



Open Government Plan

Version 1.0

March 2011

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Executive Summary

President Obama’s Open Government Directive represents a significant change in how federal agencies are expected to conduct their business and interact with the public. Emphasizing increased transparency, enhanced opportunities for public participation and greater collaboration between agencies as well as citizens – the new initiative seeks to strengthen the public’s trust in the U.S. Government while improving efficiency and effectiveness of federal agencies.

In response to the President’s call for more open government, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) has created a comprehensive Open Government Plan to describe how the agency will work to address the challenges and opportunities presented by this new policy. The plan outlines NCPC’s current and planned efforts regarding transparency, public participation, and collaboration, and is intended to help guide the agency as it implements these new open government policies and practices.

As the federal agency responsible for guiding the planning and development of the nation’s capital, NCPC already solicits input from the public regarding its planning efforts, collaborates and consults with various stakeholders throughout the region, and regularly disseminates information about its activities. However, given recent advances in information and communication technologies – NCPC recognizes that more can be done to expand opportunities for participation and collaboration and provide easier access to information.

Over the next two years, NCPC plans to launch a series of new initiatives that will provide the public and regional stakeholders with enhanced access to the agency’s records and data, employ new methods of public engagement, and make collaboration and information sharing easier for agency staff and its partners – as well as cultivating an internal culture supportive of more open government. In addition, NCPC will develop several flagship initiatives to serve as new models for involving the public in the urban planning and development process – including a new online collaborative platform for long-term and comprehensive plan documents.

While this plan covers a two-year timeframe, NCPC will publish an annual status report regarding its open government efforts, and update the plan on a bi-annual basis. Ultimately, NCPC expects its open government efforts to create greater awareness and accountability around the proposed plans and development projects within its jurisdiction – resulting in a better national capital for all Americans.

Introduction

The Open Government Directive

As the first order of business of his new Administration, President Obama released an executive memo on January 21st 2009 that called on the federal agencies to embrace a new era of openness and adopt new practices aimed at making the U.S. Government more transparent, participatory and collaborative. As part of the Administration’s Open Government Initiative – formally manifested in the Open Government Directive published by the Office of Management and Budget in December 2009 – federal agencies are asked to prepare an Open Government Plan to document current and future open government efforts aimed at increasing public trust and improving efficiency and effectiveness.

The National Capital Planning Commission

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is the central planning agency for the federal government in the National Capital Region centered. Established in 1924, NCPC is charged by Congress to ensure the protection and enhancement of the natural, historic, and cultural resources of the region. The 12-member Commission meets 11 times each year to adopt, approve, or provide advice on plans and projects that impact the region, and is supported by a staff of planners, architects, urban designers, and other professionals.

The National Capital Region

The National Capital Region (NCR) encompasses the District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties in Virginia; and the incorporated cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax, and Manassas. The approximately 2,500 square mile (6,475 sq km) region is home to over 4.6 million people, and has a total economic output of \$408 billion – the fourth largest of any metro area in the United States.

Overview of NCPC Activities

For the purpose of assessing and improving public understanding of NCPC, its activities may be broken down into the following categories:

Commission Meetings — regular business meetings at which the Commission takes action on plans and projects submitted to NCPC for review. The Commission also adopts plans and studies as policy that guides subsequent review of plans and projects.

Plan and Project Review—the process by which the agency’s staff formulates the recommendations presented to the Commission at its regular meetings.

Comprehensive Planning—preparation of the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan – which address matters related to federal properties and federal interests in the NCR. The agency also reviews and comments on the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan – which are

prepared by the DC Office of Planning and outline the goals, objectives and policies for land use in the District of Columbia as a whole. Together, the Federal and District Elements set out planning policy related to transportation, land use, housing, parks and open spaces, the environment, and many other aspects of development in the District and across the region.

