Senior Agency Leaders Working Session
Feedback to the Open Government Directive

May 12, 2009

Nineteen senior leaders from 13 federal agencies and departments came together on May 12, 2009, at the headquarters of the Transportation Security Administration to offer ideas to the Open Government Directive. Participants in the three-hour discussion shared their hopes and concerns for the directive, discussed the most important things that the directive should accomplish, and what will be needed for the directive to be successfully implemented. Beth Noveck, the director of the White House task force responsible for creating the directive, participated in the discussions and responded to participant questions and ideas.

The May 12 meeting follows an earlier working session in late March that convened 34 managers and staff from 23 different agencies to develop recommendations for the Open Government Directive. The report from the earlier session may be read at www.americaspeaks.org/champions. Both meetings were facilitated by AmericaSpeaks, Demos, Everyday Democracy, and Harvard University's Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation.

AMERICASPEAKS
Engaging Citizens in Governance

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

Demos

HARVARD Kennedy School
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IDEAS FOR THE OPEN GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVE

The following ideas emerged from the May 12 discussions:

1. **Use an Existing Structure to Drive the Goals of the Open Government Directive Across the Federal Government**

   The Open Government Directive should be led by an existing organization that has the highest authority to drive change across the federal government. It must represent all major agencies in the federal government and be led by people at a high enough level of authority in agencies to create comprehensive change. If it is the President's Management Council, the Council should create seats for independent agencies that are currently not represented. If it is the Performance Improvement Council, then adjustments should be made to ensure that the right decision makers are involved who will be needed to lead the implementation of the Open Government Directive.

2. **Communicate the President's Commitment to the Goals of the Open Government Directive as well as the Commitment of the Whole Federal Government**

   The President's genuine, authentic commitment to the goals of open government must be communicated clearly to all agency employees. To convey this message, the President could send a signed letter to every employee about why open government is important and/or an electronic message with a brief video recorded by the President on the same subject. The principles of the Open Government Directive should be repeated often and with consistency. The President should be joined by Congressional leaders in declaring the government's support for this new way of doing business.

3. **Encourage Agencies to Make Open Government a Priority by Establishing a Senior Level Champion and Integrating Participation, Collaboration and Transparency into Strategic Plans and Policy Statements**

   The President must make it the responsibility of each agency to advance the goals of the Open Government Directive and send a signal that creating a more open government is the responsibility of every employee. Each agency should designate a senior level champion of the Open Government Directive. These champions should be acknowledged in a way that makes their work visibly important. These champions should not be limited to public affairs staff. The goals of the directive should be built into agency strategic plans and each agency should issue a policy statement about its commitment to achieve the directive's goals. It should be understood that the manner through which each agency reaches the directive's goals will differ based on the unique circumstances and missions of each agency. Informal systems and structures should also take up the goals of the Open Government Directive to support the formal systems and structures.

4. **Develop Sufficient Training Systems to Ensure that Federal Employees Have the Skills They Need to Deliver on the Goals of the Open Government Directive**

   The Directive or efforts that follow it should define transparency, public participation and collaboration, describe the range of practices and processes embodied in the President's vision of open government, and begin to develop a common language on these topics within the government. Agencies should train employees in relevant skills related to transparency, participation and collaboration because open government is everyone's responsibility.

   The Office of Personnel Management should reconsider existing competency definitions and requirements and provide agencies with clear guidance about the skills that must be developed by agency employees in consultation with agencies who have best practices in open government, collaboration and transparency. Agencies may then develop customized trainings for their employees. This includes ensuring that the Senior Executive Service Executive Core

Qualifications are consistent with and reinforce the principles of the Open Government Directive. Special attention should be paid to develop training for key groups of employees who will have a significant impact on the success of the Open Government Directive, including political appointees and OMB budget examiners. Attention could also be paid to helping the public better understand the workings of government and providing curricula to support an active citizenry to primary and secondary schools.

5. **Establish a Reporting and Measurement Process to Assess Progress on Meeting the Goals of the Open Government Directive**

   Integrate measures to assess progress on meeting the goals of the Open Government Directive for individual employee performance contracts as well as agency-wide management reports. Build mandatory reporting on open government into the Performance and Accountability Reports that every agency must submit each year. Specific public dates should be set for making progress on open government goals that may be tracked by the media and the public. Reporting should be outcome-based and incorporate a well-defined set of measures that are consistent across the government while allowing for differences in agency missions and legal requirements.

6. **Provide Agencies with Adequate Funding to Expand Transparency, Participation and Collaboration Activities**

   Send a clear signal of the importance of the Open Government Directive by providing agencies with seed money to launch open government projects. Manage perceptions about cost savings due to technology. Encourage agencies to integrate participation and collaboration into budget requests. However, across-the-board requirements to dedicate a certain portion of agency funds to participation would be counterproductive.

