



[www.pra.ca](http://www.pra.ca)  
[admin@pra.ca](mailto:admin@pra.ca)

**NATIONAL ROUND TABLE ON THE  
ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY –  
SUPPORT FOR THE PERFORMANCE CASE**

**FINAL REPORT**

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Prepared for:

The National Round Table  
on the Environment and the Economy



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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) would like to strengthen its performance reporting. This document presents a review and comments pertaining to the NRTEE's performance case, specifically the ongoing performance measurement and evaluation approaches, as they flow from the Program Activity Architecture (PAA) and Results-based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF), and provide the basis for the annual Departmental Performance Report (DPR). Since much of the work undertaken by the NRTEE is research and policy analysis, measuring tangible outcomes can be challenging. This brief report also identifies potential additional performance measures and presents options for strengthening the NRTEE performance case.

## 2.0 The Round Table

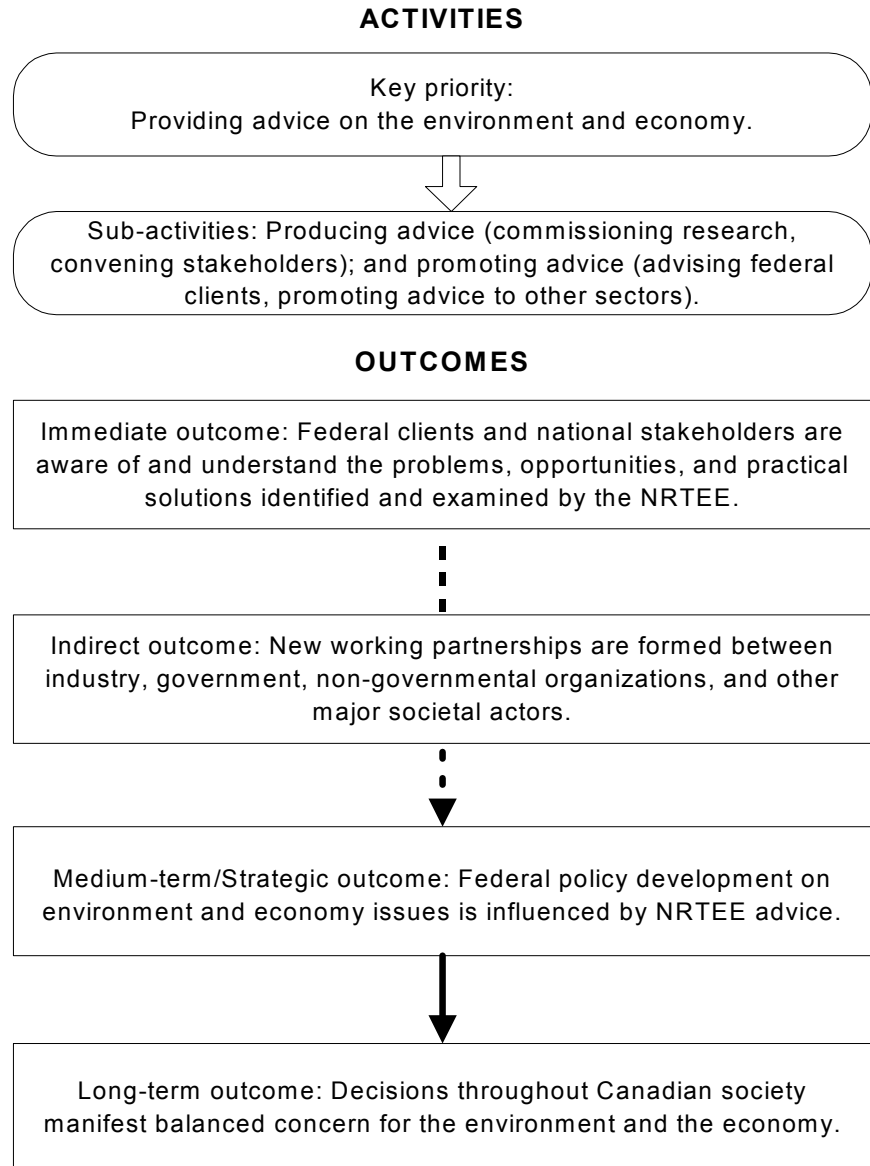
### 2.1 Mandate

The NRTEE, established in 1994, is a publicly funded, independent federal agency. The mandate of the NRTEE, as outlined in the *National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy Act*, is to “...play the role of catalyst in identifying, explaining and promoting, in all sectors and in all regions, principles and practices of sustainable development.” The NRTEE focuses on providing advice and recommendations to federal government decision-makers and other national stakeholders pertaining to areas that lie at the intersection of the environment and the economy.

