Open Data for Accountability

Data Transparency Coalition

Data Transparency Summit 2014

Tuesday, September 30, 2014

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office

Source: PhotoDisc.

GAO-14-880CG

Agenda

Source: PhotoDisc.

- About GAO

- Federal data transparency: challenges and opportunities

- Related statutory requirements can help

- Open data for analytics at GAO
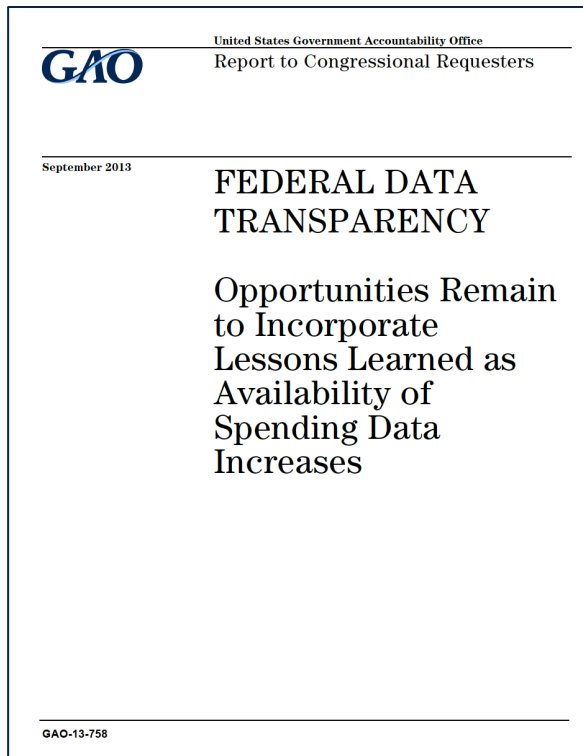
U.S. Government Accountability Office

- Independent, nonpartisan congressional watchdog

- Advise Congress and executive agencies to help improve government performance and ensure accountability

- Work comes from Congressional mandates and requests and the Comptroller General's authority

U.S. Government Accountability Office goals and objectives

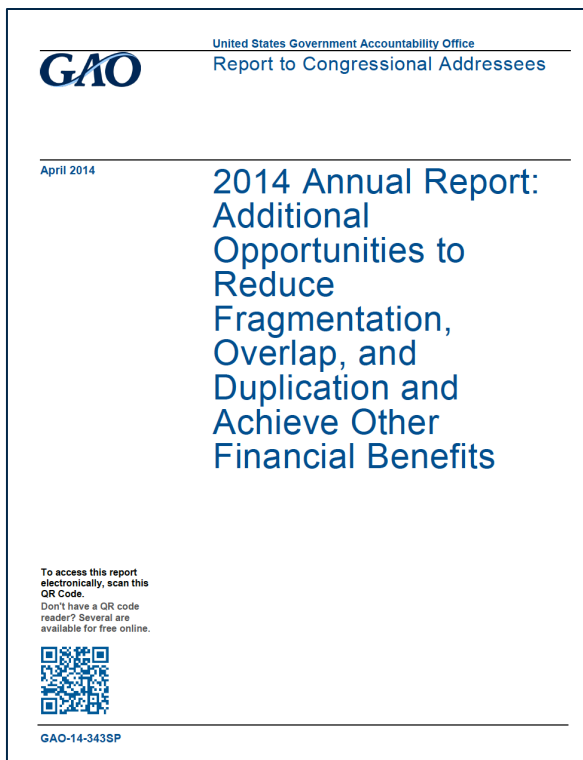| Goals	Objectives	
Provide Timely, Quality Service to the Congress and the Federal Government to…		
Address Current and Emerging Challenges to the Well-being and Financial Security of the American People related to…	■ Health care needs ■ Lifelong learning ■ Challenges facing an aging population ■ Effective system of justice ■ Housing finance and viable communities	■ Stable financial system and consumer protection ■ Natural resources and the environment ■ National infrastructure ■ Benefits and protections for workers, families, and children
Respond to Changing Security Threats and the Challenges of Global Interdependence involving…	■ Homeland security ■ Military capabilities and readiness	■ Foreign policy and international economic interests
Help Transform the Federal Government to Address National Challenges by assessing…	■ Government's fiscal position and approaches to address current and projected fiscal gaps ■ Federal government audit and internal control standards	■ Major management challenges and program risks ■ Fraud, waste, and abuse, and improvements in internal controls
Maximize the Value of GAO by Enabling Quality, Timely Service to the Congress and Being a Leading Practices Federal Agency by focusing on…	■ Efficiency, effectiveness, and quality ■ Diverse workforce and inclusive work environment	■ Networks, collaborations and partnerships ■ Human, information, fiscal, technological, and physical resources

The need for greater federal data transparency

United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

GAO

September 2013

FEDERAL DATA TRANSPARENCY

Opportunities Remain to Incorporate Lessons Learned as Availability of Spending Data Increases

