

Request for Information (RFI): Establishing a Government Effectiveness Advanced Research (GEAR) Center

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OVERVIEW

The Federal Government intends to pursue a Government Effectiveness Advanced Research (GEAR) Center, which would be a public-private partnership focused on applied research that improves mission delivery, citizen services, and stewardship of public resources, as proposed in *Delivering Government Solutions for the 21st Century: Reform Plan and Reorganization Recommendations*. This non-governmental, public-private partnership would address operational and strategic challenges facing the Federal Government, both now and into the future, by engaging researchers, academics, non-profits, and private industry across an array of disciplines, such as data science, organizational behavior, and user-centered design.

Through applied research and live pilot testing, the GEAR Center would connect cutting-edge thinking with real-world challenges the Federal Government faces in serving Americans in the Digital Age. This means re-imagining possibilities for how citizens interact with the Government; rethinking the delivery of citizen services and data; reforming core processes (e.g., procurement, budget, IT investment and capital allocation); and exploring how the public-sector workforce can be developed, reskilled and redeployed in creative ways. The focus would be on the Federal Government, but we expect it could also involve interested State and local governments. While the Federal Government anticipates providing seed funding for the Center, we do not expect to maintain responsibility for long-term administration, staffing, and operational management. This request for information (RFI) seeks input from across sectors and disciplines on similar capabilities that already exist as well as key considerations in pursuing this initiative.

PURPOSE OF THIS RFI

This RFI supports a two-step process to gather information for the development of the GEAR Center and to promote transparency and innovation by enabling the public, academics, experts, and industry to comment on how best this can be accomplished. First, the Government will hold a conference in late summer with interested parties to discuss the three areas below as well as

other topics raised by questions and comments received in advance. Second, interested parties are encouraged to submit written responses to the following eight questions.

Informing the GEAR Center:

1. Given the mission of the GEAR Center, what should be:
 - Its strategic approach and operating objectives?
 - Specific areas of innovation and practice to prioritize? For example, we anticipate an early focus on reskilling the Federal workforce and growing the economy through appropriate commercialization of Federal data.
 - The process to identify and prioritize additional new areas on an ongoing basis?
2. How should a GEAR Center be operationalized, including its structure, such as a physical center, a network, a consortium of institutions, or other approaches?
3. What models of public-private partnership should inform the GEAR Center:
 - What sectors, stakeholders, types of expertise, and networks or programs should be involved?
 - What should a governance structure look like or include?
 - How should the GEAR Center maintain mission focus without the Federal Government being responsible for ongoing administration, staffing, and operational management?
4. What examples already exist that serve a purpose similar to the GEAR Center, whether for governments or other institutions:
 - How might such examples be replicated, scaled, connected, or more systematically leveraged?
 - Opportunities for the Government to learn more about these examples, such as through a demonstration, virtual interaction, or other method?

Establishing the GEAR Center:

5. What model should be used to establish a GEAR Center, including:
 - The most effective and low-burden mechanism to establish a GEAR Center, such as the Government issuing a challenge, pursuing a traditional procurement, or an alternate approach?
 - If the Government were to pursue a challenge or other open competition, the key considerations in establishing a panel of judges?
6. How should a GEAR Center be funded? The Federal Government expects to provide seed funding to support near-term establishment of the GEAR Center agenda, but a market-driven model will be needed to sustain the Center facilities, operations, and agenda over the long term.
 - What could be sustainable funding approaches, including sources of funding?
 - What market incentives are necessary to make the Center sustainable?

Anticipated Early Focus Areas:

7. What models, approaches, and opportunities should inform an anticipated early focus on reskilling and upskilling Federal employees? For each questions, please cite any available data or research to support your answer.
 - What are leading practices for effective reskilling, upskilling, and training adult workers, including opportunities for new applications of existing models?
 - What approaches could be piloted for possible application and scalability across the Federal sector in various learning domains (e.g., cognitive, affective, behavioral) - such as gamification, use of massively open on-line courses (MOOCs), apprenticeship models, and other new approaches?
 - What are examples of metrics currently used to assess the effectiveness of reskilling and upskilling efforts?
 - Do any of the suggested approaches have a particular nexus to the Federal workforce and/or to the automation of existing workflows, and transformation of existing skills to in-demand skills expected to comprise the “future of work”? If there are occupations or skill sets that would provide an opportunity-rich environment, please include specifics.
8. For an anticipated early focus on how Federally owned data could help transform society and grow the economy:
 - Are there opportunities for the Federal government to partner with the private sector to improve data architecture/taxonomy, and data quality/hygiene?
 - Are there innovative economic models that highlight the value of the data, and would encourage private investment to capture that value both within the Government and across the broader economy? What are the barriers to implementing these models?
 - Are there specific data sets that could be further leveraged by the Federal government, start-ups, and the public – that, once scaled, have a significant potential to contribute to the greater good (bolster the economy, improve population health, provide services to the general public, etc.)?

THE PROBLEM

Most Federal Government entities and programs were designed many decades ago, and many are still aligned to the missions of the 19th Century. Their designers could not have anticipated how technology or society’s needs would evolve in the 21st Century. Today’s Government is outdated and proven to adapt more slowly than the private sector and has fallen behind the curve, with reported decreases in trust¹ and lower customer satisfaction.² The inability to adapt has likely contributed to the Federal government’s failures to meet expectations and resulted in less than optimal use of resources. Moreover, the Government’s reliance on outdated technology has led to a workforce insufficiently equipped to transition to more modern ways of doing business.

¹ Pew Research Center, May, 2017, “Public Trust in Government Remains Near Historic Lows as Partisan Attitudes Shift.”

² <https://www.theacsi.org/news-and-resources/customer-satisfaction-reports/reports-2017/acsi-retail-report-2017>.

Although disparate research is available in the public and private sector, there is little work directed toward providing a forward-looking view on how Executive Branch agencies should evolve management practices for the 21st Century. Moreover, existing research often has very little connection to the practical operating considerations of how new ideas or methods could be delivered and executed. In short, almost no applied research or true technology research and development address the practical realm of government operations. The Executive Branch lacks an enterprise-wide capability to work with researchers, academics, non-profits, private industry, and State and local governments to assess the long-term strategic needs of the Government enterprise and to “test and learn” how to apply innovative approaches to meeting the mission, service, and stewardship needs of the 21st Century. This capability is needed to effectively apply theory and research to Federal practice in a low-risk environment and, based on findings, create “on ramps” to scale effective practices and initiatives across Government.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The GEAR Center would be a public-private partnership bringing together experts in disciplines ranging from economics, to computer science, to design thinking, in order to take a creative, data-driven, and interdisciplinary approach to imagining and realizing new possibilities in how citizens and government interact. It would provide the Federal Government with the opportunity to catch up with where private-sector services and capabilities are today and lay the groundwork for where Government operations and services need to be in five, 10, or 20 years.

This work would be an important, high-level complement to existing ways that the private sector and academia already inform Federal work. For example, targeted exchanges of expertise and leadership are already supported through the Intergovernmental Personnel Act³ (IPA), which provides for temporary assignment of personnel between the Federal Government and State and local governments, colleges and universities, Indian tribal governments, federally funded research and development centers, and other eligible organizations. In addition, the Government regularly uses its convening capacity to learn more from other sectors on specific issues and establishes advisory committees pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act⁴ (FACA).

INITIAL IDEAS FOR THE GEAR CENTER

This Center will enable live testing and piloting of new capabilities, methods and approaches and inform future direction by helping the Government anticipate and respond to changes in technology and society that have implications for Government efficiency and service to citizens. Developing this capacity supports innovation as an engine to transform the public’s experience with Government. Researchers and other GEAR Center stakeholders will validate and/or develop improved ways to effectively serve customers of Government services and rethink the experience of Government-public interactions.

³ 42 U.S.C. §§ 4701 *et seq.*

⁴ 5 U.S.C. App. § 9

Two anticipated areas of focus highlight how the GEAR Center would address likely impacts to Government from broader economic forces, improving service in programs that rate the worst in terms of public feedback, and exploring strategies to leverage Big Data and manage data as an asset across Government silos. First, the Government anticipates an early focus for the GEAR Center on reskilling the Federal workforce to fulfill the demand for up-to-date skills and prepare for further transitions into modern, technologically driven Government. Live-testing innovative reskilling models is a tangible example of how the GEAR Center would help translate the latest knowledge and practice about effective adult learning into a real-time Federal environment. A second early focus could be data commercialization. The private sector has effectively leveraged Federal data such as weather and satellite data to drive economic growth and meet consumer demands and retail and real estate industries' use of Census data. Results could potentially be scaled across Government more broadly and would inform Federal policy and practice.

The Government anticipates providing nominal seed funding for the GEAR Center. However, a long-term funding strategy should not depend on dedicated Federal funding but instead on market incentives and the ability to connect innovative research and private sector capital with tangible needs. The Center's long-term administration, staffing, and operational management would not be a Federal responsibility.

The Government would work with the GEAR Center to establish a governance structure that supports leveraging and scaling successful models tested through the GEAR Center. This would likely include a formal connection to the President's Management Council and the Office of Management and Budget. These connections would help to make sure that the GEAR Center can respond to the most relevant Government needs and also that its findings can appropriately inform key processes such as the establishment of the President's Management Agenda, Cross-Agency Priority Goals, and the development of the President's Budget.

The GEAR Center could be established at a university, think tank, or other prominent research institution as a public-private partnership. It would call upon researchers, academics, non-profits, private industry, and State and local governments to help test hypotheses, rapidly prototype new strategies and models, and help the Government anticipate and respond to changes in technology with implications for service to citizens and Government mission.

To establish the GEAR Center, the Government could, for example, issue a new Challenge under the America COMPETES Act.⁵ Prize competitions under this new statute may be funded jointly by more than one agency and by the private sector. This authority offers a flexible and fast method to obtain input from a wide swath of the public, including industry, non-profits, universities, and other entities, to best spur innovation.

⁵ America COMPETES Reauthorization Act, 111 Pub. L. 358 § 105 (codified at 15 U.S.C. 3719). In March 2010, OMB issued memorandum M-10-11, Guidance on the Use of Challenges and Prizes to Promote Open Government. In March 2018, the Trump administration indicated its support for using this mechanism: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/trump-administration-supports-fostering-innovation-leveraging-prizes-challenges/>.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITTEN RESPONSES

Interested parties should provide written responses to the questions outlined in the “Purpose of This RFI” section. Submissions are due on September 14, 2018 through email to performance@omb.eop.gov.

Please include the below in your response, *limiting this portion of your response to one page*:

- The name of the individual(s) and/or organization responding.
- A brief description of the responding individual(s) or organization’s mission and/or areas of expertise, including any public-private partnership work within the past three years with Federal, State, or local governments that is relevant to applied research on workforce reskilling and data commercialization.
- A contact for questions or other follow-up on your response.

PRIVACY

All feedback and questions related to the conference will be made public.

Additionally, submissions responding to the questions in this Request for Information may also be made public. **Please do not include any confidential, proprietary, or sensitive information that you do not wish to be made public.** Information made public will not include names and contact information of individuals or entities. Submissions are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

NEXT STEPS

The Government anticipates hosting a conference prior to the RFI deadline to allow for additional engagement. The government invites the public to submit questions to performance@omb.eop.gov to help inform the Question and Answer period at the conference. Questions will be received until 5 PM ET on the date of the conference. The government will make available written questions and answers on or about 30 days after the event.

The results of conference discussion, in addition to the written responses to this RFI, will be used to determine next steps in establishing the GEAR Center. Next steps will move toward establishing the GEAR Center, which may include issuing a challenge or pursuing another open type of competition.

To get up-to-date information, including about logistics and other information regarding the conference, please visit us at www.performance.gov/GEARcenter and follow us on Twitter [@PerformanceGov](https://twitter.com/PerformanceGov).

This Request for Information is solely issued to engage with interested parties to inform the Government on developing a strategy for a GEAR Center. The Government will not reimburse costs associated with responding to this announcement and participating in the conference.

The Government may contact respondents regarding their submissions, such as to ask questions, to learn more, or to notify them of further developments related to the GEAR Center.