



NASA Strategic Planning for 2000 and Beyond

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Abstract

This short paper outlines the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration's development of its 2000 Strategic Plan
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NASA's Strategic Management System and Strategic Plan also include environmental assessments, external consultations, objective development procedures, long-range planning, performance planning linkages, and a series of subordinate planning at the Enterprise, field center, program, and employee levels.

Introduction

NASA has refined its highly benchmarked Strategic Management System which defines an agency-wide process of planning integrated with budgeting, performance evaluation, and program and project management. Based on its Strategic Management System, NASA developed its new 25 year strategic plan, which will shape its budget, performance objectives, programs, projects, and partnerships for the beginning of the new millennium. This paper will reveal NASA's new plan and will describe the process that NASA used to develop it. It was developed from Agency source documents and interviews with staff and management officials.

NASA Strategic Management System

- In 1996, building on a long legacy of strategic planning, NASA developed its current "Strategic Management System" to integrate the agency's existing strategic planning, budget, and management processes and the strategic & performance planning and evaluation requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. In February 2000, NASA released a new version of the Strategic Management System Handbook based on a year and a half long effort to update and improve its highly benchmarked system.

NASA's new strategic plan reflects a greater emphasis on commercialization of operations and commercial partnerships, continued emphasis on international partnerships, and more attention to cooperative activities with other US agencies. It defines goals and objectives for five principal areas of Agency activity, or Enterprises: Space Science, Earth Science, Biological and Physical Research, Human Exploration and Development of Space, and Aero-Space Technology, and in four process-oriented crosscutting areas: Manage Strategically, Provide Aerospace Products and Capabilities, Generate Knowledge, and Communicate Knowledge. The Strategic Plan generally describes the science, technology development, and spacecraft missions that are planned to meet the specified objectives.

U.S. Government Performance and Results Act

The purpose of the GPRA law as articulated in the act itself were as follows:

- Improve the confidence of the American people in the capability of the Federal Government, by systematically holding Federal agencies accountable for achieving program results;
- Improve Federal program effectiveness and public accountability by promoting a new focus on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction;
- Improve internal management of the Federal Government.
- Help Federal managers improve service delivery, by requiring that they plan for meeting program objectives and by providing them with information about program results and service quality;
- Improve congressional decision-making by providing more objective information on achieving statutory objectives, and on the relative effectiveness and efficiency of Federal

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programs and spending.

GPRA requires U.S. Federal agencies to regularly submit three sets of documents:

- Strategic Plans – at least once every three years, to describe agency missions & goals
- Performance Plans – annually, to establish measurable performance indicators necessary to achieve agency goals
- Performance Reports – annually, to report actual performance measured against the established performance indicators

Going Beyond GPRA

NASA's Strategic Management System uses a three part cycle built around the processes represented by the three sets of documents required by GPRA.

Because NASA's legacy of Strategic Planning predated GPRA, some of NASA's recent gains have taken place in parallel with GPRA implementation not necessarily because of the law itself. However, even in these cases it is clear that these efforts have been supported by the passage of GPRA and the broader focus on organizational reinvention both at NASA and Government-wide. GPRA has reinforced the role of strategic planning in driving and enhancing Agency decision-making. While not required by the law, NASA has in this time-frame pushed planning to lower levels of the organization in a structured fashion. This effort has already paid dividends in terms of greater communication on respective organizational roles and contributions to Agency mission, and a greater focus on customers. With time NASA hopes to also see an impact in the form of enhanced organizational effectiveness and (partly through the coordination mechanism that it refers to as Crosscutting Processes) to see an increase in cross-organizational coordination and greater leveraging of resource synergies.

NASA's effort to turn strategic planning into a linked process at all levels of the organization has been a part of NASA's larger effort to design an integrated approach to all aspects of Agency management. This effort, while also not required by GPRA, was viewed by NASA as an essential part of making GPRA's requirements useful for NASA as a management tool, not merely as an external reporting mechanism. This effort has sought to transform strategic planning from an isolated process into a key component of "strategic management." The NASA Strategic Management System, now in its second generation, has been largely successful in integrating strategic planning, budgeting, performance planning, and

evaluation into an integrated system of Agency decision-making. This effort has been reinforced by NASA's willingness to revise this system based on what works, and by NASA's implementation of ISO 9001 (a total quality system, enforced by outside standards and audits, designed among other things to ensure that an organization says what it does and does what it says).

The NASA Strategic Plan is supported by a linked hierarchy of supporting planning documents that define NASA's goals and objectives:

- Enterprise Strategic Plans for each of NASA's 5 Enterprises
- Functional Leadership Plans for every NASA HQ Functional Office
- Center Implementation Plans for the NASA Centers
- Program & Project Plans, and
- Employee Performance Plans

These planning documents in turn support the annual development of budget requirements and corresponding performance measures at each level of the organization, which are represented at the highest level by the President's Budget Request for NASA and the annual NASA Performance Plan.

Performance evaluation efforts are then conducted at each level of the organization and are rolled up at the Agency level into the annual NASA Performance Plan (and for financial data into the annual NASA Accountability Report). These processes form a recurring cycle where evaluation results are used to alter plans, budgets and future results targets.

NASA, unlike many other U.S. Federal agencies, had long done strategic planning even in the absence of a legal requirement to do so. As a result, the most significant direct impact on NASA from GPRA has been in the area of performance planning and reporting. While NASA has long used program management measures of performance for management purposes, the requirements of GPRA have led the Agency to broaden performance measurement efforts to focus on Agency-level outcomes.

Before passage of the GPRA, NASA Administrator Dan Goldin had led NASA toward a renewed focus on return on investment to the taxpayer and Agency accountability for mission delivery. GPRA's performance planning requirements have strongly reinforced this focus. With this year having marked the first round of GPRA performance reports implementation of the performance aspects of GPRA

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