Plans and Studies—NCPC-led initiatives with various scopes and time frames for completion that advance the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. This work may result in the issuance of broad or detailed design and development guidelines, strategies for implementation and interagency cooperation, feasibility assessments for specific projects, reports for public distribution, or policies related to some aspect of capital area planning.

Capital Improvements Planning—annual review of the Federal and local capital improvements plans that provide a link between longer-range comprehensive planning goals for the region and annual capital budgets. With the Federal Capital Improvements Program, NCPC compiles and evaluates proposals from Federal agencies that identify capital projects and provide corresponding budget estimates over a six-year time horizon. NCPC also has specific review authority over the annual District of Columbia Multi-Year Capital Improvements Plan, and evaluates the capital improvements programs of other local jurisdictions within the region to determine their effect on federal interests in the region.

Locality Plan Review—the review of draft plans prepared by cities and counties within the National Capital Region to determine if there is a federal interest at stake and to help local agencies coordinate with affected federal entities. Types of plans include comprehensive, area, transportation, open space, historic preservation, and other similar plans.

NCPC's Open Government Plan

The President's call for more "open" government fits squarely within the existing goals and objectives of the National Capital Planning Commission. As the federal agency responsible for guiding the planning and development of the nation's capital, NCPC collaborates and consults with various stakeholders throughout the region – including other federal agencies, state and local governments, Congress, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and the general public. To ensure that its plans, policies and actions reflect what is in the best interest for the region, NCPC regularly disseminates information about its activities and frequently solicits input from the public regarding its planning efforts.

Through the preparation and implementation of this Open Government Plan, NCPC expects to cultivate a strong culture of open government organized around the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration. This organizational shift in thinking is a critical component to ensure that they agency can leverage the benefits of open government to increase public participation and stakeholder collaboration, while creating greater accountability in regards to the agency's plans and projects.

An initial draft of the NCPC Open Government plan was created in April 2010. Staff members from all of the agency's functional units were consulted regarding potential agency actions related to open government before a final draft was completed in early December 2010.

NCPC released the final draft of its plan for a 60-day period of public comment in early 2011, soliciting feedback via an online forum. Input received was incorporated into the finalized plan. The agency will publish a status report evaluating its open government efforts each March starting in 2012, and will update the plan on a bi-annual basis.

Measuring the Success of NCPC's Open Government Efforts

While the NCPC is committed to meeting all the requirements set forth by the Open Government Directive, the agency also plans to quantitatively and qualitatively measure the impact of the open government initiatives detailed in this plan where possible. Such efforts will help NCPC determine if its open government efforts are in fact succeeding in delivering constituents and stakeholders with the type of transparent, participatory and collaborative government envisioned by the President.

To evaluate its success, NCPC anticipates collecting, analyzing and publishing the following information on an annual basis:

- The number of attendees at monthly commission meetings
- The number of visitors to the NCPC website
- Percentage of NCPC records that are available online
- Number of public comments received by the agency
- Number of online applications and tools that make use of NCPC data and records
- Number of FOIA requests received

Transparency

NCPC strives to provide the public with complete information about its activities, and complies with all legal information dissemination obligations as defined in the Paperwork Reduction Act, 44 U.S.C. § 3506(d) and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552 (as amended). However, the agency also recognizes that providing additional information about its actions beyond what is currently mandated can help improve the public's understanding of the work of NCPC, and foster constructive scrutiny that will help improve the agency's performance. As such, this section of the NCPC Open Government Plan highlights the steps the agency has already taken in regards to transparency, and outlines its future plans for improvement.

Summary of Current Efforts

NCPC informs the public about its business through a variety of ways. Commission meetings are open to the public, and interested stakeholders can request a printed or electronic copy of the tentative agenda in advance of the meeting. Notices about the agency's periodic meetings and events related to important projects and plans are included in press advisories sent to local print and online media outlets.