7. **Acknowledge the Need for Greater Focus on Participation, Collaboration and Transparency within the Federal Government**

   The Open Government Directive should encourage greater transparency with, participation of and collaboration among government employees to increase government effectiveness and build capacity for transparency, participation and effective collaboration with the public.

8. **Celebrate Successful Innovations and Best Practices in Participation, Collaboration and Transparency**

   Create an award for excellence in open government. Establish an Open Government Conference at which the award will be presented for innovations and best practices. Conference participants will learn from one another and share best practices at the session, which will also engage stakeholders and citizens who have partnered with agencies on open government projects. A public map could be created online that highlights innovations taking place across the nation.

9. **Support Agencies in Adopting Open Government Practices through Resources, Technical Assistance, and Communities of Practice**

   Establish an online resource base that will enable sharing of best practices in participation, collaboration and transparency. Create a cross-agency team of internal consultants that will be available to support agencies who have questions about open government. The cross-agency team should be self-nominating and rotate between agencies that have demonstrated successful innovations in open government. It should be directly linked to the entity that is driving the Open Government Directive. Additionally, create a venue through which legal staff from agencies communicate about interpretations of Federal statutes that may otherwise appear to inhibit participation, collaboration and transparency.

10. Establish the Open Government Directive as a Living Document that Provides Agencies with Latitude for Achieving the Goals of the Directive

Create an iterative document that is grounded in a core set of open government principles but will enable ongoing collaborative efforts within government to design and support implementation. Encourage agencies to experiment, innovate and customize their own approaches to achieving the goals of the Open Government Directive, rather than requiring a one-size-fits-all solution across the Federal government. Take into account the reality that many agencies do not yet have their political appointees in place – open government reforms taken before they are in place may lack their full ownership. Acknowledge that open government innovations carry risks with them and commit to remain supportive of employees when conflicts arise.

11. Encourage Federal Agencies to Engage the Public in Discussions on Key Priority Issues for the Administration

The Offices of Public Engagement or Open Government in the White House should regularly inquire about agency activities in participation and collaboration that advance Administration priorities in areas such as employment, health care, education, energy and the environment. The White House might sponsor a nation-wide public deliberation on a key issues such as health or climate change in which it calls upon several key agencies to organize engagement with hundreds of thousands of Americans.

12. Build on Existing Resources within the Federal Government to Advance the Open Government Directive

Don't reinvent the wheel. Build upon existing resources and best practices in the federal government, like existing networks of expertise in dispute resolution, collaborative problem solving, participation, and proactive conflict prevention. Specific examples of resources to build upon include the Department of Interior's Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution, EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's collaboration initiatives, and the Transportation Security Administration's workforce National Advisory Council.

13. Write the Open Government Directive using clear language that captures the imagination of federal employees and conveys the value and importance of open government

The primary audience of the directive is federal managers and the language of the directive should convey to them why open government is important for them. Federal employees need to understand why the additional risks and burdens that may be associated with open government are worth it. The directive should also speak to other sectors that will need to work with government. The document should be phrased in empowering language that encourages innovation, rather than being overly directive.

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APPENDIX

NOTES FROM SENIOR AGENCY LEADER MEETING ON OPEN GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVE

MAY 12, 2009

IDEAS FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVE

IDEAS FROM TABLE #1	**Mapping of Feedback Related to Report Themes**
Use best practices to identify core competencies that managers and employees need and then look at system: recruitment, training, etc, to develop staff with these skills	Related to idea #4
Need leaders in key agencies that don't currently have champions to advance these goals	Related to ideas #3 and #4
OPM and agencies: OPM sets core qualifications for SESers and that should be reviewed to reflect core competencies to do this work. OPM should change its stance, consult with agencies before sending directive. OPM needs to hire people in units that carry this value in their core	Related to idea #4
Much of the focus of language that started task force to date was external; there needs to be a recognition that this needs to be internal too. It should be acknowledged that participatory, collaboration and transparency reforms are needed internally within government	Related to idea #7
Balance institutionalizing and shine a light on innovative lab practices. Not good enough to just get good innovations, also need to integrate. Innovations need to be reusable and replicable	Related to ideas #8 and #9
Structural conversation: President's Management Council does not include independent agencies in government. If we use PMC to lead directive then we should make sure there are seats for independent agencies. Alternative is Performance Improvement Council: Concern that we don't have the right people on that council to lead the directive from the agencies. Whatever structure is put in place needs to include all agencies and have the right kind of people	Related to idea #1
Provide latitude for agencies to figure out how to do this on their own as long as delivering on outcomes.	Related to ideas #5 and #10
Part of what agencies need to do: is teach how government actually works to the public	Related to idea #4
Plain language: should not just be directed at federal managers. Language should be intriguing and tell government what is in it for them.	Idea #13
Really important at the front end: this president did something extraordinary to care about open government. On May 21, something should happen that is in the President's voice himself. Given how much federal employees want to be attached to Obama Admin. Could every federal manager get a hard copy of letter from president?	Related to idea #2

