**Data.gov Meetings with Open Data Leads**

Background:

Between April and September 2015, the Data.gov team met with the open data leads at 22 of the 24 CFO Act agencies.[[1]](#footnote-0) Most meetings were in person at the agency, with the open data leads and others supporting the effort, and with Chief Data Officers where applicable. Discussions were informal and in general covered:

* confirming names, roles and responsibilities of open data contacts
* description of the open data process at agencies
* the challenges at each agency
* identifying tasks for the Data.gov team, whether resolving specific technical issues or the need for new shared services
* feedback from agencies to Data.gov, OMB, and OSTP on what needs to be done to make the open data effort sustainable beyond this Administration.

Findings:

* There is a wide and varied spectrum of effort and staffing on open data. In several agencies it is the effort of a single person. A few have agency-wide working groups specifically for open data or existing organizations that are used to coordinate the open data effort. Most of the open data efforts are through CIO offices.
* The tools being used to managed data inventories range from spreadsheets, existing data management systems, agency CKAN instances, and inventory.data.gov provided by the Data.gov team.
* There is a range of agency leadership commitment or support to open data. The agencies with strong support are still in the minority. There are a few agencies, especially where releasing data to the public has not been part of the core mission, where there is disinterest or clear opposition. But in general, the open data leads are dedicated and trying hard regardless of the level of senior management support.
* A few agencies stated that they have included most of their known data assets in their data inventories, but the more common scenario is that only a small percentage of potential data assets have been included and described.
* For larger agencies with independent bureaus/sub-agencies, there are coordination challenges in including sub-agencies that might not be responsive to the person charged with the open data effort for the department.
* Agencies generally understand the Open Data Policy requirements and the process of generating a data.json to be harvested by Data.gov.
* Most agencies could use assistance with a shared service for handling two-way public feedback.

Challenges:

* Almost all agencies mentioned that there were no additional resources for open data. Some stated that there was only enough to maintain or “keep the lights on” for important datasets, and nothing for investment to improve access to more data.
* Several agencies brought up the need for guidance on data governance and assistance with dealing with PII, risks of re-identification, security, and other policy or legal questions where there has been inadequate support or guidance to agencies.
* The Sunlight Foundation FOIA was brought up by several agencies. Their FOIA offices or OGCs found that it did not go through proper FOIA channels and the result was a more difficult environment for subsequent efforts by the open data leads at these agencies.
* Hiring for specific innovations like focusing on APIs is still a challenge at most agencies.
* Most agencies criticized the quarterly open data milestones/dashboard process. They did not discern an overall strategy to the quarterly milestones and stated that it seemed like just new requirements every quarter that forced them to re-do work. The criteria for what makes a certain factor green/yellow/red on the dashboard are unclear or not understood. A few open data leads who have been historically very motivated about open data have become disillusioned with following this process as a result.
* At most agencies, the “business case” for open data has not been made. There is a need to show the benefit to the agency mission, as well as the possibilities for government-to-government use of open data.

Action Items for Data.gov:

* Follow up on the specific technical issues with each agency.
* Continued work on shared services for CKAN and the Data.gov Help Desk (CRM module).
* Work with OMB/OSTP on action items (below) as well as provide more details and context on problems at specific agencies.

Potential Action Items for OMB/OSTP:

* Integrate open data goals with existing, ongoing IT capital planning, budget, data management, or other processes. Some agencies brought up questions about how to align open data with the Federal Enterprise Architecture. Almost every agency stated that integration with other ongoing processes is critical to sustaining the open data effort.
* Continued efforts on budget support for open data.
* Reconsideration of quarterly milestones going forward, communicate overall goals (“what is the two-year plan?”), and provide clearer explanation of “grading” criteria on the dashboard
* Look for ways of “asking once” and re-using for multiple purposes other than open data (e.g., FITARA requirements).
* Lead efforts on policy/legal questions that are common to all agencies such as PII or security, where there is lack of guidance or actual disagreement between different General Counsel’s offices (there is a current draft National Action Plan item on this).
* Continue efforts, whether through hiring of more Chief Data Officers, or other avenues, to build support for open data with agency leadership.

1. We were unable to schedule meetings with the NRC and Department of Energy due to lack of response or vacancies in the open data positions. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)