THE RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY™ GUIDE

The Results-Based Accountability™ Guide uses and is based upon concepts and materials developed by Mark Friedman, author of *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough* (Trafford 2005) and founder and director of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute.

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INTRODUCTION

01

What is Results-Based Accountability™?

Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA) is a disciplined way of thinking and taking action used by communities to improve the lives of children, families and the community as a whole. RBA is also used by agencies to improve the performance of their programs

How Does RBA work?

RBA starts with "ends" and works backwards, step-by-step, towards "means." For communities, ends are the conditions of well-being we want for children, families, adults, or the community. For example, ends could be "residents get and keep good jobs," "children are ready for school," or "our neighborhood is clean and safe." Ends can be even more specific than that, like "our public spaces are graffiti-free" or "our neighbors know each other." These types of ends are referred to as Results. For programs, ends are how our customers are better off when the program works the way it should. For example, an end for a program could be "% of people in the job training program who get and keep good paying jobs" or "% of children in our afterschool program with improved reading scores." These types of ends are referred to as "Performance Measures."

Why Use RBA?

RBA improves the lives of children, families, and communities and the performance of programs because it:

- Gets from talk to action quickly
- Is a simple, common sense process that anyone can understand
- Helps groups to surface and challenge assumptions that can be barriers to innovation
- Builds collaboration and consensus
- Uses data and transparency to ensure accountability for both the well-being of children, families and communities and the performance of programs.

What is the RBA Guide?

The RBA Guide includes a brief overview of the framework's most important ideas. You can use the RBA Guide to lead or facilitate a group in using the framework to improve decision-making. The RBA Guide is ultimately a road map to help you navigate the complete RBA decision-making process, step-by-step.

THE RBA "TURN-THE-CURVE" TEMPLATE

This template is an overview of the step-by-step RBA Turn-the-Curve decision-making process.

01 What is the "end"?

Choose either a Result and Indicator or a Performance Measure

02 How are we doing?

Graph the historic baseline and forecast for the Indicator or Performance Measure.

03 What is the Story Behind the Curve of the baseline?

Briefly explain the Story Behind the Curve (i.e., the contributing and limiting factors that are most strongly influencing the curve of the data baseline.

04 Who are partners who have a role to play in Turning the Curve?

Identify partners who might have a role to play in Turning the Curve of the baseline.

05 What works to Turn the Curve?

Determine what would work to Turn the Curve of the baseline. Include no-cost/low-cost strategies.

06 What do you propose to do to Turn the Curve?

Determine what you and your partners propose to do to Turn the Curve of the baseline.

STEP-BY-STEP RBA TURN-THE-CURVE PROCESS

The following is a step-by-step guide for conducting an RBA decision-making process to get from talk to action.

01 What is the end?

The starting point in Turn-the-Curve decision making is to identify the desired "end." First, determine if your end is:

(1) to improve the quality of life for a Population (Population Accountability)

(2) to improve how well a program, agency or service system is performing (Performance Accountability).[1]

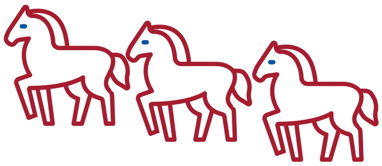
If the focus is Population Accountability:

- Begin by identifying a Population (e.g., all children in a specified county).
- Next, ask what quality of life or condition you desire for that Population (e.g., all children in our county enter school ready to learn). This statement is called a "Result."
- Finally, ask how you will measure whether you are achieving the Result identified in the previous step. For example, you could create a measure for kindergarten readiness assessment scores. These measures are called "Indicators."

To select an Indicator (shoot for 2 or 3 at the most) for a Result, use the following criteria:

COMMUNICATION POWER:

Does this Indicator communicate to a broad range of audiences? Would those who pay attention to your work (e.g., voters, legislators, agency program officers) understand what this measure means?



PROXY POWER:

Does this Indicator say something of central importance about the Result? Is this Indicator a good proxy for other Indicators? Data tend to run in a "herd" (in the same direction). Pick an Indicator that will tend to run with the herd of all of the other Indicators that could be used (so it is possible to use only 1 to 3 Indicators).

