Government Accountability and Transparency Board

April 24, 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 Wednesday, April 24, 2013, at 10:00 a.m. and continued until 11:38 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
Gregory Friedman, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Energy
Allison Lerner, Inspector General, National Science Foundation
Daniel Levinson, Inspector General, 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
Victoria Collins, Policy Analyst, Office of Management and Budget
Kristine Conrath, Assistant Commissioner, Federal Finance, Financial Management Service, U.S. Department of the Treasury
Jim Finkelstein, Professor, George Washington University and Consultant, U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General
Nancy Gunderson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grants and Acquisition Policy, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Karen Pica, Management Analyst, Office of Management and Budget
Atticus Reaser, General Counsel, Recovery Board
Dorrice Roth, Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Department of the Treasury
Scott Stewart, Director of Applications, U.S. Postal Service, Office of Inspector General
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 10:00 a.m. By unanimous vote of the members present, the minutes of the March 27, 2013, meeting were approved. Mr. Ginman provided a brief summary of the recent interview with representatives from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). He commented that he, Ms. Tighe, and Mr. Williams met with representatives from three groups within the GAO who are preparing reports that focus on transparency, data quality, and the lessons learned from the Recovery Act. Mr. Ginman also commented that the GAO representatives reviewed the GAT Board's Way Forward document, which is posted on FederalTransparency.gov. Ms. Tighe and Mr. Williams agreed with Mr. Ginman that the

strategies and approaches described in the Way Forward document appeared to be well received by the GAO personnel.

Mr. Ginman provided the members with a copy of the FederalNewsRadio.gov article featuring Ms. Tighe and Mr. Werfel. He also discussed his recent written responses to questions concerning the GAT Board posed by Michael O'Connell, web editor for Federal News Radio. A copy of the written document was also provided to the members. The members engaged in a brief discussion of recent meetings with staff and senior management from the Recovery Board, Department of Defense, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Treasury Department that focused on potential approaches and models to track the movement of federal funds. Several members commented on the benefits and potential limitations of the approaches discussed during the meetings. Mr. Ginman noted that additional meetings are planned.

The Data Analytics working group provided a briefing and a draft paper covering its proposed approach. Mr. Williams recapped the objectives of the Data Analytics working group. He outlined the sections of the briefing and informed the members that he would be jointly presenting with Ms. Lerner and Mr. Wood.[1] Mr. Williams also informed the members that a presentation on the material had been given to members of the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE).

Ms. Lerner discussed the need for improved data analytics and the challenges contributing to the slowing of progress in this area. Ms. Lerner commented that fragmented system silos and erroneous data have inhibited fraud detection. Mr. Ginman commented that improved data analytics can lead to infinitely better management and reduced costs, which are important benefits for the program management community. Mr. Williams added that the majority of accountability efforts begin at the program management level.

Mr. Williams provided the members with a high-level description of the working group's proposed government-wide data analytics solution. He reported that the working group envisions a shared platform approach that relies upon standardized data and allows information and analytical tools to be shared across the government. Mr. Williams described the three layers of the model, which include a layer of attributes from government and non-government sources for financial and spending data, a data analytics layer that utilizes relational databases and algorithms to produce various analytic tools, and a layer of data presentation templates and report formats. Mr. Williams commented that the potential benefits from the shared solution include minimizing poor performance and risk, an increased awareness of oversight efforts underway across government, and an increase in the recovery of funds.

Mr. Wood discussed options and challenges with implementing the proposed solution. These included reaching consensus on a set of common attributes for use in the model and the changes needed to existing laws to allow access to certain types of data and systems. Mr. Williams and Mr. Wood also summarized various funding alternatives for the proposal.

The members discussed the spending data layer of the working group's proposed solution. An in-depth discussion of data quality occurred. The group agreed on the importance of quality data, but had differing ideas on how to best achieve that end. Mr. Williams discussed the Data

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[1] Upon approval, the Data Analytics Working Group briefing is expected to be made available on FederalTransparency.gov.

Analytics working group's proposal to "cleanse" data entering the shared platform through an extract, transform, and load (ETL) process. Mr. Stewart described the function of the ETL process. The members debated the use of an ETL process for cleansing data. Mr. Ginman feels strongly that data quality should be addressed at the input source. He emphasized that the individuals inputting the information have a vested interest in data accuracy when managers use their data to make decisions. Ms. Tighe commented, and Mr. Williams confirmed, that the proposed data analytics solution requires the successful achievement of the data standard efforts underway by the Procurement and Grants Data Integrity and Standardization working groups.