The agency consists of a membership of 24 distinguished Canadians, supported by a Secretariat in Ottawa. Members are appointed by the Prime Minister, and they represent a broad range of sectors, including business, labour, academia, environmental organizations and Aboriginal peoples, as well as diverse regions across the country. The NRTEE has an annual budget of approximately \$5.3 million and a staff complement of 29. The Secretariat, headed by an Executive Director, provides program management and analytical, communications, and administrative services to the NRTEE members and their task forces and committees.

## 2.2 Logic model

The NRTEE has established its logic model as follows:



### 3.0 Program Activity Architecture

The NRTEE has defined a progression of outcomes and has established tools to monitor performance against said outcomes. However, at a more basic level, a series of detailed activities should flow from the PAA and RMAF structure, the outputs and outcomes of each of which would contribute and credibility of the performance case presented in the DPR.

Treasury Board requires a PAA for each federal department and agency. It has also recommended that NRTEE keep the PAA simple. That may be sound for the PAA in its role of accounting for the outputs flowing from specific activities, but an opportunity exists to add to the PAA to create an internal PAA to serve as a performance-reporting template. Therefore, our suggested enhancements are not intended to change the PAA submitted to Treasury Board, but to increase the detail to the NRTEE performance story.

The PAA breaks down activity 1. *Provide advice* into two sub-activities, 1.1. *Produce advice* and 1.2. *Promote advice*. Not only do these “activities” essentially amount to business lines, but there are also some challenges associated with measuring the value of producing and promoting advice to stakeholders. Hence, breaking down the “activities” into more detailed, concrete pieces may lead to more demonstrable performance.

To the sub-activity of producing advice, objectives of timeliness, relevance, and high quality can be attached. We suggest sub-activities under this heading could include:

- Ongoing environmental scanning to identify potential issues with regards to the area where environmental and economic considerations intersect.
- Scoping exercises on potential issues in order to explore further the knowledge and/or policy gap and gauge interest among stakeholders.
- Program planning related to each issue retained, including most appropriate information gathering and knowledge building activities, identification of foremost experts and most interested parties, and target audience(s) for advice on given issue.

- Research into each issue retained, including reviewing literature, comparable issues, and contacting experts and other stakeholders.
- Validation and/or debate of information gathered and analysed among experts and other stakeholders.
- Timely reporting on the status of both knowledge and debate on the issue, with advice/recommendations to federal and other decision-makers.

To the sub-activity of promoting advice, objectives of effective dissemination, education/awareness raising, and monitoring of target audiences can be attached. Detailed activities under this heading could include:

- Actively seeking and/or creating opportunities for educating and raising awareness as to the importance of both environmental and economic considerations in decision-making – for example, by monitoring events hosted by federal departments and other stakeholder groups and ensuring NRTEE presence at such events.
- Posting the latest environmental scan results and program of work on the NRTEE web site and circulating to stakeholders through other appropriate means in order to encourage participation and feedback for example, mailing (hard copy or e-mail) an updated program of work on a semi-annual basis.
- Dissemination of advice/reports using a variety of tools, including mailings, web posting, presentations at relevant events, individual briefing sessions to senior federal and other decision-makers, etc. This implies actively seeking and/or creating opportunities for a wide dissemination of findings.

The PAA could be revised to include more detail along the lines of the suggestions above, in order to express more clearly what each sub-activity entails and allow clear linkages to performance measures. There is a risk in producing a detailed PAA, in that outputs/outcomes will be required for each activity and sub-activity. This may increase the workload associated with performance monitoring, which can be considered a reasonable price to pay for a more detailed performance report. In our view, the increased workload from reporting at this more detailed level should be modest. It is important to note that although we have

elaborated on the sub-activities under activity 1. *Provide advice*, a similar exercise could be undertaken for activity 2. *Corporate services*. Sub-activities 2.1 through 2.6 are essentially branches, or groups of activities which, if not broken down further, obscure the reporting of the effective use of resources by the Secretariat, and hence limit what can be said in terms of the performance of the agency as a whole. However, corporate services are often treated as “overhead” only indirectly contributing to the performance story. Under this latter view, corporate services can simply be mentioned as an overhead element in the DPR.