(1): Note: This distinction between Population and Performance Accountability allows two different assessments: first, what efforts and programs should be undertaken to achieve a desired quality of life or "Result" and, second, how well these efforts and programs are performing. This distinction also recognizes that a single program, agency or service system cannot take sole responsibility (or credit) for achieving a desired Result.

DATA POWER:

Is there quality data for this Indicator on a timely basis? To be credible, the data must be consistent and reliable. And timeliness is necessary to track progress.[2]

If you are focused on Performance Accountability:

- Begin by identifying the program, agency, or service system.
- Next, select a Performance Measure. There are three kinds of Performance Measures:
  - How much are we doing?
  - How well are we doing it?
  - Is anyone better off?

Appendix A describes the process for developing and selecting Performance Measures.

02 How are we doing?

After you have selected your Indicator or Performance Measure, present the corresponding data on a graph with:

A A historic baseline (a trend line spanning at least 5 years of data, if available).

B A forecast of what the trend line would do assuming there were no changes in your current level of effort (spanning 3 - 5 future years, if possible).

To provide the forecast, you will need to complete Step 3, the "Story Behind the Curve." Turn the Curve decision-making involves systematically determining the best actions to take to improve the forecast for the baseline - in other words, to Turn the Curve on the baseline.

(2): Note: If an Indicator is strong on the first two criteria, but data is not available, consider putting that Indicator onto a "Data Development Agenda."

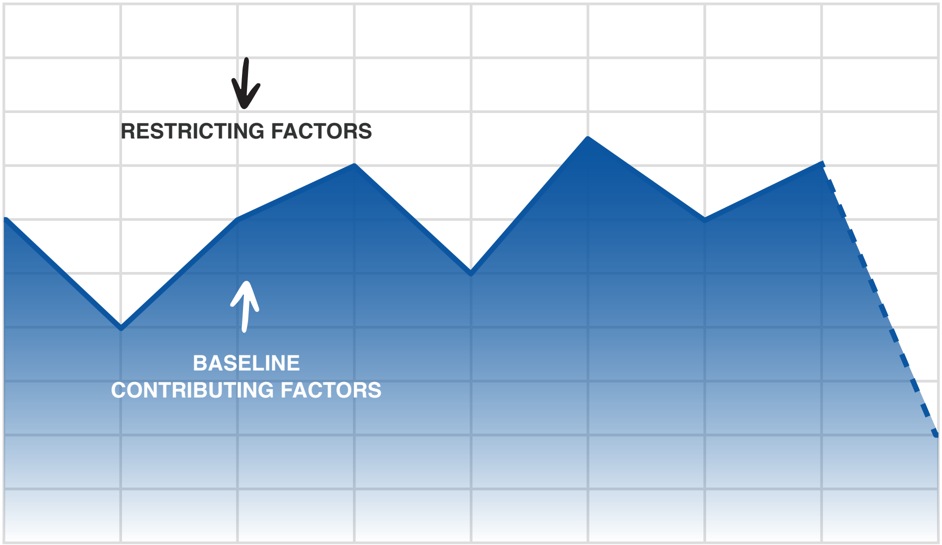
03

What is the Story Behind the Curve?

In this section, list the key factors underlying the historic baseline and forecast for the Indicator or Performance Measure. Identify: *(1) contributing factors that are supporting progress* and *(2) restricting factors that are hindering progress.* Progress is defined as Turning the Curve of the baseline (or accelerating the curve if it is already headed in the right direction).

FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

This "Force Field Analysis" illustrates how you can view factors according to their contributing and restricting influences on the curve of the baseline.



It is important to identify not just the most immediate and easily observed factors impacting the baseline (i.e., the "proximate causes"), but to engage in the kind of rigorous analysis that will identify the underlying or more systemic factors (i.e., the "root causes"). It is also important to conduct additional research where necessary and feasible.

Once you've identified the root causes, prioritize those root causes according to which ones are likely to have the greatest influence on progress. These causes thus become the most critical for you to address to improve progress.

The best format your Force Field Analysis is **bulleted list** that lists each root cause on its own bullet line with a brief underlined header and a brief description of the root cause.

