



EVIDENCE TOOLKIT

PerformanceStat

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What you need to know about PerformanceStat

- PerformanceStat is a leadership approach that uses ongoing, data-driven meetings with staff to identify key challenges, diagnose problems, devise solutions, and track results.
- PerformanceStat can be used by public agencies at the federal, state, and local level and by jurisdictions at the state and city level. Stat processes have primarily been used at the upper levels of organizations, but the approach can be applied to any level of management where performance data are available.
- PerformanceStat differs from typical check-in meetings between leaders and senior managers because of its data-driven approach and sustained focus on a key set of organizational metrics.

PerformanceStat is an approach to driving government performance that many leaders credit with significantly improving their organizations' results.¹ It can help leaders focus their organizations on results and build a culture of learning and improvement. It can also help staff identify and solve their most important performance problems or deficits by improving underperforming programs, refining program quality, and increasing bureau or program efficiency.

What is PerformanceStat?

At its core, PerformanceStat involves ongoing, regular meetings between leadership and agencies, bureaus, or departments. Participants review the trends of key performance measures and diagnose performance deficits, then decide how to fix those deficits. More broadly, the PerformanceStat process includes preparation for those meetings, the meetings themselves, and follow-up actions.

Critically, PerformanceStat meetings (stat meetings) are ongoing conversations rather than one-off events, and each meeting starts with updates on action items from the previous meeting. That continuity ensures that the focus remains on fixing specific performance deficits.

PerformanceStat has its roots in the CompStat approach used by the New York City Police Department in the 1990s. Since then, the approach has been adapted to a wide range of public sector settings, including [CitiStat](#) in Baltimore, the state of Maryland's [StateStat](#), and [HUDStat](#) and [FEMASat](#) at the federal level.² Some jurisdictions have created stat processes to tackle specific issues, such as [BlightSTAT](#) in New Orleans, which addressed blighted properties.

¹ For examples, see Robert D. Behn, *The PerformanceStat Potential: A Leadership Strategy for Producing Results* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2014).

² Bureau of Justice Assistance and Police Executive Research Forum, *Compstat: Its Origins, Evolution, and Future in Law Enforcement Agencies* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2013).

Although almost all public leaders have regular check-in meetings with their senior staff, many of these meetings simply review ongoing challenges and share updates. PerformanceStat does not replace those check-in meetings but creates a separate, purposeful forum for discussing results grounded in data and metrics. Each monthly (or quarterly, etc.) stat meeting for a particular bureau or topic covers a similar set of performance metrics, forcing the organization to focus on the same set of key organizational challenges until they are solved. Moreover, stat meetings involve a range of relevant staff, often including the leadership team of the department and its bureaus along with the chiefs of procurement, human capital, and information technology. This expedites the conversation because questions can often be answered on the spot. Finally, PerformanceStat meetings, unlike typical check-in meetings, are data-driven: the discussion draws on data to identify problems, monitor progress, consider fixes, and track improvements.

What key factors make PerformanceStat work?

The most important factor in making PerformanceStat a meaningful strategy is leadership engagement, which may involve the department's secretary or deputy secretary leading each meeting. An appointed stat director might also lead meetings, as long as everyone is aware that senior leaders are personally monitoring progress. Without clear, visible leadership engagement, PerformanceStat can easily turn into what public management scholar Robert Behn calls "MimicStat," a show-and-tell session that highlights good news but does not tackle tough issues.

Follow-up is another key factor. Every meeting starts with an update on progress for the action items agreed to in the previous meeting. This ensures that

SUCCESS STORY

HUDStat

HUDStat, launched by former Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan, is organized around HUD's key strategic goals. Rather than having separate offices present at the meetings, a common approach to PerformanceStat, meetings involve staff from different offices who are leading efforts around a particular HUD strategic goal. Meetings are led by the HUD secretary and involve pointed questions and frank discussion about performance metrics and problem identification, what staff are doing to improve results, and what next steps need to be taken. HUD links their regional officials into these meetings via videoconference.

One HUDstat meeting is conducted jointly with leadership and staff from the Department of Veterans Affairs and focuses on veteran homelessness, a topic that crosses federal department boundaries. Through HUDStat, HUD has identified local challenges and responded by streamlining its processes, resulting in increased housing voucher utilization that has helped curb veteran homelessness. "For the first time, in a very concentrated way, [we are] able to see the relationship between our investment in our programs and resources and the effect on our mission outcomes," noted Lisa Danzig, former HUDStat director.

participants address important organizational problems identified through the stat process *in every meeting* until they are fixed.

Although meetings are the most visible part of the PerformanceStat approach, much of the work is done between meetings and includes follow-up by bureaus and preparation by PerformanceStat analysts for the next meeting. Analysts brief stat meeting leaders on issues they may want to focus on and questions they may want to ask. In some versions of PerformanceStat, staff will alert bureaus as to what issues leadership will ask about, known as a “no surprises” approach. In other versions, bureaus need to be ready for any questions that might arise.

Stat processes have primarily been used at the upper levels of organizations (e.g., the head of a federal agency running stat meetings with subagencies), but the basic approach can be applied to any level of management where performance data are available.

What does it take to launch PerformanceStat? What design choices should be considered?

- **Data and analytic capacity.** Aside from the essential element of leadership engagement, the stat process requires data and analytic capacity. Those who have run stat programs recommend starting with the data you have and building from there. Once teams have access to data, staff must analyze the data and prepare department leaders. Depending on the size of the organization or the breadth of the project, this may involve one analyst or a whole team.
- **Structure and focus.** An important design choice in PerformanceStat is whether to frame meetings around particular bureaus, around priority topics that may cross bureaus, or both. For example, a federal agency could have monthly stat meetings with each bureau as well as quarterly meetings addressing particular department goals that span the organization.
- **Meeting frequency.** The frequency of PerformanceStat meetings is also an important organizational design choice. If meetings occur too irregularly, participants may put off follow-up work to focus on fighting immediate fires. Whether meetings should occur monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly depends on how quickly new data are produced and what makes sense for the issues and teams involved. In any case, the frequency of meetings must sustain the pressure on participants to address the issues discussed.

