PART II

OBSTACLES TO ACCOUNTABILITY

As promising as accountability may be, there are many obstacles to overcome in bringing about the desired results—and some of those obstacles may be insurmountable.

Christopher Pollitt examines the assumed connection between accountability and the promise of enhanced agency performance and finds the link problematic at best. Until and unless a wider segment of the lay public becomes more concerned about and engaged in assessments of agency performance, the effectiveness of such measurement regimes remain limited.

Beryl Radin's analysis of the U.S. federal government's experience with two major performance measurement initiatives—GPRA (Government Performance and Results Act) and PART (Program Assessment Rating Tool)—stresses the role of the United States' complex institutional context and how multiple expectations have limited the impact of these accountability mechanisms.

The study by Bonnie Johnson, John Pierce, and Nicholas Lovrich, Jr. shifts our attention in a number of ways. First, in contrast to the other studies in this volume, they focus on accountability in a general governmental jurisdiction: the American county. Second, while most contemporary studies of accountability reflect the current bias toward the promise of performance, they highlight the standards associated with political accountability—for example, government openness and responsiveness. But most significant is their exploration of the role played by what Kevin Kearns termed the "accountability environment." Conceptually, the accountability environment constitutes an array of external factors that scholars find intriguing. But for those engaged in the practice of enhancing political accountability in real world situations, the environment also imposes constraints and obstacles.