

Shared Services to Ease DATA Act Implementation

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Dick Gregg, Fiscal Assistant Secretary of The Treasury and the executive assigned to implementing the DATA Act, expressed concern about the quick three year implementation timeline for the DATA Act at a recent Federal Financial Management Conference. However, he believes that moving agencies to shared financial management services is a "force multiplier."

Gregg believes outsourcing financial management functions to one of the four recently approved federal financial management shared service providers could streamline the compliance process. "The sooner we can move more agencies into shared services, the easier it's going to be to implement the DATA Act," he stated.

The Digital Accountability and Transparency Act creates standards for agency reporting of financial data and makes it publically available. The Act specifies a three year implementation timeline to begin with Treasury's establishment of a data analytics center modelled after the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board's Recovery Operations Center for the Stimulus. The center will work with OMB to establish agency financial reporting standards. OMB will also set up a two-year pilot program for use by contractors and grantees. Gregg wants to move quickly with demonstration programs to see what will work.

The Act provides no funding for implementation. This may explain the less than enthusiastic reception from some agency financial managers. They fear reporting may cast more of a burden on already strained resources. According to Mary Peterman, president of the Association of Government Accountants, "...generally, they all believe in the essence [of the Act], except that whether the legislating transparency is a value proposition for the citizenry is somewhat the question."

Ultimately, the new financial reporting will be available via USASpending.gov which is now managed by Treasury. After implementation, the federal spending data available via the site will provide a deeper view into federal spending. Not only will the additional data provide transparency to the public, it should help agency executives gain more insight into their operations, leading to improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.