GAO-13-758

Our earlier work on data transparency has found that the lack of consistent, reliable data:
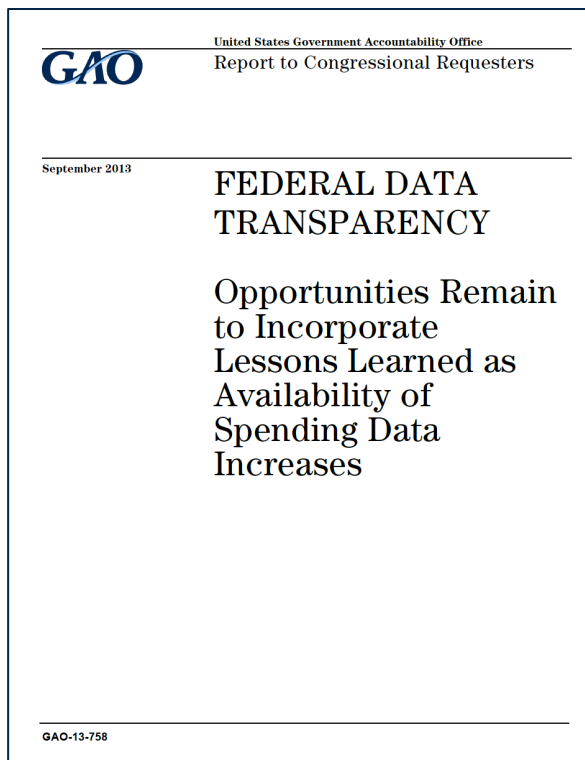
- hampers the ability to link existing agency financial and award systems to monitor federal spending throughout the lifecycle

- limits data sharing across agencies, sectors of government and the law enforcement community to identify programs at risk for fraud, waste and abuse

The need for greater federal data transparency (continued)

United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Addressees

April 2014

2014 Annual Report:
Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits

To access this report electronically, scan this QR Code.
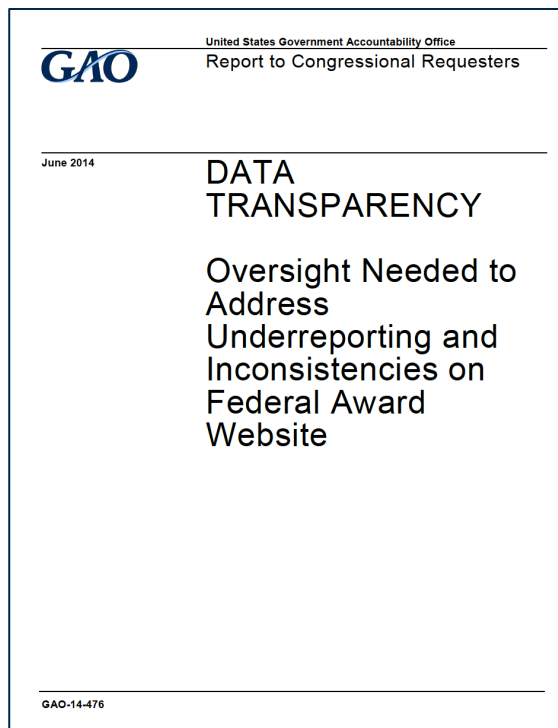Don't have a QR code reader? Several are available for free online.

GAO-14-343SP

- limits comparability among like programs to accurately measure the cost and magnitude of federal investments and identify program duplication, overlap and fragmentation

- prevents easy aggregation of data at the government-wide level to optimize existing data sources and reduce reporting burden

The need for greater federal data transparency (continued)

United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

GAO

September 2013

FEDERAL DATA TRANSPARENCY

Opportunities Remain to Incorporate Lessons Learned as Availability of Spending Data Increases

GAO-13-758

- The DATA Act responds to our recommendation to legislate transparency requirements, including data standards and clear authority for implementation.

- We recommended that OMB, with the GAT Board, develop a long-term implementation plan and increase efforts to obtain stakeholder input.

- OMB generally agreed with our recommendations and has taken steps to increase stakeholder outreach.

USASpending.gov challenges highlight need for strong leadership over DATA Act implementation

United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

June 2014

DATA TRANSPARENCY

Oversight Needed to Address Underreporting and Inconsistencies on Federal Award Website

GAO-14-476

In our report evaluating the reliability of USASpending.gov data published in July (GAO-14-476), we found:

- Roughly 300 assistance programs representing $619B in FY12 awards were not reported to USASpending by January 2013

- Information on reported awards was largely inconsistent with agency records. Only an estimated 2 to 7 % of reported awards were fully consistent

- Information on the recipient's location, and the award's place of performance and description differed significantly from agency records

- Unclear guidance and weaknesses in oversight contributed to these issues

USASpending.gov challenges highlight need for strong leadership over DATA Act implementation (continued)

- We recommended that OMB clarify its guidance and develop and implement improved oversight processes.

