

Government Accountability and Transparency Board

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 Wednesday, June 25, 2014, at 10:00 a.m. and continued until 11:30 a.m.

ATTENDEES:

Board Members:

Richard Ginman, Chairman and Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, U.S. Department of Defense
Nani Coloretti, Assistant Secretary for Management, U.S. Department of the Treasury
Allison Lerner, Inspector General, National Science Foundation
Daniel Levinson, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Calvin Scovel III, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Transportation

Agency Staff:

Brett Baker, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, National Science Foundation
Ross Bezark, Executive Director, GAT Board and Recovery Board
Kay Daly, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Nancy DiPaolo, Chief Intergovernmental Affairs, Recovery Board
Amy Haseltine, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grant Policy, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Karen Lee, Chief of Management Controls and Assistance Branch, Office of Management and Budget
Keith Maddox, Special Assistant, U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General
Karen Pica, Management Analyst, Office of Management and Budget
Atticus Reaser, General Counsel, Recovery Board
Jenny Rone, Assistant Director, Data and Performance Measures, Recovery Board
LeAnthia Sumpter, Deputy Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, Program Development and Implementation, U.S. Department of Defense
Cynthia Williams, GAT Board Secretary, Recovery Board

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Ginman called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m., and by unanimous vote of the members present the minutes of the May 28, 2014, meeting were approved. Mr. Ginman informed the members of his upcoming briefing to the Recovery Board regarding his proposal for the inclusion of a unique identifier for entities in the databases used by the Offices of Inspectors General (OIG).

Ms. Lerner commented that a briefing on the proposal before the Council of the Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) might also be beneficial. Mr. Ginman expressed his willingness to brief members of CIGIE.

The members briefly discussed the status of the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act) and various implementation activities underway. Ms. Sumpter informed the members of a recent meeting with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to discuss the best approach to sharing data on high risk entities. She commented that during the meeting,

DHS representatives noted their collaboration with and use of the Recovery Board's Recovery Operations Center (ROC) to assist with data matching and risk identification efforts.

The members then turned their attention to the scheduled data analytics briefing. Ms. Lerner provided an overview of varied common and unique uses for data analytics across the OIGs. She mentioned several OIGs are developing unique tools tied to agency mission, and began by briefly discussing the National Science Foundation Office of Inspector General's (NSF OIG) approach to using data analytics. She commented that several tools are used by the NSF OIG to improve its ability to oversee NSF's grant programs. Ms. Lerner added that these tools are of particular benefit to the OIG's audit staff. She also commented that data analytic tools assist with data mining, risk identification, and the review of agency business rules. Ms. Lerner noted that information uncovered is often shared between the audit and investigative staff.

Ms. Lerner informed the members that the degree to which OIGs introduce data analytics into their work products vary based, in part, on the capabilities of the individual office. She noted that although several OIGs are developing independent data analytic tools for individual use, several collaborative initiatives are underway. These included two initiatives spearheaded by the CIGIE Data Analytics Working Group (working group) and a jointly sponsored start-up effort, led by the US Postal Service OIG.

The members then engaged in a detailed discussion of the working group projects. Ms. Lerner explained that all projects explore ways to improve data sharing across the IG community. Mr. Bezark and Ms. Rone explained that the first project is a follow-up initiative from the 2013 Data Forum jointly sponsored by the Government Accountability Office, Recovery Board, and CIGIE, which creates a comprehensive data library of known datasets in use across the OIGs. Ms. Rone added that members of the working group are currently collecting and reviewing data.

Ms. Rone also informed the members that the second working group project is designed to identify and bring together OIG self-developed data analytic tools for shared use. She explained that OIGs often develop in-house data analytic tools using applications such as Microsoft Excel or written in Java Script. The objective of the project, she further explained, is to locate and copy these tools to a shared site that can be accessed by the entire community. Ms. Rone noted that the working group has identified the MAX.gov website, managed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), as a possible location for the shared information. Ms. Rone and Ms. Lee noted that MAX.gov includes powerful tools that allow users to view and manipulate data in a variety of ways. Ms. Rone remarked that the working group is consulting with OMB staff to determine if MAX.gov is a viable option for storing shared information. Ms. Lee commented that a joint discussion between the working group and members of the Treasury Department (Treasury) might help identify ways to leverage the existing infrastructure.

