

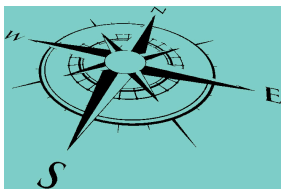
Advancing Information Policy and Use at the Office of Management and Budget

ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT — The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address Grand Challenges in Public Administration. These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of an Office of Management and Budget (OMB)-focused Select Task Force associated with the Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement Grand Challenge. It includes these Fellows’ recommendations for how OMB should prioritize information policy and use in 2021.

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National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA)

Description:

The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, accountable, and transparent organizations. Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy's unique feature is its over 950 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and career public administrators. The Academy helps the federal government address its critical management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Under contracts with government agencies, some of which are directed by Congress, as well as grants from private foundations, the Academy provides insights on key public management issues, as well as advisory services to government agencies.

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OMB :

OMB is a critical linchpin for the achievement of important policy priorities across government. OMB’s operations and effectiveness can be significantly improved, just as OMB expects every federal agency to adapt and improve. Cultural and organizational barriers that impede OMB’s success on informational policy can be addressed. Resources currently divided among the management, budget, and information and regulatory policy functions of OMB can be better coordinated. Improving OMB’s role in information policy and utilization is a necessity for effectively accomplishing the administration’s goals in 2021 and beyond. OMB is an essential institution that should not run on ‘auto pilot’ just because the nation is in crisis. On the contrary, the crisis demands that OMB undertake change to raise its and government-wide attention to infor-

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Stakeholders (continued)

mation and program evaluation matters. The time for change is now so the country can make meaningful improvements in people's lives sooner rather than later.

Vision

Meaningful improvements in people's lives

Mission

To improve OMB's role in information policy

Values

Coordination

Accountability

Relationships

Planning

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1. Policy

Prioritize Information Policy for Presidential Appointees at OMB

Stakeholder(s)

Presidential Appointees at OMB

The President should nominate a Director, Deputy Director, and Deputy Director for Management who commit to prioritizing and improving OMB's information policy and use responsibilities. OMB's political leadership positions are critical to ensuring the priorities of OMB are clear to the agency's staff, including framing the processes and procedures to address major challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and planning for economic recovery. Aspects of information policy, including the role of data and evidence, should be reinforced in the budgetary, regulatory, and other policy-making processes. The OMB Director and other political leaders should clearly and repeatedly emphasize to OMB staff and federal agencies the role of information policy and use in improving government operations.

2. Activities

Reorganize OMB Information Policy Activities for Effective Coordination and Clarity

Stakeholder(s)

OMB Director

The OMB Director should establish a new position—Assistant Director for Information Policy—to oversee, manage, and coordinate relevant activities across OMB’s divisions and offices. OMB currently has an Assistant Director for Budget, which is a high-level career position with responsibility for coordinating all budget related activities at OMB in order to produce the President’s Budget and support government-wide budget execution. (An Executive Associate Director, a political appointee, has at times held an oversight role in this area, too.) The position has cross-cutting authority across all OMB offices. A companion position related to information policy and use should be established. This allows a point of responsibility and coordination that can bring together the disparate elements of OMB and be accountable for integrating information policies across disciplines and closely coordinating with the budget function to assure that budget formulation incorporates the need for or results of rigorous evaluations, high-quality metrics, resource investments, and technological innovation. The position can also help assure that the Regulatory Agendas and Learning Agendas of agencies are in sync. That is, if an agency is planning major regulatory actions such as evaluating existing regulations or proposing new ones, it should be including any scientific studies and data that inform the regulations as part of its Learning Agenda and the budget should reflect the resources needed to carry out those studies. Currently, budget decisions don’t always provide resources to evaluate regulatory (off-budget) outcomes that enable agencies to learn and improve future regulations.

3. Coordination

Coordinate Information Policy and Practice within the Executive Office of the President

Within the first 100 days of the Administration, the Assistant Director for Information Policy should identify OMB responsibilities for information policy and practice and inform the other Executive Office of the President (EOP) components of OMB's roles and responsibilities in relation to the other components. The Assistant Director should then facilitate a joint-EOP component memorandum to federal agencies outlining the vision, intent, and prioritization of information policy and practice, including to support evidence-building activities and evidence-based decision-making.

4. Leverage

Support federal agencies in better leveraging their data.

LEVERAGING EXISTING ACTIVITIES — Several productive information and data-related activities are underway in OMB to support federal agencies in better leveraging their data. Below are some recommended ways to boost these activities in support of presidential priorities:

4.1. Federal Data Strategy

Reinvigorate and continue the trajectory of the Federal Data Strategy.

Reinvigorate and continue the trajectory of the Federal Data Strategy, under the leadership of the new Assistant Director for Information Policy. OMB led the development of a Federal Data Strategy during 2018-2019 as part of the President's Management Agenda, with guiding principles and an annually updated action plan for agencies. In 2019 and 2020, the strategy was co-led in OMB by the Chief Statistician in OIRA and Chief Information Officer in the Office of E-Government, under the direction of the Deputy Director for Management, with other co-leads coming from the Office of Science and Technology Policy, Department of Commerce, and Small Business Administration. A key element of the strategy is to push agencies to make their data more accessible in order to leverage that information to improve programs and regulatory outcomes, and to improve their program management and regulatory policy through informed decision-making. In 2021, the administration should signal the continuation of aspects of the strategy, including by identifying a subset of priority actions for agencies to implement that support pandemic response, economic recovery, and other administration priorities.

4.2. Evidence Act

Proceed with implementation of the Evidence Act.

Evidence Act implementation activities should proceed, with a coordinated approach for implementation led by the new Assistant Director for Information Policy. With passage of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, OMB acquired several statutory responsibilities and mandates based on unanimous recommendations from the Commission on Evidence Based Policymaking. These built on existing authorities from the Paperwork Reduction Act, Information Quality Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act, EGovernment Act, Privacy Act, GPRA Modernization Act, and other information policy statutes. Coordinated OMB guidance and technical assistance on implementation of this important law is a linchpin for agency success in implementing the law consistent with congressional intent and the Evidence Commission's vision. In 2021, the administration should set clear expectations for continued progress at agencies in implementing initial guidance on the Evidence Act and should prioritize issuance of delayed regulations and guidance under the coordination of the new Assistant Director for Information Policy.

4.3. Management Initiatives

Establish a mechanism in which senior leaders from across OMB meet to discuss major management initiatives.

Establish a mechanism through the internal quarterly President's Management Agenda update in which senior leaders from across OMB meet to discuss major management initiatives, including information management initiatives. Many of the management initiatives include a significant information policy or data component and have synergies with other activities that should be more integrated across OMB. A quarterly (or more frequent) update at which senior OMB leaders discuss major initiatives and ensure awareness, assess progress, and

identify further opportunities for greater collaboration, synergy, and accelerated improvement will help facilitate the cross-cutting approach needed to solve the complex issues with which the country is dealing.

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5. CxO Councils

Inform the relevant CxO councils of the new coordinated approach.

Stakeholder(s)

CxO Councils

Chief Information Officers Council

Chief Data Officers Council

Interagency Council on Statistical Policy

Privacy Officers Council

Evaluation Officers Council

Chief Human Capital Officers Council

Chief Acquisition Officers Council

Chief Financial Officers Council

Performance Improvement Council

Regulatory Working Group

Agency General Counsels

OMB should convene the major cross-agency councils (e.g., Chief Information Officers Council, Chief Data Officers Council, Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, Privacy Officers Council, Evaluation Officers Council, Chief Human Capital Officers Council, Chief Acquisition Officers Council, Chief Financial Officers Council, Performance Improvement Council, Regulatory Working Group), in addition to agency general counsels, to emphasize the need for coordination, collaboration, and cooperation on the administration's priorities. In addition, OMB should clearly delineate roles and responsibilities, including how relevant officials in agencies can most effectively approach OMB for information policy and utilization support and guidance.

6. Information Collection

Initiate a review of the formal Information Collection Budget in OIRA to determine a strategy for better utilizing this resource for achieving the administration's goals on evidence-building activities.

Among other goals of this review, OMB can consider how existing government-wide processes for procurement, grants management, and reporting generate information that varies in level of quality, burden, and utility.

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7. Capacity & Resources

Assess OMB capacity and allocate sufficient resources for Information Policy.

OMB leadership should review the organization's investment in information policy activities to determine if gaps in capacity exist. Should gaps be identified, OMB should reallocate resources internally, including limited moving of some positions or functions, if necessary, and request sufficient resources in the Fiscal Year 2022 President's Budget to address any remaining capacity limitations to support implementation of mandates assigned to OMB.

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8. Accountability

Improve agency accountability for Information Policy.

OMB should hold high-level agency officials accountable for advancing important priorities and for collecting, using, and sharing data and other evidence as needed to make progress on those priorities. To achieve meaningful improvements in health, housing, education, jobs, economic success, and climate progress, agencies must “build muscle” consisting of more intelligent systems and evidence-based approaches to designing, running, and evaluating programs and regulations. Establishing high-level cross-agency task forces of senior agency political leaders who have the necessary span of control over relevant functions (e.g., Deputy Secretaries), and who are supported by senior agency career officials is needed to effect change in agencies. OMB should work with the Office of Personnel Management and agencies to prioritize recruitment of individuals with data, analytics, evaluation and technology expertise who can be held accountable for improving agency capacity to utilize data and evidence to improve measurable results.

9. Intergovernmental Relationships

Build relationships with state, local, and tribal governments.

Stakeholder(s)

State Governments

Local Governments

Tribal Governments

Focus attention within OMB on building relationships with state, local, and tribal governments. Improvements in information access, use, and quality are often dependent on the willingness and ability of intergovernmental partners to participate in initiatives. Oftentimes, state and local governments receive mixed directions and redundant requirements from agencies, particularly on information reporting. In addition, OMB could work with agencies to devise ways to increase the capacity of state and local governments to use data to improve the administration of federal programs. Although a single agency is not in a position to resolve these issues, OMB is able to tackle these cross-agency discrepancies. When the federal government shows a willingness to work with state, local and tribal governments and listen to some of the big issues that are caused by a lack of federal coordination, everyone benefits when that results in better program administration and measurably improved outcomes for benefit recipients.

10. Planning

Devise a process for future OMB reform planning.

Stakeholder(s)

National Academy of Public Administration

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

Devise a process for future OMB reform planning with the National Academy of Public Administration and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. OMB leadership could call for the National Academy of Public Administration and/or the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to support convenings to plan for further reforms. As independent, nonpartisan, and nonprofit organizations chartered by the U.S. Congress to improve government performance and scientific progress, respectively, these entities could serve as partners with OMB leaders to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues and plans for further organizational change that may be needed at OMB in coming years.

Administrative Information

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