IDEAS FROM TABLE #2	
Training is key to success	Related to idea #4
• Entry level training on collaboration competencies to everyone (e.g., part of federal staff orientations)	Related to idea #4
• Each course across department builds in these skills, not just for specialists	Related to idea #4
• White House produces principles for training and then they are customized by each agency	Related to idea #4
• Create process (e.g., suite of trainings) for developing people who want to learn more, and become champions and specialists of collaboration	Related to idea #4
Create a living document -- an open government directive that is phased, beginning with the basic principles on May 21, and becoming more specific over time (e.g., providing direction on integrating the directive into agency strategic plans, agency annual performance and accountability reports, staff performance standards, incentive measures)	Related to idea #10
Beyond the federal government, clear language that speaks to all levels of government, the private sector, academia, other organizations, and members of the public	Recommendation 13
Don't use language of culture change and interagency work group	Recommendation 13
Measurement and reporting is needed on individual and agency progress that is outcome based	Related to idea #5
Provide seed money to send strong signal about what is important to gov't,	Related to idea #6
Provide seed money to fund pilot projects, to initiate collaborative approaches in new program areas, and to provide training to federal staff on the appropriate and effective uses of collaborative approaches	Related to idea #6
Build on existing collaborative problem-solving and conflict resolution programs and resources (e.g., DOI's Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution, EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution).	Related to idea #12
IDEAS FROM TABLE #3	
There are a couple overall themes: one is not being too prescriptive. Allowing agencies to be able to do self-determination.	Related to ideas #5 and #10
Use plain language to communicate the directive	Recommendation 13
Create some kind of national advisory body – maybe at OMB level, made up of agency folks at different levels	Related to ideas #1 and #9
Guide by national priorities – these are cross-cutting themes	Related to idea #11
Absolutely importance for agency champions at multiple levels; needs to diffuse through leadership team and lower levels. Wonderful examples in practice	Related to idea #3
A lot of conversation on this needing to go beyond public affairs, needs to come from decision makers, not just go to the public affairs offices	Related to idea #3

Consensus on building this into each agency's strategic plan. Build in formally as goals. Informally build in as well. We have a formal organization that tells us what to do, but also informal part of organization where things get done. Need to address on both levels. Engage the informal for vetting.	Related to idea #3
Training: We spend a lot of time on curriculum, build engagement, build into academia	Related to idea #4
Training throughout the government: we need curriculum across agencies	Related to idea #4
Have places that are highest priorities for this work, identified in short term what are most important things we want to accomplish	Related to idea #11
IDEAS FROM TABLE #4	
Agree that it is critical that OGD create collaborative model that is iterative	Related to idea #10
OGD was opportunity to signal to all public servants that it is important part of every federal employee's job to help public become more informed and engaged	Related to ideas #2 and #3
OGD shouldn't be too directive and whip cracking. Think nurturing not driving	Related to ideas #5, #10
Goals of OGD should be incorporated into strategic plans and issue a policy statement about how goals are going to be incorporate	Related to ideas #2 and #3
President make explicit responsibility of each agency to advance these goals	Related to idea #3
Be cautious whether how and when to incorporate specific standards – premature formalization and accountability could be counterproductive	Related to idea #5
Audience of Directive are federal manager – need to incorporate something novel that catches attention of mangers	Related to idea #13
IMPLEMENTING OPEN GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVE	
IDEAS FROM TABLE #1	
Set clear expectations and lead by example	Related to idea #5
Embed in budgets	Related to idea #6
Create structure in agency that brings in data from all hierarchical levels as well as regions, departments: Field people, regional people headquarters people. Message communicated across the agency whether from program person or headquarters	Related to ideas #2, #3 and #5
TSA has created workforce level National Advisory Council selected by peers, they meet quarterly, 25% time spent on Council work, videotape and make available. Make critical recommendations about how to improve transportation security and the work environment. Advances have made in safety, training, performance evaluation, etc. Savings from these changes are reinvested in workforce. Could do the same for participation, etc.	Related to idea #8
Systemic recommendations to OMB: Perception issue about savings caused by IT utilization that are overly optimistic. Manage expectations	Related to idea #6
Two groups of people that should receive real education: OMB budget examiners, if they don't have this music then they do not treat seriously the budget justification. Also orientation sessions for new political appointees with	Related to idea #4