The members also discussed data attributes. Mr. Ginman reiterated that any future common attributes should focus on data already collected, rather than imposing new collection requirements, which can be costly to implement. Mr. Werfel stated that reaching consensus on the core attributes is important to the data analytics solution. He added that it would be useful to develop a list of questions that should be addressed and answered by the solution. He also suggested the use of a gap analysis to determine if existing federal data is sufficient to answer the questions or if an expansion of the data is needed. He acknowledged the challenges of developing a list of questions for a global data analytics model.

The members then discussed the roles and responsibilities of the Data Analytics working group and the recently established Financial Management (FM) Integration and Data Display working group, and how the two efforts are complementary. The members agreed that the Data Analytics working group would formulate an initial list of questions that need to be addressed by the data analytics solution, identify any associated attributes, and present the information to the Board.

Mr. Williams stated that the Data Analytics working group was expecting comments from CIGIE on its data analytics draft paper. The members also agreed to provide feedback to Mr. Williams on the draft data analytics paper, with a target date of May 15.[2]

Following the Data Analytics working group's presentation, Mr. Ginman asked for highlights from other working groups. Ms. Sumpter provided the members with an overview of the meetings on procurement and grant standards that have occurred over the past month. She reported that members of the Procurement Data Integrity working group had met with representatives from the Treasury Department and were provided several presentations on Treasury's vision of data collection and standardization. Ms. Gunderson commented on the need to address outdated and ill-defined attributes. Ms. Sumpter informed the members that vigorous discussions and regular meetings will continue. Mr. Werfel commented that the groups are committed to exploring how best to meet emerging business needs.

Mr. Ginman reminded the members that the FM Integration and Data Display working group is scheduled to present at the May 23 meeting, followed by a briefing from the Grants Data Integrity and Standardization working group on June 26.

The next GAT Board meeting is scheduled for May 23, 2013.

Cynthia Williams
Secretary

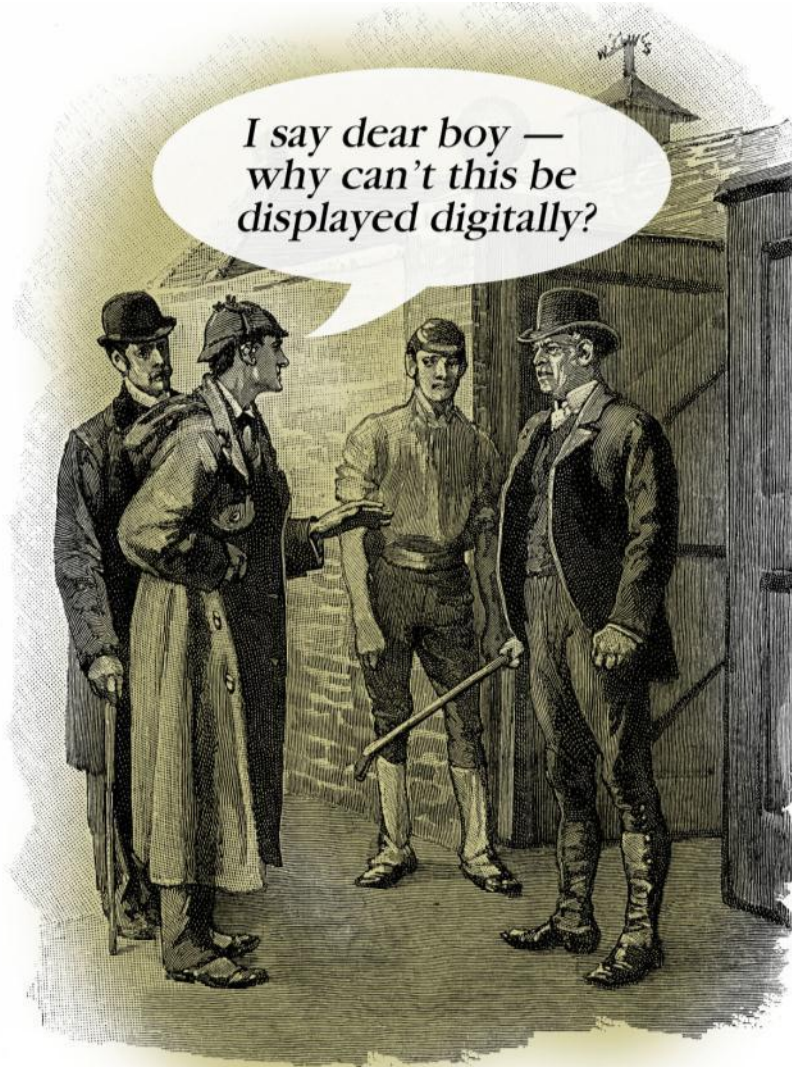[2] Subsequently, members indicated they would need more time to provide comments on the draft paper.

