

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

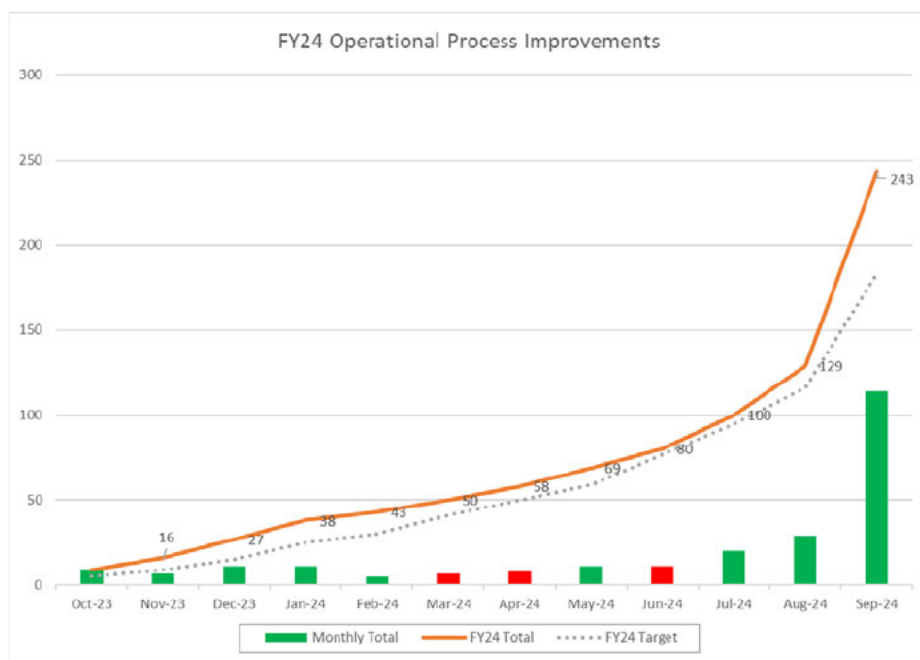
ISSUE SUMMARY:

The EPA's Continuous Improvement Program is based on a lean management system. Lean management is a set of principles that seeks continuous improvement through incremental enhancements with a long-term approach to systematically improve efficiency and quality over time. The Continuous Improvement Division (CID), formerly the Office of Continuous Improvement, was established in May 2018 to deploy an agencywide lean management system to help the EPA systematically achieve measurable results. Continuous improvement and the lean management system empower the agency to track workflow and performance data so employees can identify problems and process inefficiencies and use lean tools and techniques to solve them.

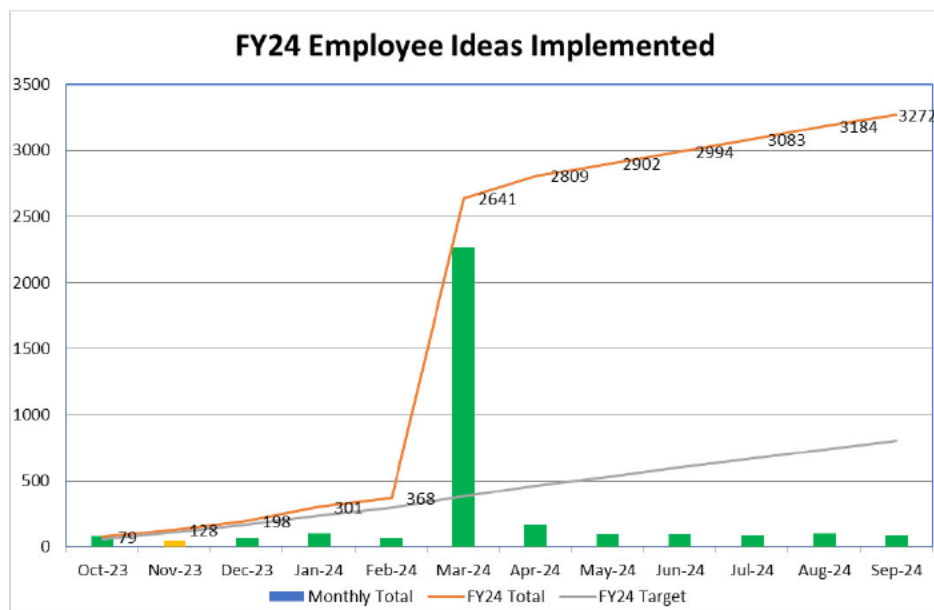
Organizational performance goals and measures are captured in a visual performance management and reporting tool called bowling charts, which are reviewed by senior leaders in each EPA organization in regularly scheduled business reviews. Bowling charts capture an organization's progress towards meeting Agency priority goals, long-term performance goals (LTPGs), and other high priority metrics and targets. Business reviews create a space for senior leaders to discuss how their organizations do their work and take action when performance targets are missed. Visual management used by all levels of EPA staff and management are intended to cascade from strategic goals, long-term performance goals and EPA's Strategic Plan. Each quarter, senior leaders meet with the Deputy Administrator in the Quarterly Performance Review (QPR) to review progress toward the LTPGs and Agency priorities. For more information, refer to OCFO's transition paper on the EPA's Performance Management Framework.