regard to their skills and capacities	
IDEAS FROM TABLE #2	
Host OGD Conference: Celebrate successes	Related to idea #8
▪ Share learning	Related to idea #8
▪ Celebrate success	Related to idea #8
▪ Cross fertilize across agencies	Related to idea #8
▪ Bring public and stakeholders to conference to co-present on progress and lessons learned	Related to idea #8
Some agencies more driven by appropriations: Announce OGD from House and Senate leadership	Related to idea #6
Create Google Map of OGD projects to provide opportunities to show case progress, successes and lessons learned	Related to idea #8
Administration needs to speak with Common Voice	Related to idea #2
▪ Repetition	Related to idea #2
▪ White House, OMB, OPM	Related to idea #2
▪ Congress and budget need to send message	Related to idea #2
▪ Needs to be realistic and clear	Related to idea #2
Principles need to be fundamental and consistent	Related to idea #2
Link to reporting	Related to idea #5
Every directive needs to refer to principles	Related to ideas #2 and #10
IDEAS FROM TABLE #3	
Key phrase: Steal shamelessly and share willingly	Related to ideas #8 and #9
Educate the legal staffs in the various agencies: FACA, and FOIA	Related to idea #4
More conversation around stakeholders and partnerships: Training with local gov't, tribal gov't	Related to idea #4
Need to talk about risks associated with this approach: Consensus that increased open government is worth it. That messages need to be conveyed on a regular basis.	Idea # 13
IDEAS FROM TABLE #4	
How can existing centralized government offices/agencies that provide direction and guidance to federal agencies support implementation?	Related to idea #12
Resources: What we need is more people and resources and the ability to share practices, expertise, and curriculum.	Related to idea #12
Most of conversation focused on how the White House could interact with federal agencies to catalyze change: President and White House should remain connected on regular basis through vehicles created for dialogue, input	Related to idea #10

and feedback. White House should ask routinely what agencies are doing on collaboration, etc.	
Suggest WH sponsor large-scale deliberations on key issues: lead agencies responsible would collaborate in carrying this out and the visibility of these efforts would create big jolt	Related to idea #11
Many agencies lack political appointees. If participation train leaves the station before appointees come on board, then new appointees will not feel ownership of it	Related to idea #10
FINAL REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
The way to get people to continually focus on this is to have incentives to share those areas where a particular agency has included collaboration in a way that makes a difference. Continually give opportunities to do that	Related to idea #8
Struck by recognition program	Related to idea #8
I enjoy listening to President Obama, when they put out announcement yesterday, he had a short video clip. He should send a letter to federal managers. If everyone got electronic copy of message with link to Obama talking to federal managers about important – I'd listen to it twice.	Related to idea #2
Export/Share what we are doing at TSA to other agencies in terms of systems approach – much of what we have talked about and what is in prior to report, Gale has had us doing for some time.	Related to idea #9
Interagency summit: where each agency comes up with what they are most proud of in this area that will allow some sharing, also give out rewards	Related to idea #8
When you open things up conflict surfaces and when you try new things mistakes happen, etc. Having leadership from the President on down acknowledge this and assure federal employees who are implementing the OGD of their ongoing support and that we will manage the inevitable conflicts and still function effectively is important.	Related to ideas #2, #8 and #9
WH should ask senior agency leaders to do some participation in ways that will be central to meeting agency mission: national dialogue. Do major participation. Idea of a kick off conference is a great idea – worked in 1976, wil work now	Related to ideas #8 and #11
Ability to fail is important. Every time there is an exec leadership meeting, this should be topic of discussion and regional bureau head wants to do know how going	Related to ideas #5 and #13
Repetition in management structure, what we hear from president, constantly reinforced	Related to idea #2
OGD must be a living document: Beginning with principles, becoming more specific, launching awards/incentives programs, highlighting successes and lessons learned	Related to idea #10
One of recommendations from Champions of Participation was to take 1% of operational budgets – will feel like budget capture. Avoid it	Related to idea #6
Acknowledgement and access: Acknowledge what is being done and idea that you have ability to feed information in meaningful way is important	Related to idea #12
Opportunity to exchange and share experiences is very powerful: You are not in it alone. How you leverage the entire federal workforce, it is an untapped	Related to ideas #8 and #12

resources for great ideas	
Weekly call or webinar among chiefs of staff for agency heads on open gov't. That gets it front and center with agency leaders	Related to idea #1
Implement OGD in transparent fashion: Openness in terms of barriers that agencies are presented with	Related to idea #13
Need to educate legal staffs, cross agency fertilization about how agencies are interpreting laws and make recommendation for changes	Related to idea #4