Does PerformanceStat need to be combative?

The answer here is a definitive no. This notion dates back to the New York City Police Department’s CompStat, known to be a combative atmosphere where police leadership would grill commanders about their results.

Today, PerformanceStat has been adapted in many settings, including the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' [KidStat](#), launched by then-Secretary Reggie Bicha in 2009. Meetings are calm and respectful and use a rectangular table designed to make the process more inclusive. Still, Bicha led each meeting by asking direct questions and made it clear that he expected follow-through and results.

A more appropriate description for some stat programs is competitive rather than combative, particularly if multiple offices (or different contractors) take part in the initiative. [JobStat](#) in New York City is run by the city's social services agency, the Human Resources Administration, and focuses on the performance of local welfare offices called Job Centers. At JobStat meetings, Human Resources Administration and Job Center leaders review each center's results, which include its rank among all centers on metrics such as job placement, measures of engagement, and timeliness of application completions. The rankings create a spirit of friendly competition between offices, improving performance and encouraging sharing among offices of useful practices and job leads for clients.³

What is an example of where PerformanceStat has led to measurable progress?

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu launched BlightSTAT, a stat process for managing blight eradication, in 2010. Landrieu established BlightSTAT to “monitor progress on meeting citywide blight goals” and “help identify what works, what doesn't, and what needs to change in order for the City to meet its goals.”⁴ In addition to its overall goal of reducing blighted properties by 10,000 by January 1, 2014, the city established several smaller goals, such as demolishing at least 100 highly visible blighted structures per month and inspecting 300 properties per week. [BlightSTAT](#) meetings enabled the city to monitor progress, address barriers, and adjust its strategies. The city's Office of Performance and Accountability prepared analyses for BlightSTAT meetings. Meetings were held each month in city hall and were open to the public, allowing citizens to ask questions and offer suggestions on how to improve blight reduction programs. By July 2012, after 35 BlightSTAT meetings, the city had removed 4,500 blighted units. In 2013, the city met its blight reduction goal.

How does PerformanceStat promote the use of evidence?

PerformanceStat is about performance management using real-time performance data rather than program evaluation using rigorous evaluation. That said, a stat process can help leaders assess the effectiveness of their strategies by regularly tracking results and encouraging new approaches when

³ The Human Resources Administration also ran VendorStat, which focused on welfare-to-work contractors—the nonprofit and for-profit organizations that provided employment services. Again, rankings allowed for direct comparisons across vendors, creating competition around helping welfare recipients become and stay employed.

⁴ Behn, *PerformanceStat Potential*, 96. This section draws on Behn's book as well as the City of New Orleans' [Blight Reduction Report](#) (New Orleans: City of New Orleans, 2014).

needed. Continuous improvement and monitoring is at the heart of performance management. Where this differs from rigorously measuring the effects of change through program evaluation is speed: PerformanceStat helps leaders make leadership and management decisions faster than most program evaluations can inform.

However, there are ways to integrate research evidence into a stat process, helping bridge the worlds of performance management and rigorous evaluation:

- Through a stat process, an organization might realize it is unclear how well a program is serving a particular demographic (e.g., elderly residents). Staff might use rigorous evaluation to determine how well the program is working for that population.
- As part of a stat process, a bureau may face a challenging target for improved performance in one of its programs. That might lead staff to undertake a rapid, randomized experiment to test out new approaches to service delivery.
- That bureau might also look to the research literature to find out what works and apply those findings.

In short, while stat processes focus mainly on performance measures, organizations can also benefit from building and using rigorous evidence and integrating that evidence into their stat process.

PerformanceStat in a larger performance-leadership context

PerformanceStat is one strategy within a broader set of useful practices for leaders.⁵ Other important practices include defining a clear mission for the organization, identifying the most consequential performance deficits the organization must tackle, and setting clear goals. In other words, leaders must make clear what success looks like. That “performance framework,” to use Behn’s phrase, can then be the foundation for a PerformanceStat approach an organization can use to drive results toward its mission and goals.

⁵ Robert Behn discusses useful practices in performance leadership in his report, *Performance Leadership: 11 Better Practices that Can Ratchet Up Performance* (Washington, DC: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2006).

Where can I learn more?

- Robert Behn provides in-depth information about the PerformanceStat approach in his book *The PerformanceStat Potential: A Leadership Strategy for Producing Results*.
- [A guide to running data-driven performance reviews](#) by Harry Hatry and Elizabeth Davies of the Urban Institute and published by the IBM Center for the Business of Government.
- The Penn Fells Institute of Government report *Smart Cities: PerformanceStat at 15* examines PerformanceStat's expansion among local and state governments.
- More than 10 audio interviews about different PerformanceStat processes are available from Andy Feldman's [Gov Innovator](#) podcast.
- More information about HUDStat is available in the HUD Evidence Matters article "[Tackling Veteran Homelessness with HUDStat](#)."



With support from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, researchers from the Urban Institute, Brookings Institution, American Enterprise Institute, and The Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative have formed the Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative. The Collaborative brings together researchers from organizations across the ideological spectrum to create tools to support evidence-based policymaking at the federal level. The Collaborative's work is assisted by an Advisory Group consisting of stakeholders throughout the evidence-based policymaking field. The opinions expressed in this brief do not necessarily reflect the views of all members of the Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative.