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Champions of Participation
Executive Summary

March 30-31, 2009

AMERICASPEAKS
Engaging Citizens in Governance

Everyday Democracy
Ideas & Tools for Community Change
(Formerly the Study Circles Resource Center)

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for Democratic Governance and Innovation

Executive Summary

Champions of Participation

Thirty-four managers from 23 different federal agencies and departments came together on March 30-31 to develop recommendations for the President's Open Government Directive. Participants in the working session shared a deep commitment to empowering the public and transforming the relationship between the American people and their government. Together, they brought to the discussion a wealth of experience in public participation, collaborative problem solving and conflict resolution. The following report compiles the ideas and recommendations generated during the event.

This executive summary reflects the views of almost three-dozen federal managers as well as about 10 outside experts from the field of public engagement. Though there were many points of agreement, this document also reflects the rich range of different experiences and perspectives brought by participants. A full report of the conference proceedings is available at www.americaspeaks.org.

"Champions of Participation" was convened by AmericaSpeaks, Demos, Everyday Democracy, and The Ash Institute of Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The working session was made possible by a generous grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Overview of Recommendations and Implementation Strategies to the Open Government Directive

Conference participants identified top opportunities for and barriers to greater participation and collaboration that must be addressed by the Open Government Directive. For each of these items, a work group was formed to develop recommendations and implementation strategies for the Open Government Directive. A summary of these recommendations and strategies is provided below and a fuller set of recommendations is available in the complete report of the conference proceedings.

1. DEVELOP HIGH LEVEL INTER-AGENCY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE OPEN GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVE

Oversight, promotion and management of the Open Government Directive within the federal bureaucracy are critical to its success. To this end, the Open Government Directive should:

1.1 Establish the President's Management Council as the key oversight structure for creating a more open government. The Council can effectively engage Deputy Secretaries of the cabinet-level departments and agencies, providing top-level management support for open government.

1.2 Form three inter-agency work groups to carry out the main aspects of the directive with the President's Management Council. The first work group will oversee implementation of the Open Government Directive and measure its progress. The second work group will build the capacity of federal employees to engage the public. The third work group will investigate enhancing public participation through the use of new technologies.

2. ESTABLISH SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT GOVERNMENT-WIDE ADOPTION OF PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION PRACTICES

In order to meet the goals of the Open Government Directive, it will be essential to support a "culture change" across federal agencies by establishing government-wide systems. To this end, the Open Government Directive should:

2.1 Establish an interagency working group on public engagement to develop a community of practice that grows and lives over time.

2.2 Establish a federal institute for public engagement, similar to the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, to gather research on best practices, conduct trainings, and develop a knowledge-base.

2.3 Provide guidance to agencies on policies and interpretations of statutes through a White House Office/Council on Public Engagement.

2.4 Require all agencies to submit plans within 120 days that outline how civic engagement will be incorporated into achieving their missions. Within 180 days, agencies will produce a plan to integrate public involvement and collaboration into all relevant systems.

2.5 Leverage the expertise of non-governmental practitioners and experts through a roundtable or advisory board on public engagement.

2.6 Direct the Federal Executive Boards to implement collaborative partnership efforts at the regional level and within 180 days report to the entity overseeing the implementation of the Open Government Directive on their plans for participation and collaboration projects.

2.7 Set up online systems of transparency and public accountability so that the public can see full life cycles of decisions and processes from the very beginning to implementation and evaluation.

2.8 Modify and augment existing performance measurement and scorecard systems to include community engagement criteria and metrics.

2.9 Establish a highly publicized and prestigious award for participation, collaboration and transparency.

3. DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF PARTICIPATION THROUGH HIGHLY VISIBLE PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES

The President has an opportunity to demonstrate the value that public participation and collaboration can bring to the policy making process through a set of high profile initiatives that involve the public on issues of high public concern. To this end, the Open Government Directive should:

3.1 Convene a national policy discussion on health care reform in order to demonstrate the role that the public can play in national policy making on a key policy issue facing the nation.

