US Department of Education, Open Government Self-Review

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Formulating the Plan in the Open

1.) Was multidisciplinary collaboration involved in formulating the plan?

The plan and its component elements have been through extensive collaboration efforts across State and local governments.

> Yes. The Department implemented a series of forums with stakeholders such as representatives of schools, organizations, and state and local governments to increase participation in discussions on topics such as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Race to the Top, and the Administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 budget request. Transcripts and videos of the meetings are posted on the Web for those who are unable to attend. All these subjects are part of the open government plan, and this public input is used throughout the plan.
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> The Department also used an internal tool called OpenEd to obtain feedback on the plan internally from employees. Additionally, the plan was distributed to almost every division within the Department during each iteration for extensive review and input.

2.) Was public consultation involved in crafting the plan?

> Yes. Secretary Duncan and senior staff visited all 50 states to hear from the public about their concerns and questions regarding the No Child Left Behind legislation and what the department could do better. The inputs from those visits were incorporated into the core Department strategies, including its open government initiatives.
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> The department also used social media to help engage with the public on a variety of issues relating to education (http://www.ed.gov/blog/topic/join-the-conversation/). The inputs from these tools were used extensively in developing major new open government programs such as Race to the Top and Invest in Innovation.
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> In addition, an web conversation management tool, Ideascale, was used to generate feedback on the plan as it was developed, including 200 comments which were analyzed and incorporated.

3.) Was the plan published in an open format, online, on time and on the open government page and with raw data?

> Yes. It is published as a PDF and Word doc. In the release at the end of June 2010, it will also be published as a web site with public commenting possible on individual pages.

> Raw data is available through a variety of sources, with more datasets to be published as they are processed (privacy and other constraints prevent all raw data from being published to the public, and processing is required by the department to share publicly):
>> Data.ed.gov
>>> i3 applications received
>> Data.gov
>>> Trends in International Mathematics and Science (multiple grades)
>> Federal Student Aid data center
>>> Data sets: Direct loan transition, Programmatic volume reports, Application volume reports, School data, Lender and guaranty agency reports, Default rates, Loan purchase activity reports
>> State Drop out data
>> National Household Education Survey
>> Common Core of Data (CCD) Local Education Agency Universe Survey
>> Ed Data Express
>>> Not released yet, but will provide easy public access to a number of key datasets.

4.) Is there a plan for continued public engagement as part of the review and modification of the open government plan?

> Yes, see Flagship Initiative Open Government Steering Committee (III.C). The open government steering committee at the Department is developing a significant plan for continuing to engage with the public. The committee will examine public input from the open government email address. The committee will develop an open government policy document that describes how and where the public can expect to be involved in department (e.g. which forums are two way versus broadcast only). The committee will take moderated public comments during its meetings, and is investigating other ways to make its meetings more open and accessible.

Transparency Strategic Action Plan

5.) Does the plan contain a strategic action plan that inventories agency high-value information currently available for download?

> Yes, see section III.D.1. National Center of Education Statistics (a Department division) has significantly completed and is continuing to extend and publish many

of the datasets lists above. In addition, the Department has released the first version of the [National Education Data Model](#) which seeks to describe the map of data available in education. Also, [EDFacts](#) is an internal data centralization initiative to inventory and make easily accessible all performance data that the Department collects from States and Local Education Agencies.

6.) Is there a plan to foster the public's use of this information to increase public knowledge and promote public scrutiny of agency services?

Yes, see Flagship Initiative Ed Data Express (III.A.). Ed Data Express is specifically designed to make it easier for the general public to access data from the Department that has in the past been accessible but not easily analyzed or manipulated. In addition, Data.ed.gov (III.D.2) is being developed to make other data sets beyond education performance related data available to the public in ways that are easy to access, understand and share.

7.) Does the action plan identify high value information not yet available and establish a reasonable timeline for publication online in open formats with specific target dates?

Yes. Beyond just identifying high value datasets, the Department has identified barriers to the release of such data and is actively working to address those barriers. For example, the department is creating a new Chief Privacy Officer position, so there will be an internal single point of contact to work with various divisions in managing security, privacy and the public's access to data sets. In addition, the release of a number of high value data sets is underway. For example, in Section IV, timelines are laid out for release of additional finance data, similar to how ARRA finance data is currently reported. In section III.E.2. a program is described that will enable large amounts of educational content to be released, not just at the Department but in partnership with other Federal agencies. In III.D.9, we outline how more Federal student aid data is slated for release. In section III.D.8. the program for making more historical data on special education programs is outlined. In III.D.7, EdFacts is outlined with plans to release numerous new high value data sets related to educational improvement. A number of other data set releases are described in the plan (search for Objective "1.2" to find them all).

