LOOKING AHEAD TO A MORE CENTRALLY COORDINATED FEDERAL DATA STRATEGY

Standing up the Federal Data Strategy Team

During the past several decades, ethically and effectively harnessing the power of data has become a growing priority for the federal government. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 was approved by Congress with bipartisan support, empowering agencies to become more data-driven in decision-making and their operations. A strong focus on data in the President's Management Agenda and a cross-agency priority goal led to the development of the Federal Data Strategy to help implement this vision. The strategy provides a framework and a roadmap to improve the federal government's approach to data stewardship, use and access during the next 10 years.[1-2]

To drive transformation across government, the Office of Management and Budget named a team of cross-agency priority goal leaders and a cohort of federal data professionals from 21 agencies and 18 departments to form working groups and develop the strategy and a year one action plan. OMB selected a second group of senior and government officials to lead implementation. This team charged forward with execution of the 2020 action plan, quickly shifting gears in early 2020 to prioritize data needs most pertinent to the coronavirus pandemic.[3]

Challenges and Opportunities for the Federal Data Strategy Team

The federal data team, which made critical strides during the pandemic, also faced constraints during implementation. With a portion of their portfolio dedicated to this ambitious effort, team members had to maintain their roles at their home agencies. The strategy requires agencies to designate a chief data officer as the central liaison, but operating models for these officers differ for each agency, leading to varying approaches to implementation across government. Limited awareness of the strategy among federal stakeholders also hindered agencies' ability to improve coordination and use of data in operations, policies and programs. The need for collaboration with cross-sector partners during the pandemic introduced additional complexity.

Because the federal data strategy was designed as a long-term vision for reform, it will require sustained momentum and strong support from leaders across the government. With leadership transitions and a new President's Management Agenda on the horizon, there is an opportunity for the Biden administration to re-envision the management of this effort and establish a more centralized, coordinated and robust approach that will garner widespread adoption within and across federal agencies.

As senior leaders develop the next steps, it will be important to consider the evolution of data and technology, to draw on lessons learned from past reform efforts and to build on progress already made.[4] The following table and resources offer a starting point for understanding how data and technology initiatives have evolved through past administrations.

Select Management Reforms by Administration

The Evolution of Data Strategy in the Federal Government

A high-level look at how past administrations mobilized management initiatives

ADMINISTRATION REFORMS	MANAGEMENT REFORM HIGHLIGHTS[5]	EVOLUTION OF DATA AND TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES
National Performance Review Bill Clinton administration *1993–2001*	With support from the Office of Management and Budget, a "reinventing government" task force of career civil servants produced more than 1,200 recommendations on ways to reduce mission support costs through staff reductions, serve customers better, cut red tape and modernize operations through technology. To help implement recommendations, the Clinton administration designated departmental deputy secretaries as chief operating officers to work together on cross-agency priorities, create accountability and elevate the importance of management.	The passage of the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act catalyzed a "performance revolution" by requiring federal agencies to set goals and performance metrics for their operations. Through a network of more than 350 innovation labs dispersed across federal agencies, the reform spurred multiple modernization efforts. One result was the first federal one-stop website to obtain multiple services—an achievement that paved the way for future federal adoption of the internet and technology modernization efforts.[6]
Performance Assessment Rating Tool George W. Bush administration *2001–2009*	The Bush administration created a set of five centralized initiatives to continue improving management operations of federal agencies. One initiative focused on expanding e-government and established federal chief information officers while another targeted budget and performance integration and introduced performance improvement officers. As part of the management agenda, the Performance Assessment Rating Tool integrated performance data with budget planning and execution. Scorecards were used to evaluate and track agency progress for more than 1,000 government programs.	With help from performance improvement officers, agencies enhanced their ability to work toward goals and missions through strategic planning, measurement, analysis, regular assessment of progress and the use of data to deliver results. Technology modernization efforts continued with the E-Government Act of 2002, which began shifting government services to the internet and used chief information officers to improve IT practices across agencies. Work done by PIO and CIO Councils would later inform the development and implementation of the federal data strategy.[7]
Open Government Barack Obama administration *2009–2017*	The Obama administration's management agenda focused on establishing cross-agency priority goals to help agencies improve government effectiveness, efficiency, economic growth and federal employee engagement and culture. One signature initiative was Open Government, which required agencies to post open and machine-readable data on websites like data.gov to increase transparency, efficiency, citizen participation and collaboration within government and the private sector.	With increased accessible and machine-readable data, the administration heavily promoted the systematic use of evidence in policy-making decisions. The bipartisan Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking began work in March 2016 to determine how the government could better use its existing data to inform improvements to program operations, while protecting privacy and confidentiality. These efforts paved the way for a more coordinated strategy around the government's evidence-building efforts.[8]
Modernizing Drivers of Government Transformation Donald Trump administration *2017–2021*	The Trump administration's management agenda focused on modernizing three drivers of government transformation: information technology; data, accountability and transparency; and workforce. An interagency team of senior federal leaders and staff led cross-agency goals for each area.[9] With the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, these goals became instrumental in guiding agencies to make rapid shifts and create the foundation for an agile and responsive government.	One cross-agency goal focused on leveraging data as a strategic asset,[10] which resulted in the development of the federal data strategy—designed as a vehicle to implement the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018. The data strategy provides a long-term vision for transforming the way government accesses, manages and uses data. Building on reform efforts from previous administrations, other cross-agency goals targeted IT modernization to provide sound and secure systems to serve the public.

Additional Partnership Resources

- [A Roadmap to the Future: Toward a More Connected Government](#)
  Describes what a better connected, more collaborative federal government can accomplish in the years ahead and identifies barriers to success that government is likely to encounter along the way. (February 2020)

- [Mastering Risk: Ways to Advance Enterprise Risk Management Across Government](#)
  Explores how federal leaders can use enterprise risk management to improve decision-making and program outcomes, and steps they can take to make ERM a critical function of agency operations. (May 2020)

- [Seize the Data: Using Evidence to Transform How Federal Agencies Do Business](#)
  Explores strategies for agencies to become evidence-based organizations and provides recommendations to help agencies think through how to incorporate data when making decisions. (June 2019)

- [Risk and Reward: A Framework for Federal Innovation](#)
  Provides a framework and case studies for federal agencies seeking to innovate and meet the constantly evolving public needs. (October 2019)

- [A Blueprint for Leading Lasting Technology Reforms in Government](#)
  Outlines concrete steps leaders can take to pursue ambitious—and vital—IT reforms. (November 2017)

- [Making Government Work for the American People](#)
  Provides insights on critical management issues and a management roadmap for the future administrations. (September 2016)

Endnotes

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3. Government Executive, "Looking Beyond the Federal Data Strategy." Retrieved from https://bit.ly/38IyeTk

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6. The Brookings Institution, "Lessons for the Future of Government Reform." Retrieved from https://brook.gs/38MHs12

7. CIO.gov, "Policies and Priorities: The Federal Data Strategy." Retrieved from https://www.cio.gov/policies-and-priorities/data/

8. The Bipartisan Policy Center, "Presidential Evidence Initiatives: Lessons from the Bush and Obama Administrations' Efforts to Improve Government Performance." Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3in82AP

9. The White House, "The President's Management Agenda." Retrieved from https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/management/pma/

10. Performance.gov, "Cross-Agency Priority Goals Overview." Retrieved from https://trumpadministration.archives.performance.gov/CAP/overview/