



# The Outcomes Bill:

## What It Means for Vermont's Mission-Driven Organizations

The Outcomes Bill was signed into law in June 2014. The first in the nation, the new Vermont legislation is designed to use evidence as the basis for state investments. The law will have an impact on state contracts with Vermont's mission-driven organizations and how Legislators view the budget-making process. We hope these materials will shed light on the history and resources to strengthen Vermont's culture of accountability.

*Developed by Benchmarks for a Better Vermont with the support of the Vermont Accountability Group, Marlboro College Graduate and Professional Studies, and Common Good Vermont. For more information contact Hillary Boone at [hboone@marlboro.edu](mailto:hboone@marlboro.edu).*

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## What is Results-Based Accountability?

There is a lot of buzz about Results-Based Accountability in Vermont's social policy circles these days. You may hear legislators, state agency staff, and nonprofit leaders discussing it in the halls of the State House. But what is RBA and what difference will it make for Vermont?

Results-Based Accountability is a framework for establishing "population level" outcomes— or big picture social goals— for policy makers, communities and coalitions. It is also flexible enough

to help nonprofit organizations and state agencies track their efforts and contribution to these goals. It asks three questions to measure the impact that programs and organizations are having: "How much did we do?" "How well did we do it?" and most critically, "Is anyone better off?"

Detailed by Mark Friedman in his book "Trying Hard is Not Good Enough" and field tested in Vermont since 1993, RBA has been used by the Vermont Agency of Human Services and United Ways across the state since the early 2000's. It is the source of the first Vermont Scorecard, which tracked the well-being of Vermonters across multiple indicators.



"[The Outcomes Bill] is the result of many thoughtful minds working together and setting a vision and a process to collaborate on the best future for Vermont."

-Senator Diane Snelling

## What is the Outcomes Bill?

The *Outcomes Bill* is designed to increase accountability and improve decision-making throughout Vermont state government. It ingrains the culture of accountability into the DNA of Vermont State Government. The *Outcomes Bill* was approved by the Vermont Legislature in April 2014, and signed into law by Governor Peter Shumlin in June 2014.

**Find the full text of the outcomes bill at <http://bit.ly/RBAbill>**

The bill enables the use of results-based policy making in the Vermont Legislature, throughout state government and in Vermont's social sector. It allows the General Assembly to obtain data-based information to know how well State government is doing to achieve the population-level outcomes set for Vermont's quality of life, and will assist the General Assembly in determining how best to invest taxpayer dollars.

By evaluating results, the General Assembly will be able to be more forward-thinking, strategic, and responsive to the long-term needs of Vermonters, and the Executive Branch will be able to consider how the programs it administers could be further refined in order to produce better results. It also encourages stronger partnerships with Vermont communities.



## What are Outcomes?

Outcomes (or results) are desired conditions of well-being for communities. They are collectively-agreed-upon starting points for making decisions. For example, a community might decide to set the outcome, "All residents feel safe in our community."

## What are Indicators?

Indicators are measures that help us quantify our progress on results. For example, the unemployment rate helps quantify economic prosperity, the percentage of troubled streams helps quantify a clean environment, and the percentage of children reading at grade level helps quantify children succeeding in school. By tracking indicators, we learn what works and we collaborate to magnify our impact. We work together to "turn the curve" on indicators that need improvement.

## Vermont State Outcomes

The State of Vermont has identified the following population-level quality of life outcomes:

1. Vermont has a prosperous economy.
2. Vermonters are healthy.
3. Vermont's environment is clean and sustainable.
4. Vermont's communities are safe and supportive.
5. Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported.
6. Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential.
7. Vermont's elders, people with disabilities and people with mental conditions live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer.
8. Vermont has open, effective, and inclusive government at the State and local levels.

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2014/Acts/ACT186.pdf>



## What does this mean for Vermont nonprofits?

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The Outcomes Bill forges a new way forward for the State of Vermont and the organizations with which it contracts. Nonprofits will be asked to link program goals with statewide outcomes, and to measure what has changed for their client populations and areas of responsibilities.

Linking to Vermont State Outcomes can be as simple as picking an outcome and indicators, and stating in plain language how the program or organization contributes.

For example, a job training program may select the outcome *"Vermont has a prosperous economy"* and describe how their program contributes to the outcome and a matching indicator such as the unemployment rate.

To measure the impact that the same job training program has on client populations, staff may measure "How many people did we train?" "What percent of our trainers are certified?" And "What percentage of people we trained obtained and kept a job?" This answers the three questions: "How much did we do?" "How well did we do it?" and "Is anyone better off?"