8.) For agencies providing public information in electronic format: Is there a plan for timely publication of underlying data for public information maintained in electronic format?

Yes. See information in section 7 above.

9.) Does the plan identify key audiences for information and their needs, and the agency endeavors to publish high-value information for each of those audiences in the most accessible forms and formats?

Yes. EdFacts, Ed Data Express and Data.Ed.Gov projects all are designed for specific consumers of data: tailoring the kinds of content for the audience. In addition, the recently established Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at the Department

is specifically created because accessing and sharing educational information can be difficult due to privacy regulations. So beyond just establishing data sets and consumers for data that are directly managed the Department, the Department is seeking to support a broader community of educational data repositories across the country effectively and securely manage their data sets, correctly following all the privacy regulations and rules.

10.) Is there a plan to demarcate educational material as free for re-use?

Yes. The Race to the Top and Race to the Top Assessment initiatives specifically require that materials developed with these funds must be open licensed. In fact the Department went further than this to require that the technology systems that are commercially licensed (and hence not open licensed) must abide by open interoperability standards, to ensure that open materials can be shared, regardless where they are created.

11.) Does the plan detail compliance with transparency initiative guidance, and where gaps exist, detailed steps the agency is taking and the timing to meet the requirements for each initiative:

  * Data.gov
  * eRulemaking
  * IT Dashboard
  * Recovery.gov
  * USAspending.gov

Yes. The Department specifically addresses data publishing and transparency work for each of these areas.

12.) Are there details of proposed actions (with clear milestones) to inform the public of significant actions and business of the agency (e.g. agency public meetings, briefings, press conferences, town halls)?

Yes. More than only proposed actions, we have already taken action to provide clear information regarding the [Secretary's public schedule](), [media and information events]() and how and where [citizens can get involved]() in two way communication with the Department. In addition the Open Government Steering Committee is going to investigate strategies for making more internal meetings open (see flagship initiative (III.C).

13.) Does the plan address existing record management requirements by providing:

  * Website link
  * Identifying and scheduling all electronic records
  * Timely transfer of all permanently valuable records to the National Archives

Yes. The plan describes the RIMS group at the Department which handles moving all records to NARA as well as identifying and scheduling all records. The plan provides

links to the [technical resources](#) relating to RIMS. It also provides a link to a more [user friendly site](#) that explains what RIMS does and what subdivisions exist (including FOIA group).

14.) Does the plan address FOIA by providing:

   * Website link?
   * Staffing, organizational structure, and process for responding to FOIA requests?
   * Assessment of capacity to analyze, coordinate and respond to requests in a timely manner?
   * If there is a significant FOIA backlog, details on how the agency will reduce the backlog by 10% each year?

> Yes. The plan includes a link to the FOIA pages on the Department's website. It also includes an organizational structure chart and detailed information on how FOIA requests are handled. An assessment of capacity to handle FOIA requests is included. The Department does not have a large FOIA backlog and therefore did not include a detailed set of milestones for reducing the backlog. The Department did identify in the plan metrics that demonstrate that the Department is currently reducing the backlog of FOIA requests.

15.) Does the plan address congressional requests by providing a:

   * Website link?
   * Staffing, organizational structure, and process for responding to Congressional requests?
> Yes. The plan includes a website link to the Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs, as well as an email address for this office. The plan also includes an organizational structure which is also easily available on the web. Information is provided about how the Congressional requests are handled.

16.) Does the plan address declassification, if applicable by providing a:

   * Website link?
   * Where the public can learn about declassification programs, accessing declassified materials, and provide input about what types of information should be prioritized for declassification?

> The U.S. Department of Education does not have original classified authority under National Security Classifications. The Department does not have the authority to declassify information.

Participation

17.) Does the plan explain how the agency will improve participation, including steps the agency will take to revise its current practices to increase opportunities for public

participation in and feedback on the agency's core mission activities (including proposed changes to internal management and administrative policies to improve participation)?

