

## **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, February 26, 2014, at 10:00 a.m. and continued until 11:25 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

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

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

Norman Dong, Deputy Controller, Office of Management and Budget

Daniel Levinson, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

#### **Agency Staff:**

Ross Bezark, Executive Director, GAT Board and Recovery Board

Kay Daly, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Boris Desouza, Program Manager, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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

Christina Ho, Assistant Commissioner, Government-Wide Accounting, U.S. Department of the Treasury

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

Alice Siempelkamp, Director Web Operations, Recovery Board

LeAntha Sumpter, Deputy Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, 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., by unanimous vote of the members present, the minutes of the November 20, 2013, meeting were approved.

Mr. Ginman thanked the members for the group effort in organizing the February 7 public meeting. The members discussed the presentations made at the meeting and the value of engaging stakeholders. The members also discussed the audience composition and whether to engage groups not represented.

Mr. Dong commented on the importance of agency participation at such events. Ms. Tighe remarked that the Board itself represents a range of agencies.

Mr. Ginman summarized key topics that surfaced at the public meeting. These included the need for data standards, unique identifiers, machine-readable and accessible data, reducing redundancies, providing line item spending, using the Recovery Board as a model, and linking appropriations to expenditures.

Mr. Ginman commented that these and other relevant issues are being addressed by the efforts of Procurement Data Integrity and Standardization working group. He added that Grants Data Integrity and Standardization working group should also work to address these issues.

The members engaged in an in-depth discussion of the GAT Board's 2014 strategic direction. Mr. Ginman remarked that the purpose of the forthcoming 2014 Way Forward document is to summarize the work performed to date by the four working groups and outline the approach and steps needed to move forward in 2014. He added that the input received during the public meeting would help shape the GAT Board's strategy.

A detailed discussion of the GAT Board's strategic approach ensued. The members discussed whether to broaden or narrow the Board's focus. Mr. Williams commented that a more far-reaching look at government-wide transparency and accountability is needed. Ms. Coloretti remarked that the end-result of the agency efforts is increased transparency, which is aligned with the Board's directive. Ms. Coloretti described the overall effort as a "transparency movement" and emphasized the importance of recognizing its context: transparency is a challenging and multi-faceted initiative, given that the government and its infrastructure was not initially established to make information public. The group discussed the importance of having a long-term vision, while recognizing the near-term reality of breaking progress into "bite-sized chunks." Mr. Ginman commented that the lack of GAT Board resources and authority requires leveraging the efforts of agencies and other rule-making entities; this led to the working group construct the Board defined in 2013, which includes an important role for OMB. He added that the GAT Board should focus on short-term and longer-term results and reminded the members that the GAT Board should be the catalyst for government-wide accountability and transparency. Mr. Williams suggested that in 2014 the members closely review the stated goals of each of the working groups and assess each group's overall effectiveness.

The members discussed data accuracy, completeness, availability, and the importance of defining the data users. Ms. Coloretti stated that different audiences—federal agencies, state agencies, inspectors general, the public—have different expectations. Most members agreed that the common themes discussed by the presenters at the public meeting included completeness of the data, data accuracy, and improved access to the data.

The group discussed the role of USAspending.gov as a transparency tool. Mr. Dong reminded the members that the Office of Management and Budget's June 2013 memorandum, requiring agencies to ensure the accuracy of spending data on USAspending.gov, provides an interim step to ensuring government-wide data accuracy. The members agreed that improving the accuracy and the ease of use of USAspending.gov is a crucial step in the overall process, and having regular updates from Treasury on its USAspending.gov initiatives would be helpful. Ms. Ho discussed an approach that would yield visible, timely, and impactful incremental improvements for USAspending.gov. She commented that there are short-term improvements that can be made to the site that do not require agency action. These include improving the search engine, leveraging the success of Recovery.gov, and educating the public on the data posted on USAspending.gov. Ms. Sumpter commented that other ideas for improving USAspending.gov are emerging in other working groups. Ms. Ho and Ms. Sumpter briefly discussed presenting spending information at a summary level. They also discussed the ongoing importance of data integrity and the need for ongoing agency-wide dialogue on data integrity, since agencies are called to testify on agency data. The members agreed that a synthesis of efforts and ideas is needed between the working groups and across agencies. Ms. Lee and Ms. Coloretti agreed to coordinate a discussion among the various working group members to discuss cross-cutting themes.

There was a brief discussion of the role of data analytics in the overall accountability efforts. Mr. Williams commented that the larger unresolved issue is the need for data preparation. He further commented that program managers are the first-line beneficiaries of improved data analytics.

Mr. Williams added that the overall effort should be in making relevant information on ways to reduce risk available to those who make spending decisions. Several members commented on agency internal controls and collaborative agency and Inspector General (IG) efforts currently in place to minimize fraud. Most members agreed that the harmony of efforts should be leveraged and expanded where needed. Mr. Ginman remarked that members must keep in mind the clear separation of duties between the agencies and the IGs. Ms. Tighe remarked that the underlying issue is who manages the data.

Mr. Ginman informed the members that an updated Way Forward document would be prepared to capture the ideas and information discussed during the meeting. He commented that the document would be forwarded to the members for review and comment.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Levinson suggested that a summary of the public meeting be included in the document as well. Mr. Bezark informed the members that a brief synopsis of the public meeting along with a link to the webcast is posted on Recovery.gov. Ms. Gunderson asked whether the way forward might entail having more than one presentation at each monthly meeting. Mr. Ginman cited concerns about being able to cover multiple topics within the monthly time constraints and suggested read-ahead materials provided to the Board might be an alternate.

The members briefly discussed the agenda for the March meeting. The members agreed to provide their comments on the Way Forward document in advance of the March meeting. Mr. Ginman commented that the meeting will include a discussion of the document along with a briefing from the Grants Data Integrity and Standardization working group. Ms. Gunderson commented that the working group briefing will include an overview of its ongoing work on data standards and data reporting.

The next GAT Board meeting is scheduled for March 26, 2014.

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**Cynthia Williams**  
**Secretary**

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<sup>1</sup> The revised draft of the Way Forward document was forwarded to the Board Secretariat for distribution 3/20/2014.