

FDP OPEN GOVERNMENT: RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION DATA SUBCOMMITTEE -OVERVIEW & CURRENT ACTIVITY 8/8/2018

Co-Chairs: Richard Fenger, University of Washington, Stephanie Endy, Case Western Reserve University and Avinash Tembulkar, National Science Foundation

Introduction

The FDP Open Government Subcommittee provides a forum to track, analyze, and streamline the impact of data driven initiatives stemming from various Federal Government directives such as the President's Management Agenda (PMA), OMB memorandums, mandates, and agency goals on researchers, research administrators, and institutions. It facilitates the adoption of standards and their implementation to ensure transparency goals are met while maximizing positive impact and minimizing workload on all partners in the process. Finally, the committee coordinates with other FDP committees as needed (e.g. eRA, Expanded Clearinghouse) to address data-centric components of mutual interest.

Background

Data and datasets are the building blocks of research and research administration. They are the raw elements of proposals, research, awards, reporting, and close out. Their unconstrained proliferation creates data quality issues such as duplication, inefficiency, and burden without creating additional meaning, safeguards, or risk reduction. While researchers are generally careful about what data supports their research, administrative data has had very few checks and balances to ensure its quality throughout the life-cycle. As the field of research management has grown since the 1940s, the related data, data sets, and taxonomies have been left to develop unguided and unhindered.

As a result, each institution has developed data to support communication around grant applications, awards, reporting, and closeout in its own silo; resulting in relatively few common terms across the grant life-cycle between sponsors and grantees or among collaborating entities. Grant administrators meeting for the first time may sometimes recognize the terminology used by each other by administrative subspecialty, most common sponsor, or software product; but most often will walk away after a conversation with generally overlapping but significantly different understandings of the details discussed. This can happen even within the same institution, be it sponsor or awardee.

The US Federal Government's role in providing assistance to stimulate the public good through research drives much of the existing shared language for financial assistance awardees, and where the agencies differ creates variety in data, data sets, processes, and language. As a result, shared taxonomies across the grant life cycle are difficult to document and slow to take root. This creates an opportunity for the US Federal Government to lead the way in working with stakeholders to streamline the building blocks of financial assistance taxonomies.

It is fundamentally important to undergo a shared effort of data modernization across institutions, grantors, and grantees in order to leverage modern computing tools and approaches for the purposes of reducing risk and burden. Put more plainly, we can and should work smarter and more efficiently through shared data, data sets, and taxonomies. Within this approach, the detailed path of how to achieve these end results must incorporate the development of these taxonomies through the creation of shared data definitions and analyses.

Current Impetus

In response to the new administration elected in 2016, several constituents of the Federal Government realized that with a new President and Administration would come a new President's Management Agenda (PMA). Instead of waiting to see what the new administration would think up, some areas began to organize around items identified that would improve their lives. Most critically, several areas came up with the same principle: improve the electronic tools, business process, data collection, data use, and data transparency. Likely this shared choice has been influenced by many recent events: the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act), the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the GREAT Act, and Presidential Memoranda addressing shared data and transparency. As a backdrop to all of these influences there is also the shared portal mandate of Grants.gov and the streamlining thread from the Uniform Guidance.

The PMA prioritizes for Federal agencies the idea that the Federal Government should be using electronic tools that include the capabilities of the 21st century and reinforces the idea that the government can reduce redundancy by sharing resources and tools across agencies.

In addition to the public attention that the PMA is receiving and the pressure that the President is putting on OMB, several agencies have independently been looking at ways to streamline grants management and are including the whole grant life-cycle in their thinking. The PMA intends to address all types of assistance grants and not just research grants; and report on outcomes and not just the outputs.

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Fundamental to the ‘boots on the ground’ approach that we are hearing across agencies is the concept that multiple forms are simply sets of data fields, and that some of those data fields are the same from form to form. For example, across the life cycle of a grant an applicant becomes a recipient and a reporting entity. For that grant, the name of the entity, their unique identifying number, and their address should be the same.

For the first time we are also hearing the desire to treat the entire lifecycle, not just proposals and electronic submission, but also to award terms and conditions, reporting, and closeout. The US Federal Government is applying the lessons learned from Grants.gov to the grant life-cycle. Though Grants.gov has not succeeded in being a single submission portal for grants, it has succeeded in being a single portal for grant opportunities, and the experience of creating a single portal has informed future directions.

Opportunity

Getting the fundamental data fields and definitions right is an opportunity for FDP to partner with the Federal Government under the PMA umbrella. Our unique set of grantees works with the most complex types of assistance mechanisms available: research grants. As the PMA drives agencies to creatively think about grants, several areas of opportunity are emerging. These include: a Grants Terms and Conditions matrix to parallel the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) matrix, electronic data feeds for awards, and taking the duplication out of financial reporting. If only one of these areas takes root and grows, recipients and grantors alike can benefit from the efficiencies gained through reduced workload and improved accuracy.

This FDP subcommittee has and continues to approach the need for research recipients and sponsors to develop a shared vocabulary including taxonomies and data definitions that can be systematically applied within and across data sets, institutions, and sponsors.

