

OMB's Open Government Directive – Beyond Transparency

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OMB Director Peter Orszag recently released an [Open Government Directive](#) to federal department and agency heads to build upon President Obama's January memorandum on Transparency and Open Government. Orszag's memorandum stresses the Administration's emphasis on openness by federal agencies based upon three stated principles: transparency to promote accountability, participation by the public to increase informed policy-making, and collaboration among all sectors to improve the effectiveness of government. As part of the effort, executive departments and agencies are required to take several actions that include increasing the amount and quality of spending information published online and creating policies that enable and solidify Open Government practices. Throughout the document agencies are encouraged to operate within a "presumption of openness" with how they treat their spending information, limited only by concerns for legality, privacy, confidentiality and security.

What to Expect in the Near-term

The directive outlines several requirements that agencies and OMB must complete within the next few months.

Federal Agencies

- Publish online at least three new high-value data sets and register those data sets via Data.gov
- Create and maintain an Open Government webpage where their information may be published and feedback on quality, etc. may be received from the public
- Designate a high-level senior official to be accountable for the quality, objectivity, and management of the spending information for their agency
- Create an Open Government Plan that will describe how it will improve transparency and integrate public participation and collaboration into its activities.

OMB

- Issue a framework for the quality of federal spending information that is publicly disseminated
- Submit a longer-term comprehensive strategy for federal spending transparency, including the Federal Funding Accountability Transparency Act and the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act
- Create an Open Government Dashboard that will combine agency open government plans, statistics and visualizations to assess the state of open government
- Establish a working group that focuses on the three open government principles within the federal government to include senior level program and management office players from across government
- Issue suggestions to agencies on how they can incentivize the development of cost-effective ways to improve open government

GovWin's Take

What is the Cost of Transparency to Agencies?

Throughout the memo Orszag encourages agencies to ensure that they have adequate systems and processes in place to support openness and to engage emerging technologies to increase communication between the government and the public. In an age of ever-tightening technology budgets it is unclear if agencies will be given additional funding to achieve these infrastructure changes or if agencies will be expected to shift funds from other mission activities. We will be closely watching the FY2011 budget when it comes out next February.

Reinventing Government Meets Web 2.0

Reminiscent of other recent presidents' efforts to improve government effectiveness (Reinventing Government under Clinton and E-Government under Bush) the Obama Administration's Open Government efforts seek to put their spin on the ball – namely, by incorporating their principles of openness into "the ongoing work" of federal agencies. Such a goal will require agencies to go well beyond improving the quality and quantity of data reported and building in a feedback loop for the public. Entrenching openness into the fabric of how agencies operate will involve an underlying cultural transformation that impacts how the government stewards the taxpayer dollar – not just reports it. This cultural transformation is much greater a hurdle to clear.