

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, October 30, 2013, at 10:00 a.m. and continued until 11:32 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

Nani Coloretti, Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of the Treasury

Gregory Friedman, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Energy

Allison Lerner, Inspector General, National Science Foundation

Calvin Scovel, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Transportation

Kathleen S. Tighe, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Education

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 of Congressional Affairs, Recovery Board

Nancy Gunderson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grants and Acquisition Policy, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Karen Lee, Chief of Management Controls and Assistance Branch, Office of Management and Budget

Karen Pica, Management Analyst, Office of Management and Budget

Atticus Reaser, General Counsel, Recovery Board

Cynthia Williams, GAT Board Secretary, Recovery Board

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Ginman called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. By unanimous vote of the members present, the minutes of the August 28, 2013, meeting were approved. Mr. Ginman discussed the previously announced agenda change: the October meeting topic is stakeholder outreach/engagement, rather than the Financial Management Integration and Data Display Working Group briefing, which will occur at the November meeting.

Mr. Ginman discussed two recent stakeholder engagements. First, he recapped the September 12, 2013, briefing that the Sunlight Foundation presented, at its own request, to GAT Board members.¹ Next, he provided a recap of an October 24, 2013, meeting hosted by the Administration as part of its Open Government Initiative.² The GAT Board and civil society organizations were invited to this October meeting, which focused on the financial transparency portion of the pending draft National Action Plan 2.0.³ Mr. Ginman commented that, at the request of the meeting facilitators, he provided the participants with a summary of the GAT Board's history, purpose, and strategic direction. Mr. Ginman further commented that the meeting included a discussion of the transparency community's expectations for federal funding transparency. He added that this included the desire to have data on federal spending

¹ Available at http://presentation.sunlightfoundation.com/Kaitlin_senate.html

² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open>

³ The GAT Board Chairman summarized the meeting and provided a list of meeting participants to GAT Board members.

made available by location, to facilitate insight into federal dollars spent in a local community. The members debated the complexity of this expectation and—given the different purposes of grants and contracts—the possibility of focusing on grants when considering local spending issues. Mr. Ginman then reviewed a list of questions regarding federal funding that the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) believes cannot be answered with the information currently available on USAspending.gov.⁴

The members then engaged in a discussion of various factors involved in providing transparency of federal spending. Much of the discussion revolved around the fundamental difference between grants, which involve financial assistance payments to recipients; and contracts, which require delivery of a service or supply. Several members questioned the need to provide spending data beyond the first- and second-tier award levels and noted that the costs associated with providing information at more detailed levels may outweigh the benefits. Ms. Lee mentioned the importance of understanding stakeholders' use cases for the data, which will assist the government in making better program and tradeoff decisions. There were also questions raised regarding the advisability of relying on any one "good government group." Ms. Lee commented that representatives from the organizations present at the draft National Action Plan 2.0 meeting addressed their diverse missions and data needs. She also addressed the evolution of the spending information available on the USAspending website, including brief mention of termination of the Consolidated Federal Funds Report website, which was formerly hosted by the Department of Commerce's Census Bureau. Ms. Lee then discussed the timeline for the completion of the National Action Plan 2.0; a preview document is scheduled for dissemination in November, and she volunteered to forward this to the members.

A discussion of the proposed Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act) legislation ensued. Mr. Ginman noted that the proposed legislation requires the availability of spending data at the project and object class levels. He provided examples of the burden this requirement could inflict on large grant and contract awarding agencies. The members acknowledged the benefits that place-based spending data could have on fraud detection and leveraging resources, but generally agreed that requiring increased transparency at lower levels should be balanced against the cost and burden of obtaining the information. Ms. Lee provided the members with a status of the House and Senate versions of the DATA Act. She informed the members that the Congressional Budget Office is in the process of calculating the cost impact of the House version of the bill.

The members discussed the possibility of the GAT Board hosting a public meeting in which stakeholders would be invited to make presentations to the Board, featuring recommendations on the future of accountability and transparency. The Board was provided a draft public notice of the meeting for consideration. The members discussed the importance of reaching the right audience. Ms. DiPaolo recommended the participation of various state and local organizations. The members discussed potential locations and other procedural issues. Mr. Williams cautioned that the GAT Board must be prepared to act on the findings from the forum. Mr. Friedman added that follow-up actions may be resource intensive and joined Mr. Williams in the call for the members to consider the implications of the information gathered from the forum. Ms. Lerner suggested the Board identify a specific set of questions for participating stakeholders to answer. Several members commented that the public meeting could be used to help shape the GAT Board's 2014 direction. Members took an action to help frame and focus the future meeting direction; Mr. Ginman asked the members to submit comments within the next few weeks on the wording for a draft Federal Register Notice, identify a range of stakeholder groups, and nominate agenda items for the notional public meeting.

⁴ The May 15, 2013, POGO blog post is available at <http://www.pogo.org/blog/2013/05/ten-questions-that-usaspending-gov-cant-answer.html>

Mr. Ginman discussed the need to close out activities laid out in the 2013 Way Forward document in order to transition into the work required in 2014. Mr. Ginman asked the group to consider the usefulness of working groups to move initiatives forward, given that GAT Board recommendations are not compulsory, and how the Board might evaluate progress. He stated that his going-in position is that the four working groups from 2013 would continue into 2014. Ms. Tighe reiterated that the data analytics topic might invoke sensitivities because it entails inspectors general. There was a brief discussion of the GAT Board's 2014 strategic direction and members agreed to provide ideas on how best to move forward at the next meeting.

Mr. Ginman informed the members Beth Colbert, Deputy Director for Management at the Office of Management and Budget requested a meeting to discuss the GAT Board. He invited the GAT Board Vice Chair, Mr. Williams, and Ms. Tighe to join him for the November 5, 2013, meeting.

Ms. Gunderson asked for clarification on what the Chairman's expectations were for the November 20, 2013, meeting. He reiterated that the featured topic would be Financial Management Integration and Data Display. Mr. Ginman stated he expected two key issues to be covered: (1) the results of Treasury's feasibility study, and (2) the goals, objectives, tasks, and timelines for OMB's "Band of 4" group—OMB, DoD, HHS, and Treasury.

The next GAT Board meeting is scheduled for November 20, 2013.

Cynthia Williams
Secretary