FDP efforts related to reviewing data sets and taxonomies

- Expanded Clearinghouse
- Financial Conflict of Interest (FCOI) Clearinghouse
- Subaward Templates
- Data Use and Transfer Agreement Templates
- Faculty Administrator Collaboration Team (FACT) - cross institution data analysis
- Data Stewardship
- DATA Act:
 - Continued support and validation of USASpending.gov data, including data demos for FDP
 - Continued interaction with the Common Data Element Repository (CDER) Library
 - Continued partnership with eRA the cross group, joint effort that was the DATA Act

Opportunities for data driven burden reduction

- **Agency Systems Matrix Analysis** in line with Reinvent grants and Financial Assistance Community for eGovernment like FACE and SAM efforts
- **Bring forward FDP efforts** that embody data and ensure their inclusion in these efforts. (e.g., Expanded Clearinghouse should be embraced and not reimaged by the Fed)
- **Post Award Reporting** e.g., SF425 (270 consolidation)
- **Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) survey** - “Expect 60 hrs” Low on definitions, standardization and the ranks are gamed by some folks using “internal funding” to get their numbers up.
- **Standard/Electronic Notice of Award (NoA)** - great influence and pilot opportunity. Direct opportunity for eRA or in partnership with
- **Form Reduction, Consolidation, Retirement**
- **Cross agency** effort monitoring and reporting back to FDP
- **Workgroups** as necessary to validate requirements or influence requirements to a better end for Higher Ed
- **Cross forum communication with** Council on Governmental Relations (**COGR**), Data Coalition
- **Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA):** FFATA Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) analysis and influence to a new state. Overall Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards (SEFA) use cases suggest ton of burden starting with FSRS

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- **Critical Data Element Lobbying** - Sponsor Award Number (FAIN, DocID, etc...): Specific impact analysis (very underway at UW and ready to rally for influence)
- **Facilities and Administration (F and A):** Impact analysis, needs analysis, and FACT

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SUMMARY OF FEDERAL / NATIONAL LEVEL MEETINGS ATTENDED RECENTLY BY OPEN GOV SUBCOMMITTEE

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---|----------------|
| Whitehouse Roundtable on Modernizing Grant Reporting | Dec 2017 | Data Coalition at OMB's request | Rick Fenger |
| Purpose: OMB sharing the Whitehouse's objectives to, post DATA Act findings, and the plans they are formulating to move forward including a mention of the upcoming President's Management Agenda. | | | |
| Summary: Attended by a large group of Feds and external constituents from state gov to advocacy. OMB shared findings from the DATA Act effort and participants shared their needs, self interests. Hope for more standardization, reduction of redundancy and transparency were established as the themes. OMB shared their anticipated direction to evolve towards DATA Act findings, this was the first mention of the President's Management Agenda. Other agencies like USDA shared their thoughts and related approaches. DATA Coalition's new white paper was announced, " Transforming Federal Grant Reporting: Open the Data, Reduce Compliance Costs, and Deliver Transparency ". The GREAT Act was officially mentioned. | | | |
| Roundtable on Innovating with Federal Spending Data | Feb 2018 | Treasury/OMB/Ctr for Open Data Enterprise | Richard Fenger |
| Purpose: "Identify new applications of federal spending data and develop recommendations for increasing its use and impact" | | | |
| Summary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced the Treasury folks behind USA Spending 2.0 • Demo'd USA Spending and data use opportunities • Cycled through a series of data users in the community and their hopes and dreams • Round table talks about how impactful the new data are and where it should go resulting in the identifying 4 common point I think we are all aware of: Need for... 1) increased standardization 2) increased transparency 3) increased data quality 4) reduced redundancy | | | |
| HHS Reinvent Grants Management Feedback Discussion | July 2018 | HHS – Mike Peckham lead | Stephanie Endy |
| Purpose: "We will use this meeting to provide an update on RGM activities and to obtain input on the RGM approach and the direction we are headed with each of the projects." | | | |
| Summary: DATA Act Pilot Recap + other reform efforts like GONE Act, GREAT Act. Discussed establishment of the ReImagine effort and introduced the Grant's Management effort. Overall this session made us aware of HHS' post DATA Act ReImagine efforts. As a part of my attendance I was plugged into the existing network from the DATA Act and was able to see how some or past work and potentially future work tie to our direction in Open Gov. They highlighted the systems matrix and the Standard NoA suggesting FDP engagement does have an impact. | | | |
| Grants Innovation Forum | July 2018 | Data Foundation - (OMB in attendance) | Stephanie Endy |
| Purpose: Discuss current landscape and future data standardization | | | |
| Summary: Collection of folks from Fed, advocacy groups, non-profits and profits brought together to discuss a post DATA Act world and the future of grant reporting. Presentation from Fed on President's Management Agenda and Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goals. PMA is the way forward on pushing government reform. Overall session helped define the current landscape from issues to current initiatives. It also provided the opportunity to network with folks from the GAO and OMB. My contact with OMB helped set up our recent call with OMB to discuss potential opportunities for engagement between FDP and OMB concerning their CAP efforts. | | | |

