

Government Accountability and Transparency Board

February 25, 2013, 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 Monday, February 25, 2013, at 1:00 p.m. and continued until 2:20 p.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 for the Department of the Treasury
Allison C. Lerner, Inspector General, National Science Foundation
Ellen Murray, Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources and Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Calvin Scovel, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Transportation
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
Juston Fontaine, Special Advisor to Inspector General, U.S. Department of Energy
Kay Daly, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Todd Grams, Executive in Charge for the Office of Management and Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
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, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, U.S. Department of Defense
Cynthia Williams, Board Secretary, Recovery Board
Michael Wood, Executive Director, Recovery Board

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Ginman called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. By unanimous vote of the members present, the minutes of the November 19, 2012, meeting were approved. Mr. Ginman then recapped the action items from the previous meeting. These included dissemination of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on the analysis of alternatives for contractor identification numbers; the Department of Defense Proposed FAR Case 2012-023, Uniform Procurement Identification; the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) data elements; and the GAT Board Way Forward document for Calendar Year 2013. Mr. Ginman provided a brief

status of the DoD Proposed FAR Case and informed the members that a follow-up meeting on data standards was held on February 5.

Mr. Ginman briefed the members on the December 19, 2012 entrance interview with representatives from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). He commented that he and Mr. Williams met with the group, on December 19, 2012, to discuss an upcoming review of the GAT Board's progress. Mr. Ginman agreed to provide the members with an electronic copy of the GAO entrance document.¹

The members engaged in a detailed discussion of the GAT Board Way Forward (Way Forward) document. Mr. Ginman discussed his proposal for three working groups to review, analyze, and evaluate pertinent data and develop action plans for procurement data integrity, grants data integrity and standardization, and data analytics on behalf of the GAT Board. The members agreed with the proposed strategic direction identified in the document and the use of working groups. Edits to the document included a suggestion from Mr. Scovel to revise some of the language included in Section I-B, the approach to the long-term strategic direction for improving federal spending transparency and accountability. The members agreed that the final document would be made available to the public.

Ms. Coloretti proposed the efforts of the working groups align with the work of the Chief Financial Officer community, specifically those efforts related to data integrity. She summarized a few of the data integrity efforts currently underway at the Department of the Treasury (Treasury). Mr. Werfel commented on the value of teaming with Treasury on issues that are part of the agency's core mission.

The members then engaged in a discussion of the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the pursuit of government-wide transparency and accountability. Mr. Ginman commented, and the members agreed, that the GAT Board is responsible for setting direction and facilitating the strategic process. He added that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and OFPP should lead the implementation efforts for the government-wide solution. Mr. Werfel discussed the resource requirements needed to effectively perform the leadership function. He emphasized that the GAT Board would need to provide the framework and keep Congress and the administration aware of the cost, performance, and time factors associated with recommended solutions.

Mr. Werfel discussed the proposed OMB guidance to agencies on improving the quality of data on USAspending.gov. He informed the members that it is intended to be a first step towards improving the data quality of USAspending.gov by reconciling agency control totals with the publically available data on USAspending.gov. The members then debated the role of the GAT Board in the ongoing discussions about federal accountability standards, the audit reporting model, and the long standing issues that accompany financial system modernization efforts. Mr. Werfel commented that the GAT Board may need to tackle foundational questions if the recommended government-wide solution embraces a more systemic approach. Mr. Wood suggested if the government developed smaller, more agile systems, a smoother transition to improved data quality and standardization might be the result.

Ms. Murray commented on the need to establish a group to identify and coordinate individual data integrity efforts that may be underway at various agencies. Several members suggested the

¹ GAO Entrance Document was forwarded to the Board Secretariat for distribution on 2/26/13.

formation of a fourth GAT Board working group to help facilitate this effort and discussed its composition. Mr. Ginman proposed gathering a small group of key representatives to develop the structure and scope for the group. Ms. Lerner suggested that representatives from the Inspector General (IG) community be invited to participate in the group along with those from select agencies. After further discussion, the members agreed that the Data Mining working group would interface with the new group to ensure that the needs of the accountability community are represented. The members also agreed that interaction among all the working groups is encouraged.

Mr. Williams informed the members that the Data Mining working group was nearing the completion of its initial analysis. He commented that the group is exploring the mechanisms required to implement a shared platform concept across the federal government.

Mr. Ginman recapped the action items generated during this GAT Board session. These included convening a small working group to determine how best to incorporate a collaborative effort with Treasury that is consistent for both the procurement and grant working groups; updating the Way Forward document to reflect the collaborative initiative and other agreed upon edits; and forwarding the revised document to the members for final review.

The members reviewed the proposed meeting schedules and sequence of working group briefings. There was a brief discussion of the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) as an interagency forum for the Data Mining group. There were differing opinions from various members on the level of involvement needed from the CIGIE. Mr. Williams asked for clarification on the final product to be delivered by each working group. Mr. Ginman commented that the working groups are expected to present an action plan that achieves the GAT Board's strategic mandate, including short-term and long-term goals and timelines. Ms. Daly cautioned that IGs should not be involved in the development of action plans if they include setting standards for management actions. The members agreed that the work of the GAT Board would remain at a strategic level.

The members then briefly discussed data elements. Mr. Ginman suggested that the data dilemma is not tied to the need for collecting additional data elements, but rather how to connect collected data in a complete and reliable manner. Data standards drive the ability to connect data. Mr. Williams commented that the GAT Board needs to be bolder with what it expects of the data. Other members noted that the data needs to be relevant for all users. Mr. Grams encouraged the working groups to consider how data can enable success rather than strictly informing oversight activities. Mr. Ginman noted the benefits to agency managers of examining data to measure the health of an organization.

Mr. Ginman reminded the members that the Procurement Data Integrity working group would report on its efforts at the March 27 meeting, followed by reports from the Data Mining and the Grants Data Integrity and Standardization working groups on April 24 and May 22 respectively.

The next GAT Board meeting is scheduled for March 27, 2013.

Cynthia Williams
Secretary