NCPC also maintains a website that is regularly updated with information about Commission meetings and events, along with opportunities for public comment. In addition, the Executive Director's monthly report, which had previously been available to the public on request, now has a permanent space on the homepage. Members of the public can also subscribe to a monthly email newsletter that includes notices about upcoming meetings and events. More recently, NCPC has made use of online social media to help inform the public about its actions. The agency's Facebook page is regularly updated with notices of upcoming events, and NCPC has worked with local bloggers to conduct live online chats regarding important projects and plans.

In regards to data, the NCPC has published four high-value datasets on its website, which provide information about the core activities of agency.

- Official transcripts of NCPC monthly commission meetings for the past two years
- All capital projects included under the Federal Capital Improvements Program, FYs 2010-2015
- The NCPC's Commemorative Works Catalog (CWC), which includes a complete list of Washington DC's commemorative works on federal land.
- A list of all titles included in NCPC's library of books, publications and reports.

NCPC has published these datasets on its website in several open and machine readable file formats. Anyone is free to download, use and analyze this data as they wish.

In addition to these datasets, NCPC maintains an archive of all commission actions from the past seven years on its website. In 2010, NCPC also added a page on its website addressing its review of plans for local jurisdictions within the NCR, which includes records which were not previously available.

Planned Initiatives

NCPC is committed to conducting its work more openly and making information about its activities more easily available to the public and regional stakeholders. Over the next two years, NCPC will review its procedures and systems related to transparency and work to improve internal mechanisms for collecting and managing data so that it can provide useful and reliable data to those within and outside the agency. In addition, new tools and data will be made available to expand and enhance the information currently available about NCPC and its activities.

Ultimately, NCPC wants to cultivate a strong and sustainable culture of transparency throughout the agency. To achieve this, the agency will focus on helping staff members understand:

1. The importance of sharing information with other agencies and the general public
2. What information might be useful to the general public
3. How to play an active role in identifying new opportunities for increasing public knowledge about the agency's activities

The following initiatives are aimed at meeting the agency's strategic goals related to increasing transparency.

1. Conduct Records Management Workshops for NCPC Staff

NCPC will hold workshops for staff involved in the production and distribution of official records to ensure that their creation and electronic archival meets the standards set out in NCPC's Records Management Handbook. Additional procedures will be established or formalized as necessary for the systematic storage of electronic records so that they can be quickly and easily retrieved in the future by people who were not originally involved with the creation of the correspondence.

Target date for completion: March 2011

2. Publish Responses to Local Plans and Capital Improvements Online

NCPC staff reviews draft plans prepared by cities, counties, and regional entities within the National Capital Region. The agency also reviews capital improvements plans from local jurisdictions. To ensure that these activities are transparent to the public, NCPC will create a web page that provides a record of all plans submitted for review and the official correspondence transmitted by NCPC to the local jurisdiction with the results of the review. In addition, NCPC will also improve its explanation of the capital improvements planning process and explain NCPC's role at the federal and local levels.

Target date for completion: April 2011

3. Conduct and Publish Inventory of Records and Data

As part of the agency's annual inventory of records, NCPC will publish a public list of the types of records it maintains. In addition, it will identify any high-value information not currently available online, and establish a timeline for its publication on the website.

Target date for completion: April 2011

4. Publish Machine Readable Dataset of Projects Submitted for Commission Review

NCPC maintains records on all projects that are reviewed by the Commission. While information about these projects is available in the current online archives of past Commission actions, it is not easily searchable. To provide better access to this information, NCPC will publish a machine readable dataset of past projects submitted to the commission for review.

Target date for completion: June 2011

5. Create an Online Searchable Index of Commission Actions

Currently information about past NCPC Commission actions are available in PDF documents organized by meeting data. To improve the ease of access and usability of this information, NCPC will develop an online searchable database of all Commission Actions for its public website. This database will allow visitors to the website to search through all available records of past commission actions using keywords, dates, file numbers, and geography (where data is available).

