also identified the shift to a stronger customer orientation and regulatory reform as influential activities in improving state government.

Factors Contributing to Successes

Colorado's state government was described by one leader as "a conglomerate of conglomerates." Uneven adoption and implementation of the administration's performance initiatives might be expected given the range of services provided by state government through its diverse departments. We asked the state leaders if there were differences in performance improvement across the departments and about the sources of these differences. Three departments, CDHS, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and CDOT were consistently raised in interviews as exemplars of different aspects of the administration's performance improvement activities. For example, C-Stat at CDHS focused on performance measurement and monitoring, while CDPHE and CDOT embraced process improvement through Lean. Interviewees lauded the performance efforts of an additional eight departments and offices.

State leaders presented a wide range of reasons for the uneven rollout of performance initiatives at the department level, but the most common responses fall into two categories. Foremost, the success of performance management and process improvement work hinged on department leadership. A strong



leader who recognizes the need for performance improvement and prioritizes the work is critical to success. Changes in leadership during the administration provided interviewees with anecdotal evidence to support this belief. An interviewee explained the importance of a department leader promoting the performance efforts by example:

...this stuff has the potential to be sort of fluff. Somebody can say, 'Look, I'm too busy trying to figure out how to build roads and highways, or address the upcoming flu season, or education, or whatever the case may be.' And so that was always the wastebasket excuse for not participating or taking on something like this. So, I think it's all about making sure that the leaders, the executive directors of the departments especially, value this as core to your work and then help lead it. Because if I didn't, it would be easy and quick for everyone else below me to say, 'yeah, it's not important to [the director], it's not important to me.'

Regardless of the quality of leadership, the degree of success, or progress, made in a department's performance improvement efforts still depends, in part, on the nature of the department's work. Some departments provide more easily measured services directly to customers, while others lack direct control over their broad or difficult to quantify outcomes of interest. This notion is captured in the following interviewee response:

...potholes and DMV licensing and that sort of stuff is quite process and procedural and that's much easier than, obviously, obesity and opioid use. That stuff gets back into the individual choice and behaviors, which is harder to measure or harder to change.

Departments, in some cases, receive external funding or oversight from the federal government or professional associations with existing performance and reporting requirements. These departments already measured and reported on performance and were more likely to have dedicated staff and resources for such activities distinct from the administration's initiatives.

Challenges

According to interviewees, the foremost challenges encountered during the design and implementation of these performance-based initiatives related to measurement of government activities. Leaders acknowledged the difficulty quantifying some important activities of state government, the tension between the quality and quantity of measures used to gauge performance, and the conundrum of critical public outcomes simply falling outside of the control of specific departments. The following responses from different state leaders are representative of these measurement difficulties:

...one challenge is how we measure and how often we measure. For example, health things take a little bit longer to change or to evolve.

When they started out, they tried to measure everything. And they thought that was the huge success story...I went to one of their briefings...and they presented 84 PowerPoints with 84 lines. And it was overwhelming so that, when I came back, I said, 'they don't know how to measure that three or four indicators that matter and go from there.'

There's a number of measures where we said, 'Well, we'd like to improve a social condition or an environmental condition over which we have very little control.'



Limited resources, in the form of people, time, and money, significantly challenged the performance improvement initiatives. Lack of a continuous source of funding limits making long-term plans and training employees, as performance improvement regularly competes with other priorities for budget dollars:

That's the other challenge, most of these efforts are funded by one-time dollars. It's hard to get legislators to want to fund good government when their constituents care about roads and bridges, schools.

Both the governor's office and the departments reported a shortage of people with adequate dedicated time to direct and support the performance work. In some departments, the performance improvement demands suffered not due to lack of effort, but because "none of this is part of anyone's job." At the executive level, the performance initiatives were led and staffed by a small group of individuals:

And so all those programs...were led, run, facilitated, and managed by never more than five total people. And that was me spending half time on this...A couple of those staff were kind of borrowed from other places in some ways...And so a lot of the stuff, we just kind of—nights and weekends!

