

performance.gov

Discovery Research Plan

Version 1.0 | January 5, 2018

Background & Prior work	1
Research at a Glance	2
Schedule	2
Phase 1: Exploration of Journalist and Analyst needs	2
Phase 2: Prototype Testing	3
Methods	3
Conversation Guides	5
Journalists Analysts Researchers	5
Information goals/questions we want to answer	5
Brief introduction	5
Journalist/Analyst/Researcher Question Guide:	6
Organization's work and goals	6
Workflow and capacity	6
Closing and referrals	7
Appendix: Backlog of other questions	7
Performance monitoring government agency representative [initial draft]	8
Information goals/questions we want to answer [initial draft]	8
Question Guide [initial draft]	8
Appendix: Prototyping script draft (revisions to come based on prototypes)	9

Background & Prior work

18F and OGP, OMB are working together to discover the best path forward for Performance.gov. We're working to understand a few key concepts central to this project:

- What, if any, government performance information journalists might seek
- How these needs might be met by performance.gov
- What long-term success for performance.gov looks like

From earlier research, we know that there are several potential audiences, including journalists, the NGO and lobbyist communities, Congress, and performance managers in government.

For this next phase of user research we focus on the questions we need to answer to frame the correct path forward for a future performance.gov. Our team will consist of both 18F and performance.gov personnel, and materials will be developed to support ongoing work at performance.gov.

Team:

18F	Performance.gov
Research Leads: Mark Trammell Jeremy Canfield Research Team: Eddie Tejeda Heather Battaglia Aaron Borden	Amin Mehr

Research at a Glance

For this round of research, we'll be focusing on **external researchers – journalists, analysts for NGOs and advocacy organizations, and academic researchers.**

Objectives	Tactics
Understand external researcher's organization's goals	Ask about the researcher's organization's goals, outputs and outcomes. Analyze outputs referenced.
Understand external researchers comfort levels and capacities	Investigate complexity/roughness of information sources used previously, understand processes and tools used in analysis by researchers
Estimate external researchers likely trust in the data	Probe issues that ensure/erode trust in a data provider for researchers

Schedule

Research will be conducted over a series of sprints.

Phase 1: Exploration of Journalist and Analyst needs

1. Develop a list of outreach targets – analysts, journalists and researchers that might conceivably be interested in the type of information performance.gov could contain.
2. Recruit individuals from these lists, interview them based on the question guides below, revising and honing question guides as we learn more.
3. After each interview, debrief with the team on relevant patterns were visible.
4. On a weekly basis, synthesize the results of the week's research, adjust outreach materials and question guides as appropriate.

Phase 2: Prototype Testing

1. Review phase 1 research to determine current workflows and processes that are likely highly representative of eventual needs.
2. Select workflow/scenario to test, and develop testing script, scenario and materials.
3. Develop the prototype to support the testing script.

4. Identify 3-5 participants for each workflow/scenario, and schedule 30-45 minute blocks of time with the participants to test with 30-minute debriefs immediately after each session.
5. Conduct the interviews.
6. Synthesize results and provide recommendations.
7. Adjust the prototype / plan accordingly.

Methods

18F will use semi-structured interviews and prototype tests to better understand how the selected user groups interact with the proposed functionality on [performance.gov](https://www.performance.gov). These methods work well to uncover behavior and implied needs that will help inform the potential direction for the future of the platform. This type of research is also exempt from any Paperwork Reduction Act implications, as the PRA explicitly exempts direct observation and non-standardized conversation, 5 CFR 1320.3(h)³.

Basics of research sessions for sprints 1 and 2:

- Sessions will be between 30-45 minutes long.
- We'll capture interviews via [note-taking](#)¹, making sure to remove any [personally identifiable information \(PII\)](#) from our final documentation.
- Sessions will be held either via teleconference, video chat/screen sharing or in person, depending on the locations and connections of individual interviewees.
- All participants will sign an [Electronic Consent Form](#) prior to sessions.²
- At the start of each session, we'll remind participants the conversation is voluntary — participants are free to discontinue the conversation at any time.

¹ If a particular interview is understaffed, we may record in-person sessions attended by only one team member (to allow the team member to effectively facilitate). If we do need to record sessions, we'll follow all applicable guidelines and ensure that we're not storing participants' PII.

² If participants are government employees, we don't technically need the Electronic Consent Form, but we may use it anyway as it explains details about the research effort.

Conversation Guides

While our interviews are non-standardized, we do plan for the kinds of experiences that are important to elicit, and brainstorm prompts that might help draw them out.

Journalists | Analysts | Researchers

Information goals/questions we want to answer

- **Data interpretation capacity:** What is the spectrum of capacities and comfort levels in analyzing and interpreting more and less raw data? How would data streams like this fit into their work processes and tools?
- **Trust in the data:** How much trust do they put in existing performance data streams and information?
- **Goal concordance:** How are their organization's goals concordant with the goals of performance.gov?
 - Informing the public of the doings of government
 - Improving the performance of agency programs
 - Who are their audiences? How are they working?

Brief introduction

"Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to chat with us. My name is [your name] and I work for a part of General Services Administration called 18F that provides technology and design services to other parts of government. GSA and OMB are currently working to improve the offerings available through Performance.gov, and part of that involves prototyping new features to replace the currently deprecated version of Performance.gov. We're talking to journalists/analysts/researchers today to begin exploring what Performance.gov might help them do.

