

# Open Data Action Plan Poses IT Investment Challenges

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Government information systems create, manage, and store a wealth of information that has yet to be fully utilized. The push to treat information as an asset is fuelled by the potential to increase government efficiency, improve accountability, and drive economic growth through innovation and scientific discovery. As progress continues toward making government data publicly available and useable, agency technology spending must straddle various and sometimes incompatible objectives.

In May 2013, the administration issued an [executive order](#) establishing open and machine-readable data as the default for government information. On the first anniversary of that step, the White House published its [Open Data Action Plan](#). The document outlines new commitments and builds on the efforts established through the [Open Data Charter](#).

The five strategic principles of the Open Data Charter, released mid June 2013, include achieving open data as a default expectation, maintaining quality and quantity of data releases, providing the data in a range of useable formats, improving governance by cultivating expertise around data collection, standards, and publishing; and cultivating innovation through empowering users. Continuing in this vein, the Open Data Action Plan describes four commitments around publishing data, prioritizing data releases, supporting innovators, and improving data.

Working toward making open data the default for government information, progress has been made both at a strategic level around policy and administrative initiatives as well as at the federal agency level. For example, the new action plan notes that, "All executive branch agencies are now required to develop a machine-readable catalog of their public data at [department].gov/data.json, such as [www.treasury.gov/data.json](http://www.treasury.gov/data.json), allowing simple software tools to automatically get updated information about the latest data available and have access to the same information that Data.gov collects and publishes."

The requirements for cataloging and providing access to data will shape efforts in parallel to agency initiatives around modernization and consolidation. The technology transformation underway (e.g. adoption of shared services, mobile technologies, and cloud computing) offers an opportunity to incorporate necessary adjustments to make data available at the same time. As agencies pursue work to refresh technology and improve efficiency, they will also need to be aware of the information being handled by their systems. While some data sets pose no issue for public release, security and privacy concerns present hurdles for others. Some agencies face additional challenges around making information available externally without compromising the internal performance of work by federal users.

The goal of releasing and enhancing high-priority data sets will engage the support of Presidential Innovation Fellows. Projects that will be led by Presidential Innovation Fellows include work at the Departments of Commerce, the Interior, Labor, and Energy, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Internal Revenue Service. These efforts, along with other examples highlighted in the plan, will serve as test cases for agencies to demonstrate the successful adoption of best practices and the value of the technology investments made along the way to the achievement.

These days, government agencies are aiming to stretch their technology spending, looking to improve both their efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, increased oversight continues to drive greater accountability and drives reporting requirements. Together, this creates a push to be selective and prioritize funding. While the goal of default open data is clear, there's a lot to be done to reach that target. The forty-some data sets selected as examples of expansions, enhancement, and releases in the action plan illustrate the work that lies ahead for agencies.

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