Leaders identified culture change as a broad challenge experienced during the performance improvement work. Motivating people to do things differently and convincing employees that the intent of performance management and process improvement is not punitive serve as barriers to change. One interviewee captures the need for continuity to establish a lasting performance orientation in state government:

I think having eight years under this has been one of the keys to having success, because you need long term so that the culture within departments changes enough. A lot of people, when governors come in or executive directors come in, because I've been in departments, it's a 'I will wait you out, and then when you're done, I will go and I will do what I'm going to do and I don't care what you're saying.' And having a consistent, long stretch of 'this is important, this is going to be what we do' then filters down, changes the culture, and then, as that culture changes, when a new administration comes in, there is resistance to changing that because that is the new norm and that is a good thing.

Detailed reactions to the culture change from staff and implementers are described in Report Two.

Advice to Government Leaders

Colorado's leaders had no shortage of advice for current and future government leaders, both within Colorado and outside, about undertaking performance management and process improvement initiatives. These recommendations are discussed in order of prominence across the interviews we conducted. The most common advice is to "do it" if you are not currently engaged in performance improvement efforts and "keep at it" if such work is already underway, because the experience is "worth it":

My advice is this: The pressure to prove your worth to the public is not going away. In fact, it is multiplying all the time. What am I getting from you people and what are my taxes paid for? So if you believe that accountability is going to be a feature of your administration, you have to do something like this.



For incoming administrations, there was a plea to build on the existing performance-oriented activity in government:

Don't throw out what's happened before, because, you know, a lot of government doesn't change when new leadership comes in, but look at it and see if there's ways to make it better or change [it].

The second most frequent advice is the need for executive leadership and a clear vision supporting performance initiatives. In Colorado, this meant that the governor cared about these efforts and played an active role in their establishment. One interviewee mentioned how reporting out on a process improvement project with the governor in the room elevated the importance of the work. Similarly, the executive directors at the department level set the tone:

In government, unlike the private sector, you have one advantage, which is you have a greater sense of mission...in the private sector, I might be able to say, if we hit our goal around profitability, or membership, or gross, I'll give everybody a 10% raise. But I can't say that in the public sector. So for me, it had to be more around what else can I give you, a sense of belonging, a sense of inclusion, better communication, or leadership skills. So, there were a lot of soft things that I had to marry to my drive to make sure that we performed in a way that was aligned with the budget and the vision of the governor.

Broadly speaking, earning employee buy-in and changing the existing culture to be performance-oriented were recommended. Engaging individuals throughout government, listening to the experts, and reducing silos across departments were suggested strategies:

And if you want to make a meaningfully sustainable change, that has to happen from the inside of the organization, not from the top down...there is a very, very real perspective amongst bureaucrats and state government, that if something is coming down from the top that they don't like, they're just going to outlast it. So, if it comes down from the top, and it doesn't acknowledge the inherent strengths that exist throughout all of state government, and the intimate knowledge of their customers, the intimate knowledge of their processes, the intimate knowledge of what makes success in government hard, then you're going to turn off all of the people who you rely on to make a meaningful change.

Advice less frequently touched on the need for resources to carry out meaningful performance improvement. This is counter to the common use of performance management and process improvement as responses to increasing fiscal constraints or crisis, where the goals are to simply cut costs while minimizing service disruptions. The leaders mentioned investing in people, providing dedicated resources for the initiatives, and recognizing upfront that performance improvement is time intensive.

Conclusion

Interviews with state leaders involved in Colorado's performance initiatives highlighted the efforts to improve government through performance management, process improvement, and talent development during the Hickenlooper administration. Interviewees emphasized that these efforts to make government effective, efficient, and elegant, the so-called "3 E's," were guided by a focus on goals and results alongside a reinvested desire to better serve the state's diverse customers. This report reflects the



perception and viewpoints of the individuals instrumental in designing and leading these initiatives from 2011 to 2019, but the following takeaways are clear:

- **Performance Management:** The administration helped revise and establish the groundwork for future state officials to embrace the performance management activities required under the SMART Government Act. The Governor's Dashboard emerged in the second term as a focal point, both internal and external, of performance management work with an eye toward improving transparency to the public about the state's achievements and shortfalls.
- **Process Improvement:** Process improvement, using the Lean methodology, entered the vernacular and skillset of many state employees, while projects proliferated despite irregular and limited availability of additional financial support for such work. Widespread regulatory reform literally rewrote the rules of government with an eye toward cutting the burden placed on both customers and government employees.
- **Talent Development:** Thousands of state employees received training on process improvement methodology, while the Performance Management Academy served as a tool to level up the skillset and network of state executives. The training empowers staff with tools to make government work better in the present, but the approach also supports developing a culture of continuous improvement expected to pay future dividends. In addition to developing talent internally through training, the administration made efforts to recognize the accomplishments of employees through awards and fellowships and attract and retain high-quality employees through personnel reforms. Not to be overlooked is the decision to conduct a biennial employee engagement survey tied to the goals of the administration.
- **Successes:** Based on the interviews, the process improvement projects implemented using Lean methodology are perceived to have the greatest impact on government performance in Colorado. The use of Lean methodology in conjunction with the state's performance planning process is considered a novel contribution to government performance management systems. Other impactful efforts were the training and talent development, serious use of department performance plans with a small number of priority goals, and a strengthened customer orientation.
- **Factors Contributing to Successes:** Interviewees repeatedly identified effective department leadership as a primary source of differentiation in performance management outcomes. Also important is the nature of a department's services, which cannot be overlooked when setting expectations and planning for improvement.
- **Challenges:** Highlighting the complexity and diversity of government outcomes, an array of measurement difficulties surfaced as a primary challenge to Colorado's performance efforts. Limited and inconsistent resources, in the form of people, time, and money, constrained the level of activity at the executive and departmental levels. Shaping the culture of state government to focus on customer service and continuous improvement was raised as a lingering challenge, although more so upon introduction of these initiatives in settings where they were perceived as potentially punitive.
- **Advice:** Colorado's leaders continue to embrace the potential value of performance management and process improvement initiatives. Despite some challenges, they urge other government leaders to engage in similar efforts. The focus on customers and performance is seen as natural and



essential in a resource-constrained public sector with increasing demands for accountability and transparency. Governments should leverage existing expertise, systems, and activities to either start or build upon performance improvement initiatives. Effective and committed leadership might seem like a stock piece of advice, but getting the right people to lead performance work elevates the efforts at all levels of government. The outsized influence of specific individuals on the success of the initiatives surfaced regularly in the interviews and reinforces the importance of developing, attracting, and retaining talent.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, government leaders in Colorado and elsewhere can learn from the successes and challenges of the performance improvement initiatives championed under Governor Hickenlooper's tenure.



Appendix A: Data Sources and Methodology

Qualitative Interviews

Officials from the lieutenant governor's office assisted in identifying a purposive sample of individuals involved in leading Colorado's performance management initiatives. The initial list suggested 19 individuals representing leaders who served in both of Governor Hickenlooper's terms, in key roles overseeing the work at the statewide and department levels, and in the executive and legislative branches. We ultimately conducted interviews with 13 of the 19 individuals using an interview protocol of 10 open-ended questions (see below). Interviewees were affiliated with the governor's office, the lieutenant governor's office, the Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB), and various other departments. In addition, one interviewee was a former legislator involved in these initiatives.

The 10 open-ended questions were as follows:

1. In your experience, what are the primary elements of the performance improvement initiatives of the Hickenlooper Administration (both formal and informal)?
2. What is/was your role related to these performance initiatives?
3. During this period, how would you describe the underlying culture, philosophy, or principles of the performance improvement work?
4. How would you describe the evolution of performance improvement during the Hickenlooper Administration?
5. Where did the ideas for the performance improvement efforts come from? Other states, national programs, individual champions within state government?
6. Which efforts or initiatives had the most impact in making government work better? How do you know?
7. What challenges have been encountered during the design and implementation of these performance-based initiatives?
8. Have some state agencies or programs made more progress than others?
 - a. Which are exemplars?
 - b. If there are differences in performance improvement, do you have any ideas why?
9. If you were providing advice to future state leaders, both within Colorado and outside, what would you tell them about undertaking performance management and improvement initiatives?
10. Who else should we talk to, in or outside of government about these programs?

We recorded and transcribed the interviews with these leaders, which averaged 37 minutes in length.



Following best practices for qualitative research, two members of the research team coded the interview transcripts to ensure inter-coder reliability. Themes in the responses were identified by each coder independently, along with representative quotations. These initial themed codes were transferred into the coding forms and consolidated across coders based on team discussions. The coding generated counts of themes raised by interviewees for each question. The frequency of mentions was used to gauge the importance of the themes in our analysis.



Endnotes

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