04

Who are partners who have a role to play in Turning the Curve?

Identify potential partners who may have a role to play in improving progress. The identification of root causes impacting progress will often point the way to the types of partners you should engaged.

05

What works to Turn the Curve?

Before developing your strategy to Turn the Curve on the baseline, it is necessary to determine whether you know what will actually work to Turn the Curve. In this step, it is important to explore the full range of options for strategies. A strategy may involve the discontinuation of existing activities and the implementation of new ones. Your strategy should be multi-year and integrated.

The following are criteria to consider in developing potential options to Turn the Curve:

A *Does the option address one or more of the root causes you have identified?*

The alignment of a proposed option with its root cause provides the rationale for selecting that particular option. When selecting and prioritizing options, make sure there is a link between the "end" (as measured by the Indicator or Performance Measure) and the "means" (the strategy).

B *Is the proposed option evidence-based?*

In most cases you should support your strategy with research or evidence. Figure out what research or other evidence is available demonstrating that the strategy is viable and that it has a reasonable chance of Turning the Curve on the baseline. There may be times that data is limited or unavailable. In this case, move forward using your best judgments and those of experienced professionals.

C *Have "no-cost/low-cost" options been developed?*

Funding is often a critical need and you must give careful thought to ways to increase funding where needed. However, it is equally important to explore "no-cost/low-cost" options (i.e., options that may be pursued with existing resources). This line of inquiry, in turn, can help you surface outdated assumptions that stand in the way of innovation.

D *Is additional research necessary to determine what would work or to identify other options?*

When you identify needs for additional information, add it to a "Data Development Agenda" for ongoing attention.

06

What do we propose to do to Turn the Curve?

Selecting the proposed strategy involves applying four criteria to each of the options: leverage, feasibility (or reach), specificity, and values.

LEVERAGE:

How strongly will the proposed strategy impact progress as measured by the baselines?

Given that resources are finite, you must base your decisions on the dedication of resources to a proposed strategy on the expected impact of those resources on progress. One way to gauge impact is to assess the importance of the underlying root cause(s) each option is designed to address. In other words, the strategy that you propose should address the most important root causes identified. It will, therefore, be geared towards having the greatest potential impact on the trend for the corresponding baseline. This concept is sometimes referred to as "leverage."

FEASIBILITY (OR REACH):

Is the proposed strategy feasible?

Can it be done? This question is the necessary counterpart to the question of leverage. Questions of feasibility should be handled so as not to limit innovation. Sometimes the consideration of an apparently infeasible option will be the catalyst in the thinking process that leads to a highly creative and feasible option. Once you've adequately explored ways to improve feasibility, you must weigh leverage and feasibility and create a balanced strategy. A strategy that has high leverage and high feasibility will, of course, be a prime candidate for action. The choice among other options, however, will likely involve trade-offs between leverage and feasibility and will need to be weighed accordingly.

SPECIFICITY:

Does the strategy include budget details, including implications for future budgets?

The strategy options should contain budget details, including implications for future budgets. There should also be a tentative timeline at the very least, that answers "Who?", "What?", "When?", and "How?"

VALUES:

Is the strategy consistent with the values of the community and/or agency?

At this point, you've probably come up with a long list of options and strategies. Some low-cost, some no-cost. Some "off the wall." Consider the appropriateness of each option with respect to you organization's and community's values.

Once the proposed strategies are selected, list them in order of priority. The best format is a "bullet list" for each strategy with a brief header that is underlined and a brief description of the strategy.