3.2 Explore other Presidential initiatives to demonstrate the value of participation and collaboration, including a federal agency intergovernmental collaboration on an issue like food safety, a cross-jurisdictional collaboration on an issue like developing a national disaster recovery plan, and individual agency problem solving on a major issue like dam safety.

4. RESPOND TO THE BARRIER THAT PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION ARE NOT ADEQUATELY VALUED INSIDE AGENCIES

Many federal agencies have been resistant to involving the public in planning and decision-making due to a highly centralized culture and structure that relies heavily on expert judgment when public values are at stake in difficult policy decisions. To this end, the Open Government Directive should:

4.1 Require that each agency designate and provide resources for a senior level open government champion who can review agency operations and identify areas to improve public participation, collaboration and transparency.

4.2 Provide agencies with incentives to pilot public engagement through rewards, a competition among agencies, learning opportunities, and incentives that are integrated into senior leadership competency requirements.

4.3 Demonstrate the value of public participation and collaboration through case studies and research on impacts and outcomes.

5. ENSURE THAT PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION ACTIVITIES ARE ADEQUATELY FUNDED

Agencies generally do not adequately plan or budget to integrate public participation or collaborative processes into their programmatic work. To this end, the Open Government Directive should:

5.1 Direct agencies to incorporate participation and collaboration into funding requests and major project planning. Direct agencies to use at least 1% of program budgets for implementation of the directive.

5.2 Set standards for the amount of funding that will be dedicated to participation and collaboration activities by collecting data on the costs of public engagement strategies and collaborative processes.

5.3 Create new funding sources for participation and collaboration through the use of public-private partnerships, the creation of a special fund for public engagement and collaboration activities, and the use of attrition to shift the number of existing full-time equivalents to new public engagement positions.

6. ADDRESS INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS THAT REWARD THE STATUS QUO

A risk adverse culture within the federal government reduces the ability of federal managers to experiment with new methods of public participation and collaboration. To this end, the Open Government Directive should:

6.1 Counter the risks perceived by federal managers and other disincentives by integrating participatory and collaborative process skills, practices, behaviors, and values into agency activities, like hiring, performance agreements, strategic planning, training and budgeting.

6.2 Hold agencies accountable for the degree and quality of their public participation and collaboration activities through the development of clearly defined and measurable outcomes and standards for implementation of participation and collaboration activities. Develop a system for monitoring progress.

6.3 Require each agency to designate one person who regularly sits at the leadership table to be responsible for driving the culture change and processes that enable optimal civic engagement in the agency's mission.

7. ADDRESS EXISTING RULES & REGULATIONS THAT IMPEDE PARTICIPATION & COLLABORATION

Certain laws and regulations, as well as the manner in which certain agencies interpret these laws and regulations, affect the ability of agencies to engage and collaborate with the public. To this end, the Open Government Directive should:

7.1 Conduct a review of each department and agency to update program regulations and rules in keeping with the goals of the Open Government Directive. Identify barriers to participation and collaboration imposed implicitly or explicitly by government-wide laws or regulations, by policies administered by other agencies, by agency or program-specific laws or regulations, and administratively by the department, agency, or program.

7.2 Based on the review described above, department and agency heads will develop plans to improve their citizen participation efforts.

Additional Recommendations and Feedback

In addition to the recommendations summarized above, conference participants produced a wealth of information to help shape the development of the Open Government Directive:

- Pilot projects for participation, collaboration and transparency
- Recommendations from individual participants
- Key indicators of success for the Open Government Directive
- Roles for public involvement
- Opportunities for and barriers to creating a more open government
- Responses to a pre-conference survey that included information about existing agency programs that can benefit from participation, existing innovations in citizen participation that the Open Government Directive can learn from, barriers to participation, hopes for the Open Government Directive, hopes for Champions of Participation, and reference materials

Download the full report of the conference proceedings to view this information at www.americaspeaks.org.

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