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FEDERAL / NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIONS RELATED TO OPEN GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

| TYPE OF ACTION | TITLE / NAME OF ACTION | DATE | LEAD ENTITY/INDIVIDUAL | FDP PARTICIPATION |
|-----------------------|---|------------|--|---|
| Legislation | Paperwork Reduction Act | 1995 | | |
| Legislation | Federal Financial Assistance and Transparency Act (FFATA) | 2006 | | |
| Legislation | American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (along with ARRA Reporting Requirements) | 2009 | | FDP ARRA Subcommittee and Report |
| Committee | Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board (RAT Board) | | | |
| Legislation | Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act) | 5/9/2014 | Rep CA- R Darrel Issa OMB & Treasury | |
| Initiative | DATA Act – National Dialogue (to collect all stakeholder feedback) | | | |
| Federal Pilot | DATA Act Section 5 Pilot with Test Models (Common Data Elements/CEDR, Consolidated Fin Reporting, Single Audit, Standard NOA, Learn Grants) | 2016/2017 | HHS Project Management Office (PMO) | Rick Fenger and Open Government Subcommittee |
| Federal Memo | OMB Memo M-17-22 : Reforming Federal Government & Reducing Civilian Workforce (cabinet level agencies to become more: effective, efficient and accountable) | 4/12/2017 | OMB | |
| Initiative | Reimagine HHS | April 2017 | HHS | |
| Engagement | DATA Coalition Presentation on data challenges – Sponsor Award # Centric | 6/27/2017 | Data Coalition | Richard Fenger |
| Legislation (pending) | OPEN Government Data Act | 7/18/2017 | House (H.R. 1770) and Senate (S. 760) – Ryan | |
| Report | DATA Act Section 5 Pilot – Report and Recommendations to Congress | 8/10/2017 | HHS PMO (Mike Peckham) | FDP direct engagement and test pilot facilitation |
| Meeting | Whitehouse Roundtable on Modernizing Grant Reporting | 12/15/2017 | Data Coalition at OMBs request | |
| Report | Transforming Federal Grant Reporting: Open the Data, Reduce Compliance Costs, and Deliver Transparency | Dec 2017 | Data Foundation | Richard Fenger |
| Legislation (pending) | Grant Efficiency and Agreements Transparency (GREAT) Act | 1/29/2018 | Rep NC-R Virginia Foxx Rep CA-D Gomez | Richard Fenger, Interview, Quote, Feedback |
| Report | The State of the Union of Open Data | Feb 2018 | Data Foundation | |
| Meeting | Roundtable on Innovating with Federal Spending Data | 2/7/2018 | Treasury/OMB/Ctr for Open Data Enterprise | Richard Fenger |
| Report | Presidents Management Agenda (PMA) – CAP Goals | 3/20/2018 | OMB | 5/11/18 OMB, Fed Agency & FDP mtg |

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| | | | | 8/7/18 Call with OMB & FDP |
|---|---|-----------|---|---|
| TYPE OF ACTION | TITLE / NAME OF ACTION | DATE | LEAD ENTITY/INDIVIDUAL | FDP PARTICIPATION |
| Report | Reducing Federal Administrative and Regulatory Burden on Research (RBM Report) | May 2018 | NSTC/Committee on Science/RBM | |
| Initiative | Reinvent Grants Management (RGM) (Initiative under ReImagine HHS) | | HHS | |
| Initiative | Optimize NIH (also Initiative under ReImagine HHS) | | NIH – Larry Talbalk | |
| Report | Delivering Government Solutions in the 21st Century. Reform Plan and Reorganization Recommendations | 6/21/2018 | OMB | |
| Report | Transforming Federal Grant Reporting: Current Challenge, Future Vision | June 2018 | Data Foundation | |
| Meeting | HHS ReInvent Grants Management Feedback Discussion | July 2018 | HHS – Mike Peckham lead | Stephanie Endy |
| Meeting | Grants Innovation Forum | July 2018 | Data Foundation – Hudson Hollister, President (OMB in attendance) | Stephanie Endy |
| Initiative | Administration's work to create a basic taxonomy for core data elements, which is one of the first parts of the CAP Goal on Results-Oriented Accountability for Grants. | 8/7/2018 | OMB – Deputy Director | Open Government Subcommittee |
| OTHER RELATED ACTIONS/ACTIVITIES | | | | |
| Fed Committee | Financial Assistance Committee for E-Government (FACE) | | GSA | Wade Wargo, ONR Avinash Tembulkar, NSF |
| Initiative/Workgroup | DATA Act related initiatives/improvements | | Treasury | Avinash Tembulkar, NSF |
| Report/Initiative | NSF HERD survey – improvements/clarifications | | NSF | |
| Initiative | The Opportunity Project (build digital tools with fed data set to improve grants management) | | Census.gov | |
| Organization | Data Coalition – Focused on advocacy | | | |
| | Data Foundation – Think tank partner to Data Coalition | | | |
| Results/Work Product | CEDR Library Prototype Standard NOA | | | |