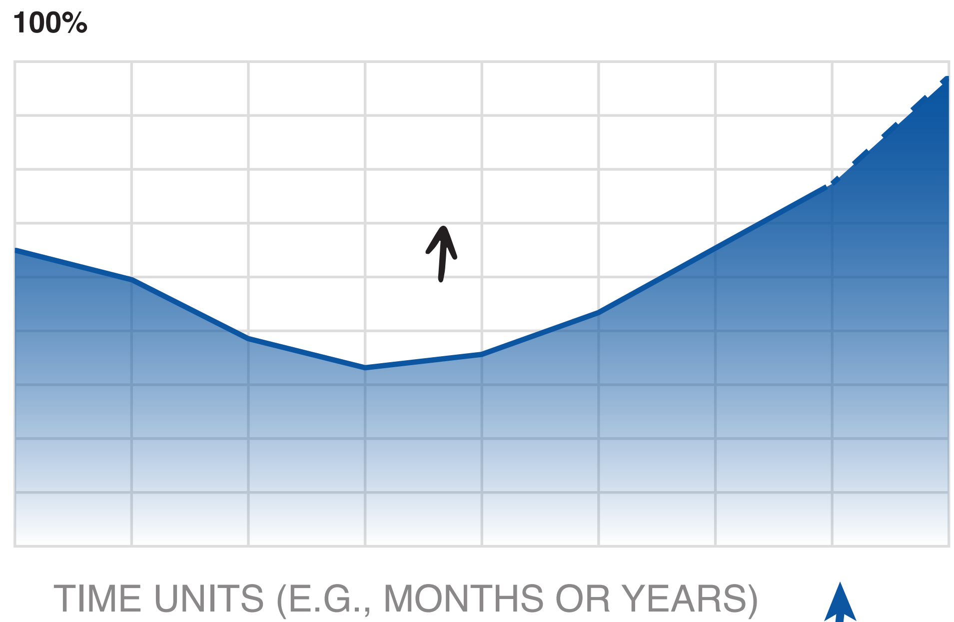
AN ACCOUNTABILITY TOOL

The “Turn-the-Curve” template is not meant to be used to produce a static document; rather, it is intended to be used as a tool. On an ongoing basis, in consultation with key partners, stakeholders should use the data to assess progress and systematically adjust strategies where necessary to improve progress. The following schematic, a succinct RBA reporting format, demonstrates the nature of this ongoing process.

Results-Based Accountability™

Result and Indicator or Performance Measure

Data presented as a graph, with both an historic baseline and a forecast.



STORY BEHIND THE CURVE

Key factors (positive and negative, internal and external) impacting progress (i.e., impacting the curve of the baseline).

WHAT WE PROPOSE TO DO TO IMPROVE PROGRESS

Feasible, high-impact actions/strategies with specific timelines and deliverables. Partners with roles to play in improving progress.

Monitor both implementation and the baseline for improvement and, as new data are obtained, repeat the process.

BOOST RBA IMPLEMENTATION WITH SOFTWARE

05

Now that your team has a better understanding of the elements and processes of RBA, you may be wondering how to get started or how you should store and monitor your Indicators and Performance Measures. If you're ready to start designing effective RBA measures, boost your RBA initiatives, get more organized, and optimize your results, you may want to consider utilizing a data management software system designed to support RBA.

Clear Impact Scorecard:

(Scorecard) is one data management solution available to you.

Clear Impact Scorecard is the only software system specifically designed to support the RBA implementation process from start to finish. It's based on decades of RBA implementation and consultation experience to make sure it contains the essential ingredients for success.

How Scorecard Supports RBA

Scorecard supports the entire RBA training and implementation process from start to finish:

- Organizes your data with adherence to the Population/Performance Accountability distinction.
- Allows you to make connections between different levels of accountability, roll up data into aggregates, or get more detailed views through disaggregated data.
- Supports transparency and accountability by allowing you to share data and Turn the Curve plans publicly.
- Guides you through the RBA Turn the Curve Thinking process for each measure.
- Contains built-in training and support to improve your RBA capacity and guide your practice.

01

Built-In RBA Training

Scorecard's features are optimal for organizations that already use RBA in their work, but it can also help those beginning to understand the framework. Internal training videos guide users through the most important processes of RBA and show you how to use the software to engage in each process.

02 Fosters Transparency and Accountability

The easiest and quickest way to communicate with donors, partners, funders, and the public effectively is through transparent visualization of data with your accompanying Stories Behind the Curve. To help you do this, Scorecard allows you to "embed" your data on your website (display your Scorecards within web pages). These embeds automatically update as you make changes in your account. Scorecard also supports public sharing via links that you can send via email and social media.

03 Supports the Population /Performance Accountability Distinction

Scorecard helps make this distinction clear by allowing you to look at your data on different "levels" while demonstrating connections between all levels. You will be able to look at your big-picture collaborative goals, strategies, and data or dive in deeper to manage the lower levels of accountability that contribute to your big-picture goals.

