

Future of Open Data Draws Attention to Innovation, Policy

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Representatives from federal agencies, transparency organizations, legislative staffers, technology companies, and activists gathered this month to discuss the future of open data policies. Yet, some agencies have their own initiatives to encourage innovation underway.

On September 10, 2013, the Data Transparency Coalition hosted [the nation's first open data policy conference](#). The discussion examined the impact of open data and explored opportunities for new tools to streamline processes and target waste, fraud, and abuse. Meanwhile, the government is looking to release the follow on to its Open Government Action Plan, and the floor is open for comments and suggestions on encouraging public participation, improving management of public resources, and achieving effective collaboration to advance public services. [Feedback submissions](#) are requested by September 23, 2013.

Even as government, industry, and academia chart steps to open silos within the federal data portfolio, agencies are making strides to achieve great agility by leveraging data. In a [recent interview](#), Dr. Sasi Pillay, Chief Technology Officer for IT, described several programs promoting innovation at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). One focuses on [engaging individuals outside of NASA](#). Another focuses [on engagement inside the organization](#) by connecting the right NASA employees and staff.

This past April, NASA's [Open Innovation projects](#) completed an activity that engaged over 10,000 people around the world in a 48 hour period to work on 58 different problems. Many of these problems were developed and presented by NASA employees that had encountered challenges they'd been unable to resolve. Over 770 solutions were developed in that 48 hour period, which Pillay considers "a huge amount of success." Pillay estimates the return on investment (ROI) for NASA was between \$10 to 12 million for around \$500,000 of investment including logistics and civil service time. The next step for the effort will be to explore the developed solutions internally to determine if they can be implemented.

NASA's [IT Labs](#) program includes an annual poll for ideas and problems from within the organization. This is the 2nd year the activity has been completed, and so far 25 technologies have been identified for further investigation and development. The aim is for some of these investments to go on to benefit the rest of NASA.

Pillay notes that the challenges of continued declining budget spur two approaches: either reduce services or increase investment in innovation. One key area that received further attention and investment at NASA is mobility. Last year, 20 partners helped to develop a strategy for aggressively embracing and adopting mobile capabilities at NASA. Going forward the agency has 30 actionable small projects, some of which include Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) efforts. To this end, NASA is taking an approach that emphasizes securing data and applications rather than endpoint devices. The focus marks a departure from past approaches that sought to save money by standardizing end-point devices. Now, NASA hopes to accommodate a variety of devices and implement strategies that make information accessible while addressing data and security layer requirements.

In recent years, early investment and aggressive adoption of new technologies has not come without setbacks. This has been especially true of technologies that have prompted agencies to approach and manage data in a new way. [Cloud computing adoption](#), for example, has required continued development of strategies, evaluation of security controls, and operational evaluations. So while, some efforts hold the promise of cost savings or greater agility, it's critical to ensure governance and adoption strategies are mature before rushing ahead.

For more information on the second National Action Plan (NAP 2.0) and details on submitting responses visit [the Open Gov blog](#).

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