#### **4.0 Results-based Management and Accountability Framework**

In keeping with the initial recommendation to break down further the activities of the NRTEE, a more refined definition and segmentation of key stakeholders and target audiences (NRTEE clients) would enable clearer linkages to performance measures and identify additional sources of outcome information.

It should be clearly stated in the RMAF that “decision-makers and opinion leaders from government, industry and other sectors” include, for example, the following:

- Federal ministers and senior policy makers whose portfolio is related to the management of natural resources, environmental protection and/or economic growth instruments/policies, and senior officials in related departments and agencies.
- Provincial/territorial ministers and policy makers whose portfolio is related to natural resources, environmental protection regulation and economic development – directly or indirectly, for example through policies and regulations regarding transportation or energy use – and senior officials in related departments and agencies. This also includes municipal planners and managers that are involved in land-use decisions and local economic planning.
- Policy planners and researchers in general.



- Non-governmental organizations, policy research organizations, and advocacy groups:
  - policy “think tanks”
  - environmental protection lobby groups
  - industry associations, consortiums, or major players
  - political parties
  - general public, consumer protection groups.

A more segmented definition of “client” leads to a more detailed expression of what changes might be expected following NRTEE interventions. For example, the NRTEE may target the general public in terms of raising awareness, but target federal and provincial ministers and regulators in terms of influencing decisions via the provision of advice. This can prove useful in identifying a “priority group” of clients. Measuring whether NRTEE is actually reaching its clients - at the very least its priority clients - would also enable the NRTEE to measure “reach” against costs, to further support the “perceived value” argument. It is important to bear in mind that the level of useful feedback varies according to the target audience, as does the appropriateness of the various feedback-gathering tools.

Collecting information on reach for NRTEE activities is as simple as recording participation (at workshops, requests for information, etc.) by these client groups. If NRTEE can show expanding reach, this in itself becomes evidence of increased impact. Further, the extent to which clients become partners in NRTEE events and activities demonstrates the important outcome of building partnerships.

#### **4.1 Ongoing performance measurement**

The NRTEE currently measures performance through regular measurement related to outputs and short-term outcomes, such as:

- gathering information at workshops and information sessions through simple surveys, interviews, and statistics gathered from program participants
- supplementation by database analysis of participants and mailing lists

- statistics regarding web site traffic and downloading of NRTEE documents
- an assessment of a repository of letters and e-mails from stakeholders
- evaluation of specific events.

As previously mentioned, we recommend that the RMAF be updated to include further detail pertaining to activities and target audiences. We also recommend that interviews and surveys of NRTEE clients be added as data sources for ongoing performance measurement. They would prove particularly useful in gathering more detailed feedback from a wider array of stakeholders than otherwise possible through simple participation surveys, letters, and e-mails. Please refer to examples in the table below (in bold).<sup>1</sup> Note that it should prove useful to conduct a regular follow up with a limited group of ‘representative’ stakeholders. Several models can be considered:

- ▶ Event-specific survey conducted one year to 18 months after each activity/output (event or report) measuring short-term impact and implementation of advice, and again three years later regarding longer term impacts.
- ▶ On-going monitoring of target clients to assess the extent to which NRTEE outputs are being regularly used. For example, using current mailing lists to survey a sample of NRTEE clients every two years.

Following our recommendation to further define target audiences, the NRTEE should devise some means whereby it would track who it is reaching through passive means (e.g., web site) versus active means (e.g., workshops). This could probably largely rest on improved mining of existing participant or client databases. For example, statistics regarding attendees of CEO or equivalent level from industry at certain key events would support NRTEE’s role as an integral part of producing advice that resonates with industry groups. The identification of overlaps in clientele across events and reports, and the systematic involvement of specific stakeholders over time should provide useful information as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the NRTEE RMAF, June 2004, page 4, table 3.1.

To reiterate, it is important that the NRTEE demonstrate that:

- ▶ It is expanding its reach over time by increasing the number of contacts and developing long-term relationships with stakeholders and decision-makers.
- ▶ It monitors how they intend to, and later actually “apply the knowledge”, using both surveys and more in-depth interviews.

Results of such tracking should be presented in the DPR (e.g., using simple pie charts to illustrate the distribution of stakeholders) to further support the NRTEE’s progress in meeting outcomes, and should also support future strategic planning exercises.

Table 1: Performance measurement tracking					
Result – outcomes	Preliminary performance indicators	Performance targets	Existing data sources	Potential new data sources	Frequency
<p>Long term:</p> <p>Decisions throughout Canadian society manifest balanced concern for the environment and the economy</p>	<p><b>Example of target audience/stakeholder groups:</b>                      Relevant federal, provincial/territorial and municipal authorities (e.g., natural resources, transportation, housing, energy).</p> <p><b>Example of outcome:</b>                      Introduction of new regulation or changes to existing regulations by provincial/territorial or municipal authorities effectively draws on state of knowledge and debate and/or advice generated by NRTEE.</p>			<p><b>Actively monitor key clients / stakeholders</b></p>	Ongoing
<p>Medium term:</p> <p>Federal policy development, and decisions in other key sectors, are influenced by advice from the NRTEE</p>				<p><b>Examples of measurement activity:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor evolution of government/parliamentary agendas with regards to environment, fisheries, aquaculture, economic interests.</li> <li>• Monitor introduction of new regulations or changes to existing regulations by various levels of government.</li> <li>• Determine whether link exists to advice generated by NRTEE and trace participants/recipients of NRTEE advice to proponents of change.</li> <li>• Case study of regulatory change that can be attributed to NRTEE advice.<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	<p><b>Legislative / regulatory scan: introduction or changes to legislation or regulation, via gazettes and similar vehicles</b></p>
	<p><i>Measurement of these outcomes is primarily addressed by evaluation, except for Repository</i></p>		<p>Repository of letters, e-mails, discussions illustrating how NRTEE State of the Debate (SOD) reports are an important resource</p>	<p><b>Survey of NRTEE clients (key federal and provincial regulators and municipal managers, NGOs, etc.)</b></p>	<p>Annual basis (timing linked to regulatory process schedule)</p>
				<p><b>Add in-depth interviews when potential link to NRTEE advice is identified</b></p>	<p>As needed, as follow-up to survey</p>
				<p><b>Case studies</b></p>	<p>As needed</p> <p>When received</p>

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the incremental impact of NRTEE advice on regulatory change could be very difficult to identify/measure.

<b>Table 1: Performance measurement tracking</b>					
<b>Result – outcomes</b>	<b>Preliminary performance indicators</b>	<b>Performance targets</b>	<b>Existing data sources</b>	<b>Potential new data sources</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<p>Short term:</p> <p>Federal clients and national stakeholders are aware of and understand the problems, opportunities, and practical solutions identified and examined by the NRTEE</p>	<p>Improvement in the level of awareness and understanding by affected federal officials and national stakeholders.</p>	<p>Significant number completing survey report increased awareness and understanding as a result of attending a workshop or information session.</p> <p>Majority report that NRTEE's information will assist them in raising awareness of these issues in their communities and organizations (multiplier effect).</p>	<p>Surveys of participants at NRTEE events (workshops or information sessions)</p>	<p><b>Legislative / regulatory scan</b></p> <p><b>Interviews for more detailed feedback regarding awareness and understanding</b></p>	<p>Consistent with timing of workshops and information sessions</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p><b>At end of each program / initiative, and follow up with selected group 1-1/2 years and 3 years later.</b></p>
<p>Knowledge of excellent quality...</p>	<p>Information is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new</li> <li>• useful</li> <li>• timely</li> <li>• balanced.</li> </ul>	<p>Significant number of those who complete a survey indicate that information was new, useful, timely, balanced.</p>	<p>Survey at workshops and information sessions / task forces</p>	<p>Web-based survey linked to downloading of SOD reports</p> <p><b>Interviews for more detailed feedback regarding timeliness and usefulness</b></p>	<p>Consistent with timing of workshops and information sessions</p> <p><b>At end of each program/initiative</b></p>

Table 1: Performance measurement tracking					
Result – outcomes	Preliminary performance indicators	Performance targets	Existing data sources	Potential new data sources	Frequency
...that reaches its target audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levels and sectors reached.</li> <li>Diversity of strategies employed to reach target audiences                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal system</li> <li>Opinion leaders and decision-makers in Canadian society</li> <li>Canadian public</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	NRTEE advice reaches a significant number of targeted decision-makers and opinion leaders in the federal government and key sectors of Canadian society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant number of federal officials surveyed indicate familiarity with NRTEE</li> <li>Significant percentage of “other” decision-makers and opinion leaders surveyed indicate familiarity with NRTEE</li> </ul>	Database analysis of levels and sectors  Narrative of vehicles used to reach 3 key audiences – briefings, newsletter, e-briefs, SODs, media, etc.	Survey at events regarding preference for receiving information by different means	Annual, for DPR
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web site traffic</li> </ul>	Benchmarked against similar organizations?	Web Trends reports, as available, to support narrative	<b>Survey of targeted decision-makers who are not participating in NRTEE activities, to determine who is not reached and why (contrast with survey at NRTEE events and web)</b>  <b>More substantive follow-up survey well after event (or distribution of report) to measure reach, probe for value-added from event/advice</b>	Annual, for DPR  <b>At end of each program / initiative</b>

## **4.2 Evaluation approach**

The NRTEE wishes to implement more extensive measurement of performance relative to medium- and long-term outcomes through formal evaluation of individual programs and 5-year synthesis to assess the overall relevance, success, and cost-effectiveness of its programs. At this time, such evaluations are limited to case studies based on individual programs/initiatives.

The agency has identified possible future approaches, including:

- Review of poll results, reports from think tanks and governments, government agenda documents, and other repository information to monitor implementation of recommendations and/or correlation of progress on environment and economy issues to advice from the NRTEE.
- Interviews with program participants and other members of target audiences.
- Developing estimates of cost for alternative delivery mechanisms for NRTEE work.

Notwithstanding the requisite breakdown of activities, target audiences, and clarification of outputs discussed previously, we recommend a threefold evaluation strategy:

- A baseline survey of all NRTEE clients who have participated in NRTEE outputs since creation. This survey needs to probe for examples of instances where legislation/regulations have been implemented to acknowledge the need to balance environmental and economic interests.
- Evaluations of individual programs/initiatives over time, at their completion (with a focus on demonstrable, individual success stories). Routine participant follow-up for each project needs to be implemented to maximize the possibility of identifying examples of implementation of the results of projects.
- Repeating the full client survey every three years (including a synthesis of individual program evaluations).

This implies committing some internal resources to such things as participation surveys, monitoring web traffic, and identifying and tracking selected legislative and regulatory changes over time. The NRTEE's limited resources can then be invested in essential, supplementary measurement tools, such as interviews with participants, non-participants, and legislators and regulators, as well as in-depth reporting on results. We believe that it is also possible to accommodate the desired synthesis and overall evaluation cycle through a combination of internal resources and the annual budget that has been set.

In addition to the threefold strategy, we recommend refinements to the NRTEE case study approach to evaluation, as presented in table 4.1. of the NRTEE RMAF, June 2004, pages 8 and 9.

Specifically, in terms of relevance:

- We suggest considering municipal government priorities when establishing a short list of priority issues, as municipalities often face decisions related to environmental protection and economic development, or face the consequences of decisions in those areas by other levels of government, hence these may shape their priorities.
- We suggest that the proposed reviews and interviews to assess relevance are not necessary if the scoping exercise is well structured and effectively determines the importance of a given issue, as well as the relevance of this issue being tackled by the NRTEE versus other organizations (the scoping exercise should have a built-in validation component).

Relative to short-term results:

- We suggest that the possible approach based on “performance measurement data” and “interviews with broad list of interested parties” be replaced by the results of feedback surveys and follow-up interviews (as suggested in Section 4.1) with members of targeted audiences (both participants and non-participants) pertaining to each program/initiative.



As for medium-term results:

- We reiterate that medium-term results can be reliably assessed only by supplementing repository information with interviews and case studies. They offer essential insight into a complex issue such as “influencing through the provision of advice.”
- We suggest adding that those reportedly influenced/affected by NRTEE advice should be able to cite, in the course of an interview, how that advice affected policy development and/or their decision-making process.
- We suggest the inclusion of legislators and regulators both reportedly affected and unaffected by NRTEE advice.
- We further suggest including in the case studies the examination of evidence pertaining to recommendations that are considered for implementation.

In terms of long-term results:

- We believe that it will not be possible to evaluate progress for Canadian society as a whole in terms of balanced concern for the environment and the economy, since it will be impossible to isolate the NRTEE’s influence versus a variety of other factors that can affect policy development and decision-making in this area. Therefore, we suggest focusing on short- and medium-term results.

Finally, surveys and interviews with clients would be effective methodologies with which to assess of the cost-effectiveness of the provision of advice/information by the NRTEE compared to other sources. Bearing in mind that the NRTEE outcomes are policy and information and will not be amenable to quantitative measurement, such qualitative "value-for-money/time questions" can be used by external evaluators when assessing NRTEE projects. These types of questions can also be included in the regular client follow-up by NRTEE. The results of these surveys and evaluations should be integrated into the DPR as evidence of the cost-effectiveness of NRTEE information dissemination, relative to other information sources available to clients.

Performance report – demonstrating value

As for most federal agencies, the primary vehicle for the NRTEE to report on its performance is the DPR. It summarizes the organization’s success according to ongoing performance measurement and evaluation studies.

Although it discusses results from performance measurement activities undertaken by the NRTEE, the DPR does not convey very well the perceived value of NRTEE initiatives by stakeholders.

The Chair of the NRTEE, in the covering note, sets the focus on the usefulness of advice provided to the federal government as the most important indicator of its performance – or success, as the term is used throughout the DPR. This reflects only one part of the NRTEE’s strategic outcome, which also includes influencing other Canadian decision-makers, outside the federal system. The Chair’s emphasis on serving the federal government’s need for advice is symptomatic of the remainder of the DPR, which is largely focused on discussing that aspect of the NRTEE’s activities.

The substance of the performance report would obviously benefit from the improvements to the PAA and RMAF as suggested in previous sections. Furthermore, we find that the structure of the DPR does not lend itself to telling a compelling story regarding the performance of the NRTEE. Several changes to its structure are suggested and summarized in the table of contents below.

Section	Heading		Suggested content
4	Context	4.1	Sustainability challenges
		4.2	Raison d’être of organization
		4.3	Overview of organization
		4.4	NRTEE human and financial resources
		4.5	Progress relative to government-wide initiatives
		4.6	Logic model
		4.7	Performance measurement system
		4.8	Factors influencing performance measurement
5	Performance discussion	5.1	Detailed activities and results
		5.2	Summary of results, by outcome
		5.2.1	Immediate <sup>3</sup>
		5.2.2	Indirect
		5.2.3	Medium term
		5.2.4	Strategic <sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Including using warning signs and trends identified through Environment and Sustainable Development Indicators (ESDI) and other NRTEE initiatives.

<sup>4</sup> Including link to federal government priorities.

Firstly, section 4. *Context* should present the challenges to sustainable development in Canada, the *raison d'être* of the NRTEE, the overview of the agency and resources used. The discussion of the NRTEE's logic model, performance measurement system, and factors influencing performance measurement should follow. The agency's progress relative to government-wide comptrollership initiatives could also be included in the *Context* section.

Secondly, the discussion of the NRTEE's contribution to federal government priorities and performance reporting should be introduced in section 5. *Performance discussion*, and linked to the performance relative to the strategic outcome, i.e., influencing decision-makers and sub-activity 1. *Produce advice*. Similarly, the discussion of warning signs and trends from indicators and reports included in section 4 could better serve the case made in section 5 regarding the usefulness of NRTEE information and advice, where the Environment and Sustainable Development Indicators (ESDI) and reports based on other NRTEE initiatives are examined and their impact weighted.

In fact, the entire discussion of performance relative to activities and outcomes (pages 13 to 23, inclusively) should be reorganized to flow from detailed activities, to the immediate outcome, to the longer-term, strategic outcome. A first section, structured around the two sub-activities – which are essentially business lines – should discuss specific, concrete activities and results as monitored through the variety of performance measurement tools available (it could also include an estimate of resources associated with each activity). This approach would allow for more extensive use of performance results (e.g., include findings based on extensive feedback from participation surveys).