04 Collaboration

Data collection becomes more collaborative when you use Scorecard's Partner Connect feature to share data with other Scorecard users. Additionally, Scorecard allows you to have multiple users participating and using the system together to create and manage RBA measures. You can also assign actions to individuals, send email notifications, and track project completion through interactive progress charts.

05 Turn the Curve Action Planning

Scorecard has a built-in space to develop your Turn the Curve action plans. When starting with data analysis, you can factor in targets, measure polarity (do you want the measure to increase or decrease?), trend lines, forecasting, and baseline percentage change. Scorecard also provides editable note containers for each step of the Turn the Curve thinking process for each measure.

You can learn more about Scorecard, sign up for a demo, or create your first ten RBA measures for free at **https://clearimpact.com/scorecard**

APPENDIX A

Performance Measures

Introduction

The selection of Performance Measures is the first and most essential step in the performance planning process that corresponds to each element of your Population Accountability strategy. The following directions will assist you in choosing your headline Performance Measures.

What are Performance Measures?

Your agency/division/program provides services that improve, in some way, the quality of life of your customers/clients/constituents. Performance Measures simply give you the means to know how well the agency/division/program is doing at providing those services and improving those lives. A good Performance Measure gives you and your staff the ability to make changes and see whether those changes improve your performance, that is, your ability to improve customers/clients' quality of life.

Importantly, Performance Measures are data - they quantitatively measure the agency/division/program's performance.

Sorting Performance Measures: The Data Quadrant

All Performance Measures fit into one of four categories. The categories, the four quadrants, are derived from the intersection of quantity and quality and effort and effect.

The rows separate measures about effort (what is done and how well) from measures about effect (the change or impact that resulted).

The columns separate measures about quantity (of the effort or effect) from measures about quality (of the effort or effect).

The following Data Quadrant, Figure 1, is a useful tool for sorting and categorizing Performance Measures.

	Quantity	*Quality*
Effort		
Effect		

Figure 1

Figure 2 shows how these combinations lead to three universal Performance Measures:

How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off? The most important Performance Measures are those that tell us whether our clients or customers are better off as a consequence of receiving the services ("client Results," the lower left and right quadrants). The second most important measures are those that tell us whether the service or activity is done well (upper right quadrant). The least important measures are those that tell us what and how much we do. To answer the two most important questions – to identify candidates for the most important Performance Measures – take the following steps, using the Data Quadrant.

STEP: 01 How much did we do? *Upper Left Quadrant*

First, list the number of clients served. Distinguish different sets of clients as appropriate. Next, list the activities or services the department/division/program performs for its clients. Each activity or service should be listed as a measure. For example, "child welfare casework" becomes "# of child welfare cases" or "# of FTEs conducting child welfare case work." "Road maintenance" becomes "# of miles of road maintained." "Stream monitoring" becomes "# of stream sites monitored." "Provide health care" becomes "number of patients treated."

	Quantity	*Quality*
Effort	***How Much We Do*** How much service did we deliver? #Customers served # Services/Activities	***How Well We Do It*** How well did we do it? % Services/activities performed well
Effect	***Is Anyone Better Off?*** What quantity/quality of change for the better did we produce? #/% with improvement in: Skills Attitudes Behavior Circumstances	

Figure 2

STEP: 02 How well did we do it? *Upper Right Quadrant*

This quadrant is where most traditional Performance Measures are found. For each service or activity listed in the upper left quadrant, choose those measures that will tell you if that activity was performed well (or poorly). The measures should be specific. For example, these measures might sound like, "ratio of workers to child abuse/neglect cases"; "percent of maintenance conducted on time"; "average number of sites monitored per month"; "percent of invoices paid in 30 days"; "percent of patients treated in less than an hour"; "percent of training staff with training certification."

