

Government Accountability and Transparency Board

October 4, 2011 Minutes

A meeting of the Government Accountability and Transparency Board (GAT Board) was held at the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board (Recovery Board) Office in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, October 4, 2011, at 9:00 a.m. and continued until 11:10 a.m.

ATTENDEES

Board Members:

Earl E. Devaney, Chairman, Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board
W. Scott Gould, Deputy Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
Allison C. Lerner, Inspector General, National Science Foundation
Daniel Levinson, Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services
Calvin L. Scovel, III, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Transportation
Kathleen Tighe, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Education
Daniel I. Werfel, Controller, Office of Management and Budget
David C. Williams, Inspector General, U.S. Postal Service

Proxy Attendees

Richard Ginman, Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, U.S. Department of Defense
Dan Tangherlini, Chief Financial Officer, Department of the Treasury

Agency Staff:

Ross Bezark, Executive Director, GAT Board, and Chief of Staff, Recovery Board
Kevin Donahue, Senior Advisor to the CFO, U.S. Department of the Treasury
Jennifer Dure, General Counsel, Recovery Board
Sandra Swab, Senior Data Manager, Recovery Board
James Warren, Chief Innovation Officer, Recovery Board
Cynthia Williams, Board Secretary, Recovery Board

Discussion:

Chairman Devaney called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. By unanimous vote of the members present, the minutes of the September 8, 2011, GAT Board meeting were approved. Chairman Devaney then reviewed the meeting agenda and discussed the structure of the presentations.

Mr. Williams began the discussion on Recovery Board systems with an overview of key challenges to the collection and display of federal spending data. He introduced Mr. Warren, who presented the GAT Board with an overview of the existing Recovery Board information technology infrastructure and the known inventory of government financial collection and display systems as well as those with only manual processes. A lengthy discussion followed on a proposed government-wide technology framework that would strengthen transparency and accountability while reducing the size and complexity of the existing federal financial information reporting and display systems. Members debated the merits of a single platform solution versus retooling existing systems or building an intermediate system interface. Mr. Werfel remarked that the technology solution should first consider the primary opportunities that exist to eliminate redundancies and inefficiencies in government systems and then determine how far to drive the consolidation.

After additional dialogue, the members agreed to establish a small working group of technology experts from various organizations to further analyze the issue and to then present their findings to the GAT Board for consideration. Chairman Devaney asked Mr. Bezark to coordinate the development of the working group. He suggested that the working group focus on the Recovery Board's proposed solution and what current systems could easily be migrated into this potential technological solution. The members agreed that this must also address fraud prevention techniques and identify challenges that need to be overcome.

Ms. Swab presented to the GAT Board an overview of the opportunities of a common technology solution for the grant award process and grant reporting. She provided the members key statistics on recipient reporting for grant awards and discussed the existing limitations of the current paper-laden reporting system. She also provided the members with the key applicable lessons learned through the ARRA reporting process, to include the ability to view real-time financial obligations and recipient receivables as well as the standardization of reporting requirements. Chairman Devaney commented another important lesson learned through the Recovery process to consider is that spending data can be collected directly from recipients with a high degree of certainty. The members also engaged in brief discussions regarding the composition and time requirements for loan and contract awards, and the probable need for policy changes to accommodate a common solution for all awards.

Mr. Werfel provided a comprehensive update on the Administration's review of the pending DATA Act legislation. An extensive discussion of the components of the legislation ensued. The members agreed that Chairman Devaney would send a letter to Chairman Issa expressing the GAT Board's views on the draft DATA Act legislation. The members then engaged in a discussion of the December report to the Administration. The members agreed that the report should focus on recommendations for implementing data standardization, system optimization/consolidation, and accountability tools. Ms. Tighe inquired into the availability of the results of the MITRE report on data standardization. Mr. Warren remarked that the final report will not be published until December; however, MITRE could brief the GAT Board on the results of their research at the next meeting.

The members determined that the duration of the next meeting will be two hours. There was also an agreement to convene a daylong meeting of the GAT Board in November.

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for 9 a.m. on October 27, 2011.

Cynthia Williams
Secretary