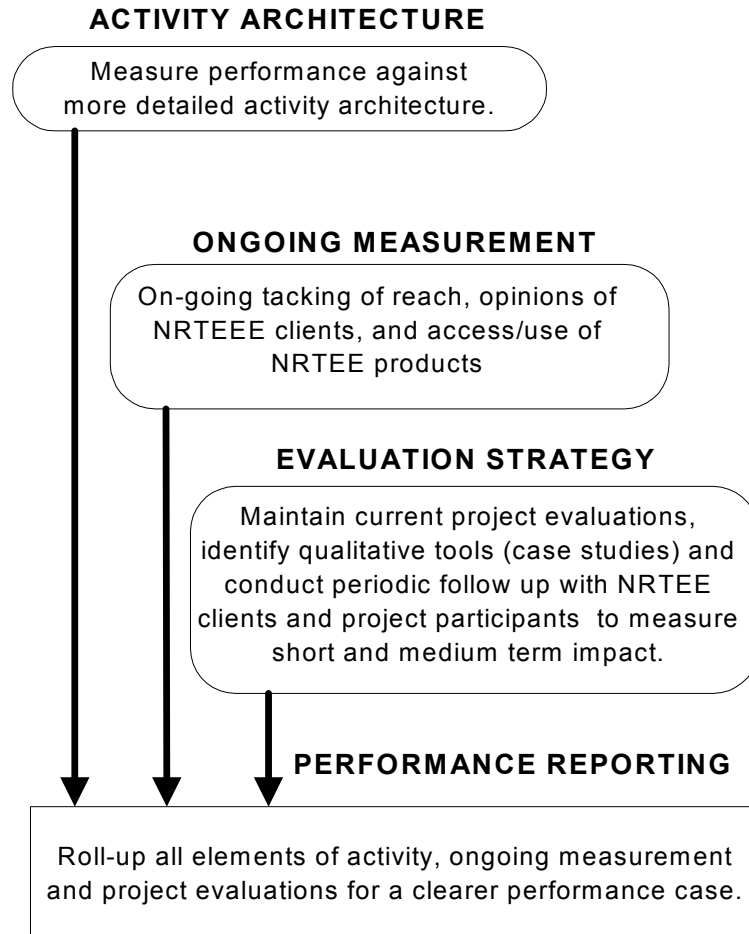
These results should then be summarized in terms of the level of success in meeting the immediate outcome of increasing awareness and understanding, the indirect outcome in terms of new partnerships, and the longer-term strategic outcome of influencing decision-makers. Shortcomings and lessons learned could then be discussed, pertaining to results or the performance measurement strategy itself.

## **5.0 Summary of recommendations**

- 1) The internal version of the activity architecture and the RMAF should be enhanced by:
  - a. further breaking down the activities and target audiences
  - b. defining the idea of a NRTEE client
- 2) Defining a performance measurement process that adds to the current process of monitoring use of products (e.g., web hits) by:
  - a. Documenting expanding reach, (through the expanding network of clients and participation in events) as well as the use of products
  - b. Implementing a baseline and on-going annual survey of NRTEE clients to identify how NRTEE activities and outputs are promoting sustainable development.
  - c. Identifying case studies that illustrate implementation of research findings and recommendations that flow from NRTEE activities
- 3) Maintain the current evaluations of individual programs/initiatives which would include surveys of participants, interviews and document reviews
- 4) The DPR could be reorganized to describe detailed results relative to each activity, followed by a summary of the results of ongoing performance measurement and event evaluations. Emphasizing on expanding network of NRTEE clients, results of on-going surveys, the periodic event evaluations/case studies will support an increasingly persuasive performance story.

The figure below presents a schematic illustration of the enhancements, which we recommend for the various elements of the performance case.

## STRENGTHENED PERFORMANCE CASE



## **6.0 Conclusion**

Following this assessment of the NRTEE's performance case, we feel that there are other cost-effective avenues that the agency should explore in terms of developing a stronger, continuous relationship with its broad client base of decision-makers and other stakeholders, which would in turn become the best advocates of the agency's performance and value. However, exploring awareness-raising and stakeholder relationship-building mechanisms are beyond the scope of this assignment.