

# Government Accountability and Transparency Board

August 7, 2012, 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, August 7, 2012, at 9:00 a.m. and continued until 11:05 a.m.

## **ATTENDEES:**

### **Board Members:**

Richard Ginman, Chairman and Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, U.S. Department of Defense  
David C. Williams, Vice Chair and Inspector General, U.S. Postal Service  
Allison C. Lerner, Inspector General, National Science Foundation  
Daniel Levinson, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Ellen Murray, Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources and Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Kathleen S. Tighe, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Education  
Daniel I. Werfel, Controller, Office of Management and Budget

### **Agency Staff:**

Brett Baker, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, National Science Foundation  
Ross Bezark, Executive Director, GAT Board, and Chief of Staff, Recovery Board  
Regina Bova, U.S. Department of Defense  
Brian A. Dettelbach, Assistant Inspector General for Legal, Legislative, and External Affairs, U.S. Department of Transportation  
Richard Gregg, Fiscal Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of the Treasury  
Karen Lee, Chief of Management Controls and Assistance Branch, Office of Management and Budget  
Edward Pound, Director of Communications, Recovery Board  
Atticus Reaser, General Counsel, Recovery Board  
LeAntha Sumpter, Deputy Director, DPAP, US Department of Defense  
Cynthia Williams, Board Secretary, Recovery Board  
Michael Wood, Executive Director, Recovery Board

### **MITRE Personnel <sup>1</sup>**

Gary Ingber  
Gordon Milbourn  
Gabriel Sifre

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<sup>1</sup> Attended during the MITRE discussion only

**DISCUSSION:**

Mr. Ginman called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. He announced that the two newest GATB members are Gregory Friedman, Inspector General for the Department of Energy, and Nani Coloretti, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of the Treasury. Both Mr. Friedman and Ms. Coloretti are expected to attend the next GATB meeting. By unanimous vote of the members present, the minutes of the June 11, 2012 meeting were approved.

*(1) MITRE Presentation: Universal ID Implementation: Proof of Concept Modeling*

Representatives from the MITRE Corporation provided the members with an update of the work being performed on the Universal Award ID (UAID) and a demonstration of two of the twenty-two processes involved in modeling the UAID. Background information on the project, including the need for a UAID, project elements, key project actions, and the desired outcome was provided by Mr. Milbourn. Mr. Milbourn stated that the lack of government-wide data standardization is a long-standing problem and creates difficulties in inter-agency data analysis and comparisons. He also stated that following earlier GATB direction and agency feedback, the MITRE group has been able to develop a proof of concept model that uses a semi-intelligent format, leverages existing systems, minimizes agency burden, incorporates a central registry approach, and consists of a format that will work within the framework of the Treasury payment process.

Mr. Milbourn introduced his colleagues, Mr. Ingber and Mr. Sifre, who provided the demonstration of the two processes: Agency Registration and Recipient Reporting. During the Agency Registration process demonstration, Mr. Ingber described the agency interaction with the Federal Assistance Awards Data System Plus, Data Submission and Validation Tool, and USASpending.gov and discussed the central repository that would be created, possibly using cloud technology. Mr. Ingber stated that the UAID, as modeled, consists of five parts: an agency code, award type, fiscal year, random alpha code, and a check digit for validation. This 12-character combination, he stated, would allow for approximately 28 million unique IDs per agency each fiscal year. Mr. Ingber then demonstrated the initial log-on procedures for the Recipient Reporting process. He identified several benefits of the proposed process. These included pre-populated static data fields and drop-down menus to ensure data accuracy. Mr. Ingber also discussed the risks associated with both processes. He identified several challenges with synchronization and data reliability. Specifically, he noted the need for improved agency reporting into source systems such as USASpending.gov. He also noted that the differing reporting and registration time-frames for the System for Award Management and Central Contractor Registry may result in challenges for the Recipient Reporting Process.

The members and the MITRE representatives engaged in a detailed discussion of both processes. The members had several questions regarding the limits of the 12-character format, the depth to which the UAID could be assigned, the treatment of award modifications, and the cross-referencing of agency award numbers with the UAID. The MITRE representatives exited the meeting at 9:50 a.m.

(2) Board Discussion

The members then engaged in a discussion of the overall benefit and utility of the UAID, which the GATB had earlier endorsed in two reports to the President, noting that such a system would ensure uniformity and consistency of data; enable more efficient and effective audits, reviews, and analyses; and enhance transparency of government spending. The members compared and contrasted an agency approach to developing a unique identifier and the government-wide approach.

Mr. Ginman commented on the importance of data standards and data reliability. Mr. Werfel commented that the UAID is beneficial only if the desired outcome is to measure the portfolio of programs government-wide. He also noted that implementation of a government-wide UAID would not resolve data reliability issues at the agency level. The members agreed that data standardization is needed to address data reliability issues. The members debated the course of action needed to ensure agency compliance with data standardization. The members could not reach agreement on whether the UAID was an essential part of the proposal.

The Board discussed two different approaches to ensure data standardization. The first was a high-level approach, which provides general performance standards and business rules but allows agency implementation flexibility; and the second was a more prescriptive approach, which would prescribe how to meet performance requirements.

Mr. Ginman said that he did not favor mandating prescriptive “how to” requirements but thought it better if agencies were given guidance and allowed to implement the systems themselves. Other members also commented that higher costs could accompany a more prescriptive approach. Mr. Williams cautioned that no solution that invested only in yesterday’s technology thereby eliminating the possibility of data mining across the government made sense. Mr. Ginman noted that the most significant benefit would be to tie the UAID to the agency’s core financial systems. Ms. Tighe commented that the UAID central registry concept could be the start of the path forward that was reasonably cost effective. Mr. Wood added that the proposed UAID process would link award numbers to the financial system. Discussions ensued on various approaches to reconcile agency spending information with core financial systems. Mr. Werfel commented that a prescriptive approach would take a quarter of a century to clean up various agency reporting and financial systems. However, he said, OMB could take steps allowing agencies to reconcile award files and financial systems, which would immediately elevate data reliability on USASpending.gov.

There was a discussion of short-term action items and a longer-term vision. Ms. Tighe reminded the group that, given the Board’s charter, all solutions must have a “transparency and accountability” focus. Mr. Werfel stated that solving data reliability problems is essential to this mandate.

There was a recommendation to assemble a working group of agency and OIG program, technology, and policy specialists to recommend performance standards, business requirements, and data standards that would result in increased data reliability and ensure transparency across the federal government. It was decided that a paper identifying the framework (background) and scope (specific queries for the working group to address) would be drafted and disseminated to the working group as guidance. Mr. Werfel volunteered to prepare the initial draft and circulate

it to the members for review prior to the next meeting. The members agreed to forward suggestions to Mr. Werfel for inclusion in the initial draft. Mr. Werfel also volunteered to prepare a draft roster of potential working group members.

The members agreed to convene the next meeting after the Labor Day holiday observance.

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**Cynthia Williams**  
**Secretary**