One hopefully clarifying note: performance can mean a lot of things in the government context, but we're specifically interested in performance of government programs – that is to say, how are government programs measuring their progress against their goals. For instance, let's say there is a government program aimed at increasing the number of small businesses participating in government contracting, we'd be interested in how they were tracking their progress – both in terms of how many small businesses submit and win bids, as well as more immediate intermediary measures, such as how many government agency contracts are small-business friendly.

My colleague [name] is also on the line taking notes. They won't be recording any personal information like your name or your colleagues' names, so your observations and responses will be anonymous.

Journalist/Analyst/Researcher Question Guide:

Organization's work and goals

- Tell us a little bit about your organization and role.
- What work has your organization done on understanding how government programs are functioning? Of these, which have you been involved in? Of these, which are you most proud of?
- Who is the audience for this work?
- Why are they the audience?
- What is your organization's goal?
- How do you hope to enact your goal – what is your theory of change?
- How do you mark progress against that? Are there shorter term goals or measures you're tracking?

Workflow and capacity

Next, we'd like to learn about your workflow.

- Sometimes it's helpful for us to hear about a specific instance – a report that you've worked on recently that demonstrates to us how you work. Can you think of any recent work that involved analyzing data? Bonus points if it was a report on how a project or program of government is functioning.
- Please tell us about it –
 - What initiated your work?
 - What data sources did you use in putting it together? Do you remember the exact web pages you went to to get the information?
 - What did you do upon finding the data/information?
 - Are there tools/sites you wish existed using broad government data?
 - If they did, how would it affect your work?
 - Do you remember looking for and not being able to find any government performance information?
 - Do you remember finding government performance information but deciding not to use it? If so, why?
 - Have you come across government information that you didn't trust?
 - Have you come across government information that seemed too much work to use?
 - What tools did you use in putting it together?
 - Did you work with other researchers/analysts/journalists on it?

- Did you do the data analysis yourself?
- What audience was that for?
- Do you any evidence of impacts from the work?

Closing and referrals

- What else should we know about your processes and data needs?
- Thanks for your time and insight – this conversation, along with others will help inform the direction of performance.gov
- One last ask: do you know folks you might introduce us to that would be instructive to talk to? If so, could you connect us?

Appendix: Backlog of other questions

- What makes the job hard?
- If you had a magic wand and were allowed to make p.gov whatever you wanted, what would you do? Why?

Performance monitoring government agency representative [initial draft]

Information goals/questions we want to answer [initial draft]

- Understand what data could be provided that isn't.
- Understand what, if any systems and processes agencies have for making data-based performance decisions, and how they are working.
- Understand the agency performance data providers journey, in particular the start—from the perspective of their day-to-day workflow.
- Determine what, if anything, in their performance plan could be enhanced or eased by better data processing?
- Determine interest agencies have in providing metadata for indicators /outputs over time.

Question Guide [initial draft]

- How often are there changes to the map between goals, outcomes and outputs?
- How often do indicators start and stop?
- How many caveats do indicators have?
- How many indicators does your agency track that are not published?
- Does your agency publish indicator data separately or in addition to performance information?
- Are you using data.gov within your agency

Appendix: Prototyping script draft (revisions to come based on prototypes)

Introduction:

Purpose of today's conversation: My goal today is to get a general sense of how you typically use the existing other government information sites, and your thoughts about a new feature that we'll ask you to walk through to complete a few tasks. Part of what we want to figure out is what works, and what doesn't - so this isn't a test to see how much you know, and there are no right or wrong answers. As I mentioned, all the feedback you give is totally anonymous, and we encourage you not to hold back — please share any thoughts and observations that come to mind (even if you think they might be critical). Constructive criticism is what will help us improve this site, so please share it!

Our conversation should take about 15- 30 minutes, but we've set aside 45 minutes just in case you want to talk more with us.

Finally, a few disclaimers: "You signed a participant agreement form earlier, but I want to reiterate that your participation in this study is voluntary. Please let us know if you have concerns at any time during the interview. Also, please know that we'll be talking about Performance.gov in a very general sense. I also want to make it clear that we don't have any authority to represent OMB or GSA or provide related insight or advice."

Goal: Observe how users interact with the prototype. Identify aspects of our designs and the system that are working well (and aspects that aren't) — what design choices help users more easily and quickly complete the assigned tasks?

"Now I've sent you a link to a prototype for part of Performance.gov. This isn't a complete system at the moment, but we're interested in testing it gradually as a proof of concept.

"Mention anything that comes to mind: things that are working, things that are confusing or that aren't working, and even things you wish were on the page but aren't. Once again, there are no right or wrong answers here, and we appreciate your honest reactions!"

"As you read and respond, pretend as though we're not here, and please share whatever's going through your mind as you explore this page."

[Todo: Add questions here to investigate the particular questions a future prototype would need to investigate, and more introduction to help the user understand this particular prototype]

Some follow-up prompts (see also these [interviewing tips](#)):

- Where would you click first? Why?
- What do you expect to happen after clicking there?
- What are your thoughts on the amount of instruction given here?
- Is anything unclear? If so, how could it be made more clear?
- Would you use [X tool/section]? If YES - why? If NO - why not?
- What caused you to pause/stop here?
- Imagine, for a moment, that this page were a person — how would you describe them? What would they be like?

Secondary follow-up prompts:

- Why did that happen?
 - What happened next?
 - How typical is that?
 - Can you tell me more about that?
 - Really?
 - I see.

Goal: Capture anything else that's on participants' minds.

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Closeout: “Thanks for taking the time to chat with me today! If you have any follow-up questions, or if you want to be involved in future tests of our work, please feel free to email me [provide contact info]. **Last but not least, if you know of anyone else who might be interested in participating, please feel free to put them in touch with me – I'd love to talk to them!**”