- OMB generally agreed with our recommendations.

- These recommendations are consistent with actions to be taken to comply with the DATA Act.

GAO

Effective implementation of the DATA Act can help in addressing these needs

The DATA Act of 2014 (DATA Act) requires:

- Treasury and OMB to develop government-wide financial data standards and issue related guidance

- Treasury to establish a data analysis center to provide data and analytical tools for preventing or reducing improper payments and improving federal spending data transparency

- OMB and Treasury to consult with public and private stakeholders in establishing data standards

- Agency IGs to report on agencies' spending data quality and the use of data standards

- GAO to review IG reports and assess agencies' data quality and implementation of the data standards.

Related statutory requirements can help

GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 requires:

- OMB to publish an inventory of all federal programs identified by agencies on a central governmentwide website

- Agencies also provide program-level funding and performance information

- Transparency of results achieved through web-based reporting

- More-frequent analysis and monitoring of performance by senior leadership at the government-wide and agency levels to identify and prioritize key performance and management issues

- Disclosure on the reliability and accuracy of performance information

OMB will merge implementation of the program inventory provisions with DATA Act transparency requirements since both laws require web-based reporting .

Related statutory requirements can help

Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Improvement Act of 2012 (IPERIA)

- Latest in a series of laws addressing government-wide improper payments

- Requires that agencies verify benefit eligibility before making a payment to a person or entity by checking multiple existing databases

- Modified requirements to promote computer matching activities that assist in the detection and prevention of improper payments

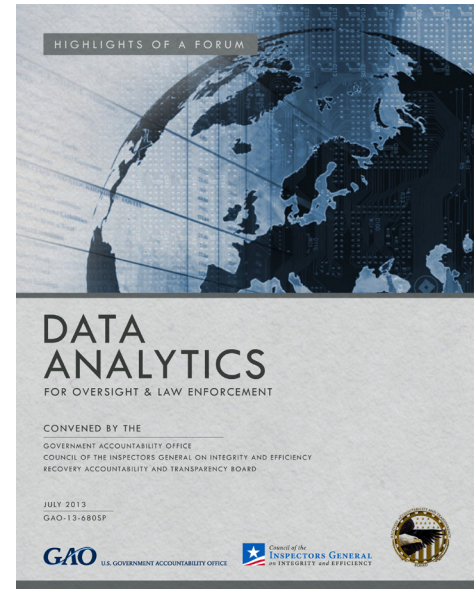# Forum identified data analytics opportunities and next steps

Recent GAO-CIGIE-RATB forum identified challenges in using data analytics

Accessing and using data

- Need for more awareness of data sources
- Lack of incentives to design systems useful for oversight due to differing missions
- Difficulties in measuring results and prioritizing resources

Sharing data

- Varying standards make interpreting and using others' data difficult
- Intergovernmental challenges—such as costly access to certain federal data and perceptions that sharing is a "one-way street"

Forum identified data analytics opportunities and next steps

Opportunities identified to enhance analytics efforts

- Attracting and retaining knowledgeable and skilled staff

- Garnering organizational support by demonstrating value and building credibility

- Supporting legislative updates to better balance privacy with data transparency

Forum next-steps

- Compile directories of data sources, known offenders, and open-source analytics, modules, and tools

- Explore and work to address any statutory issues related to data access and use

- Develop an ongoing community of practice focused on data-sharing challenges

  - GovernmentDataShare@gao.gov

How data analytics can be used: improper payments

Top 10 program improper payment estimates by dollar amount

Program	Agency	Reported Improper Payment Estimates	
		Dollars (in billions)	Error rate (percent of outlays)
Medicare Fee-for-Service	HHS	$36.0	10.1%
Earned Income Tax Credit	Treasury	$14.5	24.0%
Medicaid	HHS	$14.4	5.8%
Medicare Advantage (Part C)	HHS	$11.8	9.5%
Unemployment Insurance	Labor	$6.2	9.3%
Supplemental Security Income	SSA	$4.3	8.1%
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	USDA	$2.6	3.4%
Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance	SSA	$2.4	0.3%
Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit (Part D)	HHS	$2.1	3.7%
National School Lunch Program	USDA	$1.8	15.7%

Source: Estimates reported by OMB for FY 2013.

Open Data Expected to Enhance Analytics at GAO

GAO is leveraging open data as part of its piloting of data analytic technologies.

Pilot concepts include:

- Data mining for improper payments analysis
- Link analysis for fraud identification
- Document clustering and text mining for overlap and duplication analysis
- Network analysis for program coordination assessment

Preliminary indications include:

- A substantial decrease in labor and time inputs in analyzing documents and their content
- A possible increase in quality and number of findings
- Enhanced visualization for more efficient communication of key findings

GAO on the Web

Web site: http://www.gao.gov/

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