

FOCUS ON

Our Performance Analysis Division: Driving change in the right direction

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Gwinnett County's traditional internal audit function has expanded into a more comprehensive unit that helps Gwinnett County government operate more effectively and efficiently.

Independent internal auditors analyze and audit business processes for proper checks and balances, internal controls, and fiduciary compliance with national standards, especially where cash-handling is concerned.

A separate performance management team that was established in 2007 works with department leadership and staff across the County to assess operations and figure out what to measure and track in order to drive process improvement. "When the right things get measured, the right things get done," says Business Analyst Kevin Mylander.

They've introduced management concepts like balanced scorecards, Lean Methods, and quality principles pioneered and implemented by Henry Ford and Japanese automobile manufacturers. Successes have ranged from streamlining homeowner interactions with the Tax Assessor's office to finding ways to reduce "on-scene" times for emergency medical personnel at major trauma emergencies.

County Administrator Glenn Stephens said, "Because we don't manufacture products or earn a profit for stockholders, we've adapted many best business practices to focus on ways to continually improve our core services."

The group's overall task is to make sure the County's resources and priorities align with the overall strategic goals set each year by the Board of Commissioners. That's more important than ever after years of budget cuts and asking employees to do more with less. "We lost a lot of experience and institutional knowledge as folks retired and cutbacks were implemented during the recession, and that affects how things get done in many ways," Mylander said.

Early on in the development of the balanced scorecards, the performance management team asked departments to list and rank their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in what's known as a SWOT analysis. The highest ranked critical items in each area are then translated into strategic objectives and key performance indicators to be tracked on a balanced scorecard. These indicators could ultimately lead to process improvement opportunities. At first Gwinnett was tracking 13 scorecards – now there are 110.

At first, some employees were unsure about the changes Performance Analysis might bring, but since then, many have seen the value in using County resources to focus on doing the most important things and continually finding ways to do them better.