## Learning More and Next Steps

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Results-Based Accountability and performance management systems take practice to implement well. To give organizations the training necessary to succeed, Benchmarks for a Better Vermont employs a cadre of trainers throughout the state. Through individualized coaching, these trainers can help your organization implement RBA and performance management systems effectively, working to uncover what is working well and which programs or services need attention, and maximizing the impact of your efforts.

Visit [www.bbvt.marlboro.edu](http://www.bbvt.marlboro.edu), or contact Hillary Boone at [hboone@gradschool.marlboro.edu](mailto:hboone@gradschool.marlboro.edu) or (802) 393-4391 for more information about coaching and training opportunities.

Additionally, there are opportunities to join in the conversation about a culture of accountability. The Government Accountability Committee welcomes comment and testimony on the chosen outcomes, and is beginning conversations about indicator selection.

Look to the Benchmarks for a Better Vermont website to stay apprised of upcoming stakeholder engagement sessions. Find Government Accountability Committee meeting times, locations, and agendas at <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/Committee01.cfm>. The Committee Assistant is Gabrielle Malina at 802-828-2218 or [gmalina@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:gmalina@leg.state.vt.us).

## How did the *Outcomes Bill* come about?

Results-Based Accountability has a rich history in Vermont. It was first field-tested in the state in the early 1990's, when Mark Friedman worked with Con Hogan, the Secretary of Human Services, to create outcomes for the Agency.

Over the past two years, Results-Based Accountability has re-gained ground in Vermont. By working together, state government, the nonprofit sector, and the Legislature have shifted Vermont to a culture of accountability. In 2011, a major federal grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service enabled the creation of Benchmarks for a Better Vermont to train nonprofits, state government, and the Legislature to work within the context of RBA.

A larger circle of RBA leaders launched the Vermont Accountability Group to serve as a clearinghouse for RBA training, news, and events. Members include Marlboro College, the Vermont Agency of Human Services, the Agency of Administration, Legislative leaders, BBVT, Common Good Vermont, the A.D. Henderson Foundation, Lamoille Family Center, Vermont State Data Center, Flint Springs Associates, GNHUSA, and others.

Meanwhile, State Agencies began looking closely at how they do business: how they manage results and their measures. Sue Zeller was hired as Chief Performance Officer, charged with improving the performance of state government. RBA is an important tool to move this agenda forward. At the same time, interest in alternative indicators of well-being grew across the state, with, for example, the adoption of the Genuine Progress Indicator by the Legislature in 2012.

Vermont legislators began seeking increased accountability and better information for policy decisions. Senator Diane Snelling, with the support of Representative Anne O'Brien and the Government Accountability Committee, developed and introduced the *Outcomes Bill*, signed into law June 2014.



### Partnerships for a Culture of Accountability



# Vermont Accountability Compact

This Vermont Accountability Compact honors the long Vermont tradition of partners working together to improve the quality of life of our people and our communities. The Compact signals our intent to promote a culture of accountability in pursuit of those ends.

Due to the long history of Results-Based Accountability in Vermont, its widespread and growing application across the nonprofit and state sectors, and our belief in the collective impact of a shared framework, the Compact features an RBA approach. We recognize that there are many alternative pathways to greater accountability and welcome all efforts to that end.

By signing the Compact, we commit to support, promote, and regularly assess our progress on the implementation of a culture of accountability in our work. The following is a list of organizations and individuals whom have already signed the Compact.

We welcome you to join them at <http://bit.ly/VTcompact>

# Resources

## **Books**

- “Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough: How to Produce Measurable Improvements for Customers and Communities,” Mark Friedman

## **Full text of Act 186:**

- <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2014/Acts/ACT186.pdf>

## **Websites**

- Benchmarks for a Better Vermont [www.bbvt.marlboro.edu](http://www.bbvt.marlboro.edu)
- Common Good Vermont [www.commongoodvt.org](http://www.commongoodvt.org)
- Mark Friedman’s Fiscal Policy Studies Institute [www.resultsaccountability.com](http://www.resultsaccountability.com), [www.raguide.org](http://www.raguide.org)
- Lamoille Family Center Data Scorecard, <http://www.lamoillefamilycenter.org/data>
- Results Leadership Group, <http://resultsleadership.org/>
- Results-Based Accountability Dashboards and Reportcards <http://www.bbvt.marlboro.edu/#!/datareportcard/c20zi>

## **Social Media**

- Benchmarks for a Better Vermont on Twitter: @BenchmarksVT
- Mark Friedman’s RBA Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RBAOBA/>

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