Mr. Ginman questioned the difference between the working group initiatives and the capabilities offered by the ROC. Ms. Rone remarked that the working group initiatives focus on knowledge sharing among the OIGs and not on establishing a central location with dedicated resources, as offered by the ROC. Ms. Lerner added that the initiatives may help fill the void that will be created once the Recovery Board sunsets in 2015.

A brief discussion of agency/IG data sharing ensued. Mr. Ginman remarked that information developed by the OIGs would assist agency program managers identify high-risk entities before funds are awarded. Several members discussed the collaborative efforts in place at their home agencies. Several members also noted OIG independence issues that prohibit the sharing of specific information and tools between the OIG and the agency. The members agreed that agency/IG collaboration is critical to oversight efforts.

Ms. Lerner concluded her briefing with a discussion of the joint start-up between nine OIGs. She informed the members that the Data Analytics and Technical Expert Services initiative is a small-scale collaborative project that provides a virtual platform where services, analytics, information, and resources can be distributed across the OIGs. She added that the online system may prove beneficial for smaller OIGs with limited resources and capabilities. Ms. Lerner remarked that the system has multiple features including forensic services and data analytics tools. She added that the system includes a library of OIG semi-annual reports and other user-supplied reports and articles, an assortment of online tools, and offers users the ability to network with professionals from other agencies for the purpose of sharing skillsets and best practices.

The members then engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of the future of the GAT Board. The members were provided copies of Executive Order (Executive Order) 13576 – Delivering an Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government, which established the GAT Board.¹ Mr. Ginman reiterated his position that the passing of the DATA Act precipitates a review of the GAT Board's current composition and role in government-wide transparency and accountability efforts. He remarked that the DATA Act clearly establishes Treasury as the lead for transparency efforts. He added that government-wide accountability efforts might be better served through a different forum.

The members discussed the ways in which the GAT Board has helped to advance government-wide transparency and accountability. Most members agreed that the GAT Board has been instrumental in bringing together multiple communities for a broad look at transparency. Ms. Pica added that the impetus of the GAT Board has resulted in collaboration between the federal spending and management communities to better manage taxpayer dollars. Several members commented that the GAT Board has helped minimize communication stove pipes and expressed concern for a return to old habits should the GAT Board cease to exist. Ms. Lee discussed current efforts of OMB and Treasury to establish an advisory board to assist with the implementation of the DATA Act requirements. She commented that the Board would be comprised of functional representatives from across the government and noted that the OIGs could be included in the effort.

Mr. Ginman questioned Treasury's vision of the GAT Board's role since early dialogue regarding DATA Act implementation has not included GAT Board representatives. Mr. Ginman stressed that spending accountability and transparency initiatives need to include the contracting and grants community. He also voiced the importance of Treasury including larger agencies like the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in

¹ Executive Order 13576 – Delivering an Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government was issued by the President on June 13, 2011.

its DATA Act implementation discussions. Ms. Sumpter said the DoD internal assessment of the DATA Act, conducted by DoD's Chief Financial Officer and Chief Acquisition Officer communities, has surfaced a concern about Treasury's focus on source systems.

Mr. Levinson commented that the overarching challenge for the GAT Board is to determine how it can effectively advance the DATA Act. Ms. Coloretti reminded the members that neither the GAT Board nor the DATA Act is funded; however, the efforts needed by both are not cost-free. The members then engaged in a brief discussion of alternative forums for moving the agenda forward. Mr. Levinson commented that the horizontal structure of the GAT Board and its ability to drive action vertically are unique to the federal government. Ms. Haseltine commented that briefings for the GAT Board are viewed as action-forcing events that help maintain momentum for those involved in grants reform within HHS.

The members briefly discussed the next steps needed. Mr. Levinson commented that since the Executive Order predates the DATA Act, it seems reasonable to consider a rewrite to specific sections of the document. He reminded the members that whatever the final determination, a formal recommendation to the President would be required. Mr. Ginman suggested that OMB officials be asked to weigh-in on the issue of the Executive Order and the larger issue of the GAT Board's future. Ms. Lee agreed to relay the concerns of the GAT Board with OMB's Deputy Director for Management, Beth Cobert and other senior officials.

The members briefly discussed the meeting schedule. As a result of schedule conflicts, the members agreed to cancel the August meeting. Mr. Ginman informed the members that, also because of schedule conflicts, the July meeting agenda has been revised and will now include a briefing on the grants and procurement data collaboration effort of DoD and HHS.

The next GAT Board meeting is scheduled for July 30, 2014.

Cynthia Williams
Secretary