> Yes. The plan includes a number of steps that the Department has taken and will take in the future to increase public participation. Notably, the open government steering committee is going to investigate how to hold more open meetings at the Department to permit the public to see and hear more of what goes on at the Department. In addition the committee will investigate how to receive public input into these meetings (e.g., via moderated twitter feeds or other text streams).

> Other public participation activities are described in section III.E of the plan. In particular, use of blogs, web-based comment systems and Facebook and Twitter posts are identified as elements of the public participation strategy. More long-range strategies are also described (e.g., III.E.2) that include enabling more public access and interaction with Federal education resources provided by a number of agencies. This will enable the public to not just participate with the staff in the agencies, but to meaningfully engage with the educational resources developed by the agencies, including posting meta-data to describe resources, rate and review the resources and assemble the existing resources into new, higher value resources.

18.) Does the plan describe and provide links to websites for the public to engage in existing participatory processes?

> Yes: The plan includes a link for how citizens can get involved and a description of what the Department is doing to engage the public.

19.) Are there proposals for new feedback mechanisms (including innovative tools and practices for public engagement)?

> Yes. In particular the Department is rolling out a new web-based content management system that will permit public comments and discussion on individual pages. This new CMS will also make it much easier for individual divisions within the Department to post and manage their own information, as well as directly engage with their constituents.

Collaboration

Does the plan list steps the agency will take to revise its current practices to further collaboration:

20.) With other Federal and non-Federal government agencies? Including the use of technology platforms to this end?

> Yes. Notable examples of technology platforms for this purpose that the Department is working on (and described in the plan) are: Open Innovation Web Portal (III.B), Digital Systems Interoperability (III.E.2) and the Privacy Technical Assistance Center (III.E.3). Race to the Top and Race to the Top Assessment initiatives (II.A and II.B) are major initiatives for the Department that are designed from the ground up to create and encourage more collaboration between the Department and State

education agencies, as well as between State education agencies with each other, and with their constituent Local Education Agencies.

21.) With the public? Including the use of technology platforms?
Yes. Privacy Technical Assistance Center (III.E.3) is designed to support researchers as well as the general public. Open Innovation Web Portal (III.B) is designed to match not just organizations with funders, but individuals with great ideas with funding opportunities to get their ideas off the ground. The web publishing tools being deployed at the Department are also designed to let the public engage in discussion and collaboration more with the Department. In addition the Open Government Steering committee will investigate ways to make internal Department meetings more open, including potentially two way communications with the public.

22.) With non-profit and private entities? Including technology platforms?
Yes, see answer for #20, as the collaboration programs III.B and III.E.3 are not limited to supporting government agencies but to non-profit and private groups as well.

23.) Are there links to websites that describe existing collaboration efforts of the agency?
Yes. See answers #20 and #21.

24.) Does the plan describe the Innovative methods (e.g. prizes and collaborations) to increase collaboration with the private sector, non-profit, and academic communities?
Yes. The i3 fund (II.D) and the Race to the Top family of initiatives (II.A. and II.B.) are large dollar initiatives designed specifically for this purpose and targeting all these groups, as well as state and local governments.

Flagship Initiative

25.) Does the plan include at least one specific flagship engagement?
Yes – it includes three initiatives.

26.) Does the description provide an overview of the initiative: how it addresses one or more of the three openness principles and how it aims to improve agency operations?
Yes for all three.

27.) Does it identify external partners for collaboration (if appropriate)?
Yes. Open Innovation Web Portal, for example, is designed to foster collaboration not just between the Department and external partners, but also to use the Department's capabilities to connect external partners with each other to foster new forms of government and private sector collaborations.

28.) Is there a plan for public participation in contributing innovative ideas to the flagship?
Yes. ED Data Express, for example, is designed with public utility at its core and will be upgraded periodically based on public participation and input in the tool's utility and needs for additional functionality and data sets.

29.) Does the description explain how the improvements to transparency, participation and/or collaboration will be measured?

Yes. ED Data Express and the Open Innovation Web Portal are both web-based tools that are instrumented so they can gauge public involvement (participation), number of data sets provided (for Ed Data Express in transparency) and number of searches for matching investors and funding seekers (Open Innovation Web Portal in collaboration).

30.) Does the flagship include a description of sustainability and room for improvement?

Yes. All these programs are in their initial roll-out periods or even in design phase, with much room for improvement.

Comments: