February 25, 2022

RE: Publication of Quadrennial Federal Agency Strategic Plans in Standard Machine-Readable Formats

Members of the President's Management Council –

As you are well aware, in the final days of the congressional session in 2010, Congress passed bipartisan reforms to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), modernizing that law's performance expectations for the first time in 15 years. In GPRA Modernization, Congress outlined expectations for establishing high-priority performance goals, a topic that has garnered widespread and attention from the subsequent administrations from President Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Over the past decade, some provisions of the GPRA Modernization Act have received relatively little attention, including one I write to draw your attention to today that pertains to the upcoming publication of strategic plans and related documentation, including agency multi-year learning agendas and evidence-building plans required by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (Evidence Act). Section 10 of GPRA Modernization directs agencies to publish strategic plans in machine-readable formats. In fact, there is an accepted international standard to do just this today, though currently – to our knowledge – no federal agency has voluntarily adopted this approach.

The United States has long been viewed as a leader in the performance management, evaluation, and evidence domains. Yet our ability to communicate transparently, consistently, and clearly with the public lags behind many other developed countries, non-profits, and private firms. The adoption of machine-readable standards and applications of formats (e.g., StratML ISO 17469-1) could provide incredibly valuable for dissemination, comparability, searchability, and communication of government strategic, performance, evidence, and operational information in the years ahead.

In short, we encourage that as your agencies are preparing to launch their strategic plans in coming weeks that your communications staff and performance offices consider the additional – and simple – step of translating the information into appropriate, and standard machine-readable formats. Applying international standards as intended by Section 10 of GPRA modernization will not only comply with the statute, but will also enable the U.S. performance infrastructure to be a model for countries around the world looking for leadership on how to communicate performance information in the 21st Century.

My staff and I, as well as leaders of machine-readable standards and formats would welcome the opportunity to meet with your staff to discuss the technical applications if helpful. Thank you for your consideration.

Nick Hart, Ph.D.
President, Data Foundation

CC:
Pamela Coleman, Associate Director for Performance and Personnel, Office of Management and Budget
Dustin Brown, Deputy Associate Director, Office of Management and Budget