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Performance Management in the First Year of the Polis Administration

The Colorado Lab recently released a six-part series, [Learning from the State of Colorado's Recent Performance and Efficiency Initiatives](#) by Drs. Ely, Swann, and Teske at the School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado Denver. This follow-up report offers insight into Governor Polis's performance management approach.

Rebecca Arno

Chief Operating Officer, Barton Institute for Community Action

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For several years, leaders in Colorado government have focused on performance management initiatives as key to accomplishing their goals. With the election of Governor Jared Polis in 2018, the focus on accountability increased and his operations team launched an administration-wide strategy to boost performance management and government transparency. These efforts are already earning national recognition.

Colorado government leaders have been developing their focus on performance management and accountability over at least the past decade. In 2010, the Colorado Legislature passed the State Measurement for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent (SMART) Government Act. The SMART Act requires that departments create strategic performance plans that are shared with the public. The Act set the groundwork for the development of performance management efforts by both the Hickenlooper (2011-2019) and Polis Administrations.

The Hickenlooper Administration focused its efforts on the 3 E's – making government Efficient, Effective, and Elegant. A recent series of studies by the University of Colorado Denver, funded by the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, examined the performance improvement initiatives under this administration. <Available here – <https://coloradolab.org/projects/2019-projects/#copm>>

Given Governor Polis's background as a successful entrepreneur (companies he has launched include bluemountain.com and proflowers.com), it is unsurprising that he designed an administration focused on accountability and effectiveness. In the earliest days of his administration, Polis outlined his "Bold Four" goals:

- Fiscal reform that serves hardworking Coloradoans
- Set Colorado on a path to 100% renewable energy by 2040
- Reduce the cost of healthcare
- Implement free full-day kindergarten for all and expand preschool

Drawing inspiration from *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* (Covey, Huling, McChesney, 2012), Governor Polis created six cross-system cabinet working groups to address these goals as well as pressing issues related to cannabis, criminal justice, and rural Colorado. This approach guides teams to create structures and behaviors that focus on achieving results. The Administration's operations team, led by Director of Operations and Cabinet Affairs Tony Gherardini, is tasked with helping Cabinet members and their departments to turn the Bold Four into action.

First, the cabinet working groups set "Wildly Important Priorities" (WIPs). For example, the WIP related to fiscal reform is to foster an economy that benefits everyone and implement a cohesive economic development plan for rural Colorado. Gherardini and his team then worked with the Executive Directors of each Department to create "Wildly Important Goals" (WIGs)—performance metrics that are measurable and create what they describe as "a cadence of accountability." One



of the WIGs in the fiscal reform category is to increase the number of businesses in rural Colorado, and another is to increase high-quality childcare options in rural counties.

The operations team then led development of the [Governor's Dashboard](#). The Dashboard's purpose is to expand transparency and accountability, providing a summary of how the Administration is performing on the Bold Four and other high priority areas. It also offers a platform for sharing the department-level performance plans required by the SMART Act.

The Dashboard was a mammoth effort early in the Administration's tenure. Gherardini's team worked with Slalom Consulting and took the project from concept to roll-out in five months. The Dashboard offers online, real-time reporting of data that point to achievement of the Bold Four and their associated WIPs and WIGs. The effort has already earned national recognition. Results for America, a national organization that helps government officials use data-driven practices, recognized the Governor's Dashboard as the leading example in their "Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence" report for 2019.

Another key to performance improvement mandated by Colorado's SMART Act is support for staff professional development. The Governor's operations team is creating the Governors Professional Development Academy and the Governor's Executive Fellowship, with a focus on providing the skills public officials need to thrive in the performance-focused administration.

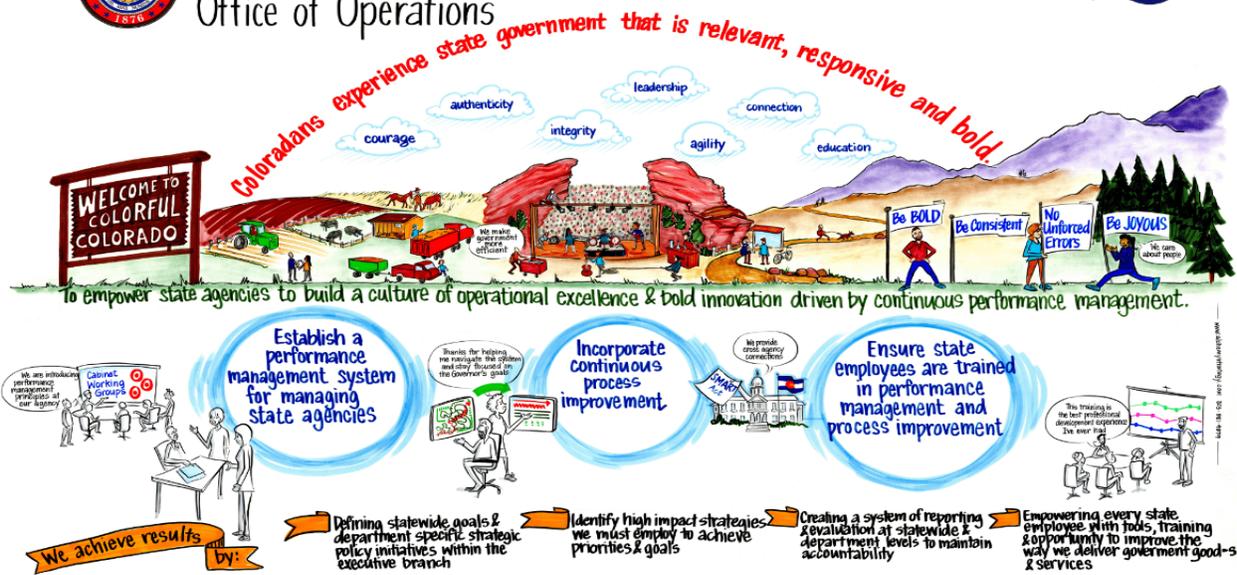
As a part of the Professional Development Academy, state employees will be able to earn certificates in Agile project management, Lean process improvement, contract management, and change management. The Contract Management certification for employees is a nationally recognized certification which is achieved after employees complete online coursework through Villanova University. Employees can also earn Product owner or Scrum Master Certifications through a statewide certification contract managed by the governor's office. All of these certifications come at no cost to the employee.

At the heart of this work is the Office of Operations. Director Gherardini is joined by Deputy Director Heather Velasquez and Operations Manager Hana Sayeed in serving as the flywheel at the center of the performance improvement initiatives throughout the administration. They provide in-house support and consulting to state agencies, with the mission of building a culture of operational excellence and bold innovation driven by continuous performance improvement.

In developing the approach for this small but mighty team, they collaborated with Alchemy Strategy's owner, Lois Todd, to develop the operations team's Cultural Roadmap, below, which helps convey to their state government colleagues the focus of the team's efforts.



COLORADO
Governor Jared Polis
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This focused approach is not without its challenges. Gherardini acknowledges that culture change within a huge, complex system the size of the state government can be daunting. He and his team believe that by investing at all levels and creating change agents within every department, they can achieve the bold results envisioned by the Governor, improving the lives of all Colorado residents.

Visit the [Office of Operations](#) website to learn more.