Target date for completion: July 2011

6. Publish Additional Data on Federal Capital Improvements Planning (FCIP)

NCPC will post additional years of raw data associated with previous years' preparation of the FCIP and subsequent years as they become available. Posting multiple years will allow the public to perform longitudinal analyses such as forecasting and time-series regression.

NCPC will also add information to these datasets, including global positioning system (GPS) coordinates, the year the capital proposal was first submitted to FCIP, and whether any related projects have been submitted to NCPC for plan/project review.

Target date for completion: January 2012

Compliance with Federal Transparency Initiatives

NCPC is committed to participating in federal transparency where relevant and appropriate to the mission, objectives and scope of the agency.

As a micro-agency, NCPC has traditionally not been required to participate in federal initiatives such as eRulemaking (e.g. Regulations.gov) and the IT Dashboard. As NCPC already publishes records of Commission actions online, and is able to provide prompt response, comments on any notices published in the Federal Register can be directed to the agency. Annually, NCPC's technology investments are extremely modest, with the bulk of the technology budget directed to maintaining the agency's operational state.

NCPC does not make any federal awards or grants, and did not receive funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Therefore, it has not participated in Recovery.gov or USASpending.gov. NCPC has registered the high-value datasets available on its website with Data.gov, and will continue to do so as new datasets are added online.

Records Management and Requests for Information

NCPC records management program complies with federal law under 36 CFR Subchapter B) including such activities as identifying and scheduling all electronic records (E-Government Act of 2002, Pub L. No. 107-347, section 207(e). The agency conducts an inventory of its printed and electronic records on an annual basis and follows a well established disposition schedule for transfer of records to the National Archives. As NCPC does not maintain any classified records, the agency has no need for an information declassification program. All information regarding the agency's management of paper and electronic records may be found in the NCPC Records Management Handbook, most recently updated in October 2009.

NCPC welcomes requests for information from members of the public. NCPC receives a small number of requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act each year (approximately 10-12). Consequently the agency has no backlog of requests to address. While it receives very few formal requests for information under FOIA or from Congress, the agency responds to several informal requests each week.

Formal requests under FOIA are accepted via mail, fax or email. Incoming requests are handled by the agency's designated Chief FOIA Officer, who typically responds in a matter of days. Every year, NCPC prepares a summary of the FOIA requests it receives and their disposition. This information is available in the annual FOIA Report, which is published on the NCPC website. Congressional requests for information are handled in the same manner as FOIA, with staff striving to fully respond to requests within 3 business days.

Full details regarding the NCPC's records management program and process for responding to FOIA and Congressional requests for information are available on the NCPC website at: <http://www.ncpc.gov/open>

Participation

Summary of Current Efforts

NCPC actively encourages public participation in the decision-making process. Members of the public can participate in Commission meetings, either as speakers, or by submitting written comments. Deadlines for registration are displayed continuously on the home page in “Commission Corner,” a prominent space dedicated solely to monthly meetings.

NCPC has been devoting particular effort in the last year to communicate the message that there are many opportunities for participation beyond attending Commission meetings. NCPC regularly provides opportunities for public comment on proposed projects and plans. Comments can usually be submitted using email or via an online form, as well as by written letter. Furthermore, NCPC also hosts a number of events each year that offer opportunities for members of the public to provide their feedback.

The agency’s emphasis on encouraging public participation can be clearly seen on its website. “Public Participation” is a tab on the top navigation bar of the NCPC website, and from there, people are prompted by drop-down links to go to Public Comment Opportunities, Upcoming Events, and Guidelines for Speaking at Commission meetings.

Under Public Comment Opportunities, visitors can find an online comment submission form that allows them to submit comments for projects currently open for comment. The website also offers an explanation of the public comment process with regard to the National Environmental Policy Act. New opportunities for public comment are also highlighted on the agency’s home page.

Planned Initiatives

1. Expand Use of Social Media

NCPC will expand its use of social media technologies and platforms where appropriate (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr), and work to integrate these channels with its website. This will be an important way to connect with existing communities of Internet users and link them with NCPC and its work.