Continuous improvement is also critical for EPA to meet statutory requirements under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) (1993); GPRA Modernization Act (2010); Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (2018), and executive orders such as the President's Management Agenda of 2001 that required a strategy for improving the management of the Federal government. Additionally, in 2017 the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) determined that EPA needed to institutionalize its lean program to reap cost and time benefits. In response to OIG, activities led by CID and OCFO rendered an OIG determination that the agency's corrective actions met the intent of its recommendations, which resulted in closure of the audit report.

The effectiveness of EPA's continuous improvement program is measured through CID-owned agency-wide performance metrics for operational processes improved and employee ideas implemented. Performance graphs for each metric are provided below along with summary descriptions.



Processes Improved – EPA set a long-term performance target to achieve 1,000 operational process improvements by the end of FY 2026. EPA has reported more than 1,500 processes improved since the program began in 2018 and is on track to achieve its current target.



Employee Ideas Implemented – To encourage micro innovations CID recommends organizations set performance targets for employee ideas. Since 2018 nearly 15,000 employee ideas have been implemented. An employee idea implemented is defined as any new action that makes a beneficial operational change. The primary purpose of the metric is to increase employee engagement and create a culture of continuous improvement and listening.

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PARTNERING AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

CID partners with all 10 EPA regions and each of the EPA's National Program Manager (NPM) offices (except for OIG) to lead, manage and support continuous improvement. CID works closely with the Deputy Administrator, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the OCFO's Office of Planning and Performance to help align strategies, performance measures, and budget resources to accomplish agency goals.

CID established and manages EPA's Problem-Solving Corps (PSC), which consists of over 400 EPA employees trained and available to help teams through problem identification, solution development, and implementation. PSC members are becoming increasingly critical to the agency's process improvement infrastructure, e.g., assisting with problem solving as part of the MEPS framework, facilitating problem solving for missed bowling chart metrics, supporting the Problem Up-leveling and Response System (PURS).

CID has also partnered with state environmental quality organizations, such as Maryland Department of Environment (MDE), Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), Texas Commission of Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) to help states, with EPA delegated authority, speed up and improve environmental permitting processes. On an international level, CID has a strong partnership with EPA New South Wales that provides a knowledge exchange and an opportunity to aid an international office build a stronger environmental program via continuous improvement methodologies.

MOVING FORWARD:

CID'S mission is to help the EPA continuously improve and systematically achieve measurable results. Continuous improvement has helped the agency improve performance, strategically plan, implement employee ideas and solve problems as evidenced by the metrics and narrative above. Grants, environmental justice, and partnership with states are areas where CID has been focused on helping the agency move forward.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OCFO

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: ALL REGIONS AND PROGRAM OFFICES