



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

ESTABLISHING A GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS ADVANCED RESEARCH (GEAR) CENTER

BACKGROUND

Despite rapid innovation and evolution in the private sector, many federal programs have not adapted to the expectations of today's customers. To restore trust and continue serving the American people, the federal government must transition to more modern ways of doing business. Existing research often lacks the practical application of new ideas and methods, thereby falling short of meeting the federal government's strategic and operational needs. The federal government needs an enterprise-wide capability to work with researchers, academics, nonprofits, private industry, and state and local governments to assess the long-term strategic needs of the government enterprise. The administration's reform and reorganization plan calls for the establishment of a Government Effectiveness Advanced Research (GEAR) Center to implement 21st century innovation and enterprise-wide solutions, thereby improving mission accomplishment and service delivery to benefit all Americans.

OVERVIEW: STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

Overview

To successfully transform federal operations, the GEAR Center should draw on new thinking and different voices, leveraging insights and capabilities outside the nation's capital. The Partnership for Public Service – a nonpartisan nonprofit organization working to make our federal government more effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of its citizens – proposes establishing a consortium of stakeholders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, including representatives from academia, foundations, corporations, and state and local government. The GEAR Center consortium will find leading-edge scalable solutions to government's management challenges by: identifying key strategic and operational issues facing the federal government; rapidly researching, designing and testing solutions; and helping agencies implement improvements.

While drawing new ideas into government, the GEAR Center should also help create an infrastructure inside the federal government to surface promising practices, so they can be more broadly applied. This could include creating regular mechanisms to share successful methods, develop cross-agency solutions, and leverage a talent pool capable of innovative problem-solving.

Proposed Structure

Consortium members would reflect diversity of geography, specialization, and expertise. The central coordinating entity (ideally a nonprofit organization with extensive federal government expertise) would establish a core leadership team, representing a cross-section of consortium members, to oversee projects and manage across participating organizations, quickly developing working groups to address specific research priorities. Each working group will manage the design, development, and piloting of each proposed solution, working closely with an evaluation team to collect and apply customer feedback. In addition to short-term feedback, the evaluation conducted by academic and public administration scholars will help to inform future policy decisions.

Governance

The core team will manage day-to-day GEAR Center operations and report to a governing body that includes government representatives from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the General Services Administration (GSA), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the President's Management Council (PMC). Specifically, the governing board would include: OMB's deputy director for management; GSA's administrator; OPM's director; and at least one Cabinet-level agency deputy secretary, representing the PMC. These federal leaders will facilitate connections into government for the innovative solutions released from the GEAR Center and create a deeper sense of trust for agency leaders implementing the solutions. Additional governing board members will include a representative from the central coordinating entity and several external private sector, academic, and state and local government stakeholders appointed by the core team.

INFORMING AND ESTABLISHING THE GEAR CENTER

Solution-Driven Approach

The government needs to move quickly to not only surface challenges, but to prototype solutions and to educate leaders to be able to scale implementation. To meet this need, the GEAR Center will launch, pilot, and apply solutions in less than six months. By leveraging human-centered design, the consortium will ensure that the solutions and processes are both usable and accessible to federal and civilian customers. Consortium members will continuously collect customer feedback to improve solutions in real-time. Based on this feedback, the GEAR Center will propose solutions to agencies as working groups identify viable products. Due to the relative independence of each working group, the GEAR Center will make recommendations and implement several solutions simultaneously.

In parallel, the GEAR Center should better position agencies to internally identify and address strategic and operational challenges, particularly to accelerate adoption and expansion of promising practices. This could include enhancing existing cross-agency coordination while supplementing talent pipelines to lead change management initiatives, aiming to quicken and deepen problem-solving and solution implementation within and across agencies.

Issue Identification Process

Initial research questions for the GEAR Center will be driven by the President's Management Agenda (PMA), including workforce reskilling and data commercialization. To identify future research initiatives, the consortium's core team will conduct a regular (and frequent) process to gather recommendations from federal representatives and government customers. Methods may include surveys, targeted focus groups, public town hall meetings, and digital platforms to leverage a broad geographic reach. From these pipelines, the consortium core team will distill insights, highlighting key themes and trends, for the GEAR Center governing board's input, approval, and prioritization.

Consortium Network

With the prioritized list of research questions, the consortium's academic partners will analyze identified challenges and propose solutions for experimentation. Using a "test and learn" model, the consortium would pilot recommended innovations with federal agencies, measuring and tracking success. The consortium will leverage technology, algorithms and data to gather insights from federal employees and citizens, using the voice of the customer to drive progress. With input from the core management team, the consortium could also create dashboards to monitor community outreach and impact of solutions on regional areas, particularly federal customers. Model solutions will be scalable and broadly replicable across agencies.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following considerations will be critical in operationalizing the GEAR Center:

- **Funding Model:** Federal seed money will originally fund the GEAR Center, specifically development of the consortium and core team. Partner organizations will pay an annual fee to be a member of the consortium, providing additional investment funding for research and testing. Industry partners will be spotlighted as supporters of good government, a key component of the value proposition of involvement with the GEAR Center. Long-term sustainability of the consortium, particularly corporate and university participation, will rely on implementing successful solutions with federal agencies.
- **Prizes and Challenges:** The GEAR Center core team should work with the federal government to use the America COMPETES Act and Challenge.gov. Prizes and challenges enable the federal government to pay only for successful solutions and to increase the number and diversity of teams working to develop solutions for a specific problem.
- **Customer Input:** Agencies need reliable and timely customer feedback to improve services. Congress can help by amending the Paperwork Reduction Act so that agencies may invite voluntary customer feedback without going through a lengthy and limiting regulatory process.

PARTNERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to achieving a more effective and innovative government for our country. We partner with individuals, foundations, corporations, universities and federal agencies to increase government effectiveness through recruiting and retaining top talent, developing leaders, engaging employees, and modernizing federal operations, systems and structures.

The Partnership is uniquely positioned to convene federal leaders in a neutral space, fostering cross-agency cooperation and exchange. As a nonpartisan, nonprofit, we are able to amplify best practices and share success stories with a broad audience through a variety of media outlets. Meeting the increasingly complex challenges facing federal agencies and civil servants requires creating a culture of experimentation in government and finding new techniques that harness approaches proven to work elsewhere. We help the government enterprise be responsive to the evolving needs of the American people by:

- Providing assistance to federal agencies to improve their management and operations, and to strengthen their leadership capacity;
- Promoting accountability by generating research on, and effective responses to, the workforce challenges facing our federal government;
- Advocating for needed legislative and regulatory reforms to strengthen and make government more effective;
- Identifying and celebrating government's successes so they can be replicated across government; and
- Conducting outreach to college campuses and job seekers to promote public service.

The Partnership has extensive experience driving transformational change in federal agencies. Our team has a depth and breadth of experience working with the public, private and nonprofit sectors—ensuring that our federal partners are exposed to the best theory and the practical, real-life experience necessary to lead effectively. We have an unmatched network of current and former government executives and senior officials, executive coaches and senior subject matter experts who serve as our faculty, speakers and advisors. Relevant examples of our work across sectors includes:

- **Center for Presidential Transition:** To provide critical assistance and information to federal agencies and presidential candidates, the Partnership's Center for Presidential Transition serves as a repository for documentation from previous transitions, offers guidance on how to set up and execute a transition, works with the outgoing administration to encourage a smooth transfer of power, shares management recommendations for the new administration to address government's talent and operational challenges, engages Congress to promote presidential transition reforms and prepares new political appointees to lead effectively. To ensure that future presidential hand-offs are as seamless as possible, the center builds on transition experience to date to develop a permanent foundation for future presidential transitions, and facilitates an ongoing dialogue with the good government and business communities, academia, the social sector, and current and former government officials.
- **Cross-Sector Issue-Based Conferences:** The Partnership regularly convenes high-level, cross-sector thought leaders through conferences at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's Pocantico Conference Center. In 2008, 2012 and 2016, the conferences brought together representatives of federal agencies, good-government groups and major presidential campaigns to discuss transition planning. In 2015, the conference focused on innovation; in 2017, the topic was federal customer experience. Each of these conferences led to broader initiatives that applied research to agency-level implementation, including creation of the Federal Innovation Council and a cross-agency customer experience program.
- **Call to Serve Network:** With the growing complexity of issues facing this country, the federal government increasingly needs to create talent pipelines with colleges and universities across the country to address the nation's challenges. The Partnership's Call to Serve network is a national system that collaborates with both federal agencies and more than a thousand institutions of higher education, working to promote federal service and recruit the next generation of public servants.
- **Service to America Medals (Sammies):** Known as the "Oscars" of government service, the Sammies are a highly respected honor with a rigorous selection process. Supported by a wide range of corporate partners, these awards embody the vision of a dynamic and innovative federal workforce that meets the needs of the American people. Honorees represent the many exceptional federal workers who are breaking down barriers, overcoming huge challenges and getting results. Whether they defend the homeland, protect the environment, ensure public safety, make scientific and medical discoveries, or respond to natural and man-made disasters, these men and women put service before self and make a lasting difference.
- **Strategic Advisors to Government Executives (SAGE) Network:** The SAGE network comprises of more than 100 former political and career executives who continue their commitment to public service by supporting current government leaders. By sharing their extensive experience and expertise, SAGEs help senior executives navigate the complex federal environment and the political, management, legal and fiduciary demands of their positions.

- **Federal Innovation Council:** The Federal Innovation Council brings together leading public sector innovators (with private and nonprofit sector affiliates) to promote greater adoption of innovation practices across government. In establishing the Federal Innovation Council, the Partnership aims to develop a comprehensive approach to promoting and enabling innovation across the federal government, helping agencies more effectively solve problems and deliver services. Council members share expertise and identify opportunities to collaborate to enable innovation in government, helping the Partnership increase awareness of – and reduce barriers to – innovation, resulting in the improved ability of federal agencies to design, test, and deliver new approaches and solutions.
- **Community-Based Initiative:** The Community-Based Initiative provided training and team-building to federal and local leaders from five different Promise Zones to strengthen their ability to coordinate and collaborate in service of shared goals to revitalize communities across the country.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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