Target date for completion: April 2011

2. Implement an Online Crowdsourcing Platform to Solicit Ideas from the Public

Web 2.0 technologies allow for mass collaboration between large groups of people. Organizations are increasingly leveraging this opportunity by posing questions and problems on the Web, and asking anyone who is interested to contribute ideas and solutions. The public – or “crowd” – is also encouraged to sort through the solutions, identifying the best ones through collective voting. The organization benefits from being able to collect new and public vetted ideas from outside its own pool of talent. This model has been popularly dubbed “crowdsourcing.”

To take advantage of new form of distributed idea generation and problem solving, NCPC will implement an online crowdsourcing platform that will allow the agency to solicit ideas and opinions from visitors to its website. Visitors will also be able to comment or vote on other contributed ideas, helping to identify priorities and concerns not already considered by NCPC staff.

Target date for completion: April 2011

3. Stream Live Video from Commission Meetings and Events

NCPC will broadcast a live video and audio stream of Commission meetings accompanied by a live chat feed to allow members of the public who cannot attend meetings in person to participate in the proceedings. Video streams will also be archived on the NCPC website for later viewing. Where possible, NCPC will work to stream video in a similar manner from other agency events.

Target date for completion: May 2011

4. Develop an Interactive Online Commenting System for NCPC Plans and Initiatives

NCPC will implement an online commenting system that will allow the public to submit comments regarding the planning initiatives of the NCPC. Comments received will be published on the website, along with responses from NCPC staff. This will help provide a more visible record of the public participation process around the agency's activities.

Target date for completion: February 2012

Collaboration

Summary of Current Efforts

NCPC actively collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders. The agency has ongoing working relationships with various federal agencies, local governments, and other public and private entities involved in the planning and development of the region. NCPC communicates with these stakeholders regularly, and provides information regarding its business and actions. Staff members are typically open and available for consultation regarding plans and projects, and the agency regularly arranges and facilitates meetings and events for the purposes of coordination and collaboration between stakeholders. In addition, several members of NCPC's senior staff serve on regional boards and councils, helping to enhance coordination and collaboration between the agency and other governmental bodies.

Planned Initiatives

While NCPC considers itself a relatively collaborative agency, there is recognition that more could be done to increase cooperation. Furthermore, many of NCPC's opportunities for collaboration tend to be focused around particular projects, and are weighted towards the District of Columbia proper. Thus, NCPC's proposed collaborative initiatives seek to strengthen collaboration with stakeholders across the region, and include more proactive and policy-oriented efforts.

1. Enhance the NCPC Intranet

NCPC will enhance its internal intranet to support improvements in collaboration and information sharing among staff. These improvements will include the ability to quickly contribute information about projects and events, and a repository of centralized outreach and contact lists.

Target date for completion: May 2011

2. Permit Online Submission of Project Review Applications and Materials

NCPC will develop an enhanced online submission system that will allow applicants to submit a project for review on the NCPC website. This system will also allow applicants to upload supporting documents, and confirm the status of their project application.

Target date for completion: August 2011

3. Develop an Online Platform for Stakeholder Collaboration

NCPC will develop and deploy an online platform to facilitate regular communication and collaboration with its various stakeholders. In addition to contacts management, information sharing, and messaging tools, the platform will provide for hosting of virtual meetings.

Target data for completion: June 2012

Flagship Initiatives

In addition to its already proposed initiatives, NCPC is planning two flagship initiatives that will exemplify its efforts to be more transparent, participatory and collaborative.

Commemorative Works Database

NCPC will develop a user-friendly map-enabled database application on its website that will allow visitors to browse and explore the information contained in its Commemorative Works Catalog. The application will also allow the submission of photos and comments by the public regarding the region's commemorative works. The application framework developed for this purpose will also be extendable to other future NCPC datasets, allowing the agency to provide robust access to other catalogs of records as appropriate.