STEP: 03

Is anyone better off? *Lower Left and Lower Right Quadrants*

Ask “In what ways are your clients better off as a result of getting the service in question? How would we know, in measurable terms, if they were better off?” Create pairs of measures (# and %) for each answer. Four categories cover most of this territory: skills/knowledge, attitude, behavior, and circumstances (e.g., a child succeeding in first grade or a parent fully employed). Consider all of these categories in developing measures of whether clients are better off. Examples are: "#/% of child abuse/neglect cases that have repeat child abuse/neglect"; "#/% of road miles in top-rated condition"; "#/% of cited water quality offenders who fully comply"; "#/% of repeat audit findings."

Selecting Headline Performance Measures

The key to ensuring that your Performance Measures are useful is to limit the total number of measures you use. In most cases, you can select 3 to 5 “Headline Measures” from the list of candidate measures. Usually, headline measures will only include measures from both the upper right and lower right quadrants. To select these headline measures, rate each candidate measure using the following three criteria (these are similar to the criteria for selecting Indicators):

Communication Power:

Does this measure communicate to a broad range of audiences? Would those who pay attention to your work (e.g., voters, legislators, agency program officers) understand what this measure means?

Proxy Power:

Does this measure say something of central importance about your department/division/program? Is this measure a good proxy for other measures? For example, "reading on grade level" might be considered a proxy for other measures such as attendance, quality of the curriculum, quality of the teachers, etc.

Data Power:

Do you have quality data for this measure on a timely basis? To be credible, the data must be consistent and reliable. And timeliness is necessary to track progress. Rate each candidate measure “high,” “medium,” or “low” for each criterion. Use a chart, like the one shown below, “Selecting Headline Performance Measures.” The candidate measures that have high ratings for all three criteria are good choices for Headline Measures. For those measures that are rated high for communication and proxy power, but medium or low for data power, start a Data Development Agenda. These are measures for which you might want to invest resources to develop quality data that would be available on a timely basis.

Selecting Headline Performance Measures:

Directions: List candidate Performance Measures and rate each as High, Medium, or Low on each criterion: Communication Power, Proxy Power, and Data Power.

Who pays attention to your work?
Who watches what you do?

Would they understand
what this measure means?

Does this say
something of central
importance about
your department/
division/program?

Do you have
quality data on
a timely basis?

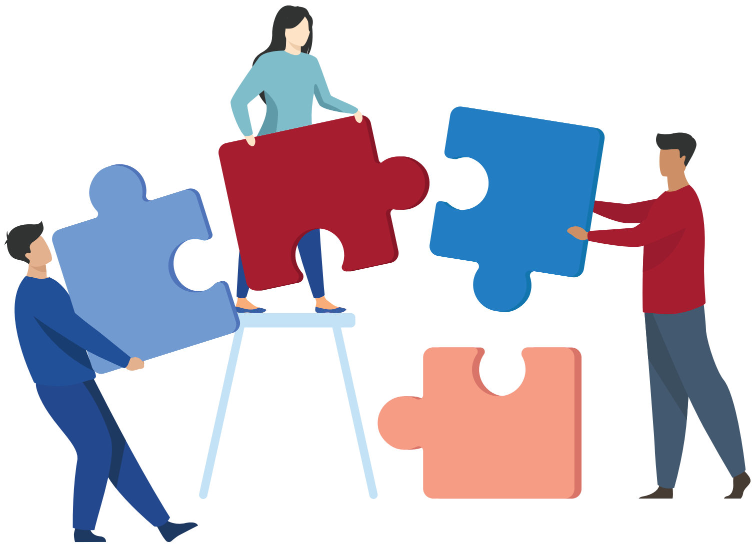
CANDIDATE MEASURES	COMMUNICATION POWER	PROXY POWER	DATA POWER
______			
______	H	H	H
______	H	H	L
______			

HEADLINE PERFORMANCE MEASURE

DATA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Learn More

We hope you found The RBA Guide to be a valuable resource on your journey to measurable results! You can learn more about how to effectively implement RBA at the following links:



RESOURCES:

- Access More In-Depth RBA Resources and How-Tos
- Become a Results-Based Accountability Certified Professional
- Access Turn the Curve Action Plan Examples
- Access a Sampling of RBA Success Stories
- Learn More About Virtual and In-Person RBA Training
- Create, Store, and Improve Your RBA Measures

CLEAR IMPACT
reach your peak