Target date for completion: October 2011

Online Platform for Collaborative Planning

A primary responsibility of the NCPC is the preparation of the region's comprehensive plan. While the agency has traditionally provided opportunities for public input when the agency updates the plan's elements, advances in technology now offer the potential to create a more interactive public participation process. To engage both a larger audience and involve members of the public more deeply in the planning process, NCPC plans to develop an online platform that allows the public to directly suggest changes to the text of the agency's plans in draft form.

This collaborative platform will be modeled on other successful examples of online collaborative planning from around the world, including Melbourne, Australia's Future Melbourne 2020 and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Bicycle and Pedestrian Wiki. The platform will allow visitors to the site to register and contribute their feedback on the plan – either through comments, contributed media or direct changes to the text. The platform will also allow NCPC planners and the public to view the evolution of the plan as it moves through revisions.

Target date for completion: February 2012

Appendices

Appendix A: Timeline for Completion of Proposed Initiatives

	2011												2012					
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J
Transparency																		
Records Management Workshops			X															
Publish Responses To Local Plans				X														
Publish Records/Data Inventory				X														
Publish Machine Readable Dataset of Projects Submitted for Review						X												
Develop Searchable Index of Commission Actions							X											
Publish Additional FCIP Data													X					
Participation																		
Expand Use of Social Media				X														
Deploy Crowdsourcing Platform				X														
Live Streaming of Meetings					X													
Develop Online Public Commenting System													X					
Collaboration																		
Enhanced Intranet					X													
Online Submission of Project Review Materials							X											
Online Stakeholder Collaboration Platform																	X	
Flagship Initiatives																		
Commemorative Works Database										X								
Collaborative Planning Platform													X					

Appendix B: Key Audiences for NCPC Information

NCPC has several audiences, each with distinct needs for information.

1. Citizens affected by or interested in planning and development activities within the National Capital Region
 - a. Expert Public—advocacy groups (e.g. Coalition for Smart Growth, National Coalition to Save the Mall), architecture and planning professionals, and others wishing to provide technical expertise or detailed, focused input on NCPC initiatives or projects submitted to the agency for review.
 - b. Engaged, Nonexpert Public—individuals and groups that take a keen interest in a particular project, perhaps because it has a direct impact on them (e.g. Armed Forces Retirement Home, the RFK Stadium redevelopment). They may become very informed through their involvement, but they are not necessarily engaged with planning issues on a routine basis.

- c. Local General Public—Those who are affected by planning in the National Capital Region, but are only peripherally aware of or sporadically tuned into important issues.
 - d. Broader General Public—US Citizens residing outside of the region, all of whom have a stake in the capital city, especially its heritage sites and symbolic structures.
 2. Other public agencies in the National Capital Region, many of which submit projects to NCPC for review, contribute to NCPC’s planning efforts, and/or implement plans developed by NCPC and partner agencies.
 - a. Federal (e.g. General Services Administration, Department of Defense, National Park Service, etc.)
 - b. DC (e.g. District Department of Transportation, Zoning Commission, etc.)
 - c. Other local jurisdictions within the region, but outside DC (Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland; various towns within those counties that have separate planning agencies; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties in Virginia; the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park in Virginia.)
 3. Congress
 4. The media, opinion leaders, and other organizations that influence public debate on planning issues by spreading ideas and expanding the conversation
 - a. Traditional broadcast and print media—those who primarily report planning and development activities (e.g. Washington Post, Northwest Current, Washington Business Journal, etc.)
 - b. Independent writers and bloggers—those who report, interpret, and comment upon planning issues and encourage an open exchange among readers (e.g. GreaterGreaterWashington.com, DCist, etc.)
 - c. Think tanks and research institutes—those who issue reports and sponsor forums that are a source of expert information and analyses to the media, policymakers, and the general public (e.g. Urban Land Institute, Brookings Institution, etc.)