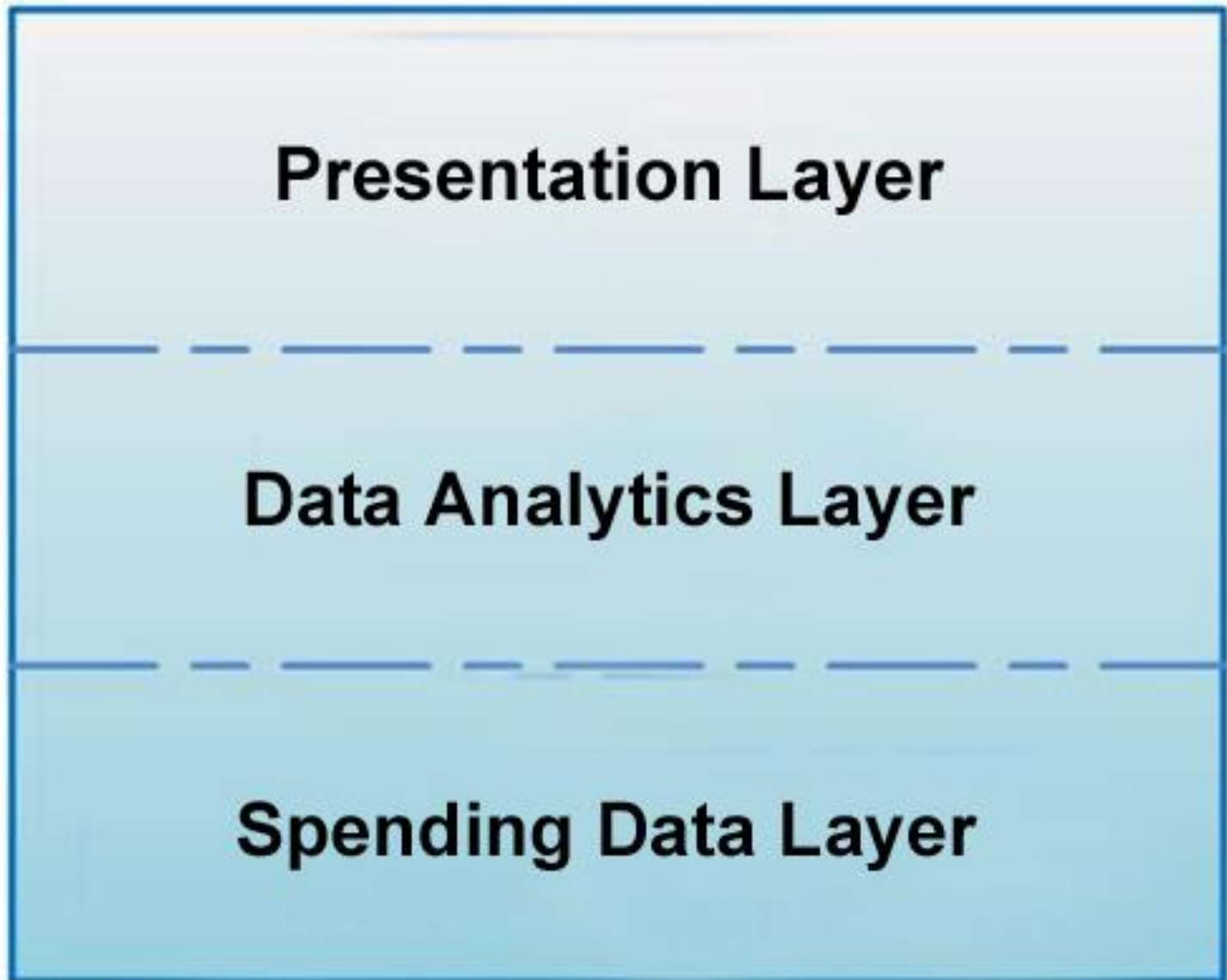# GAT Board History and Purpose

- Created to enhance transparency and accountability

- Focused on cutting waste, streamlining operations, and reinforcing performance and management in government

- Develop a shared platform for data analytics and improve fraud detection within Federal spending
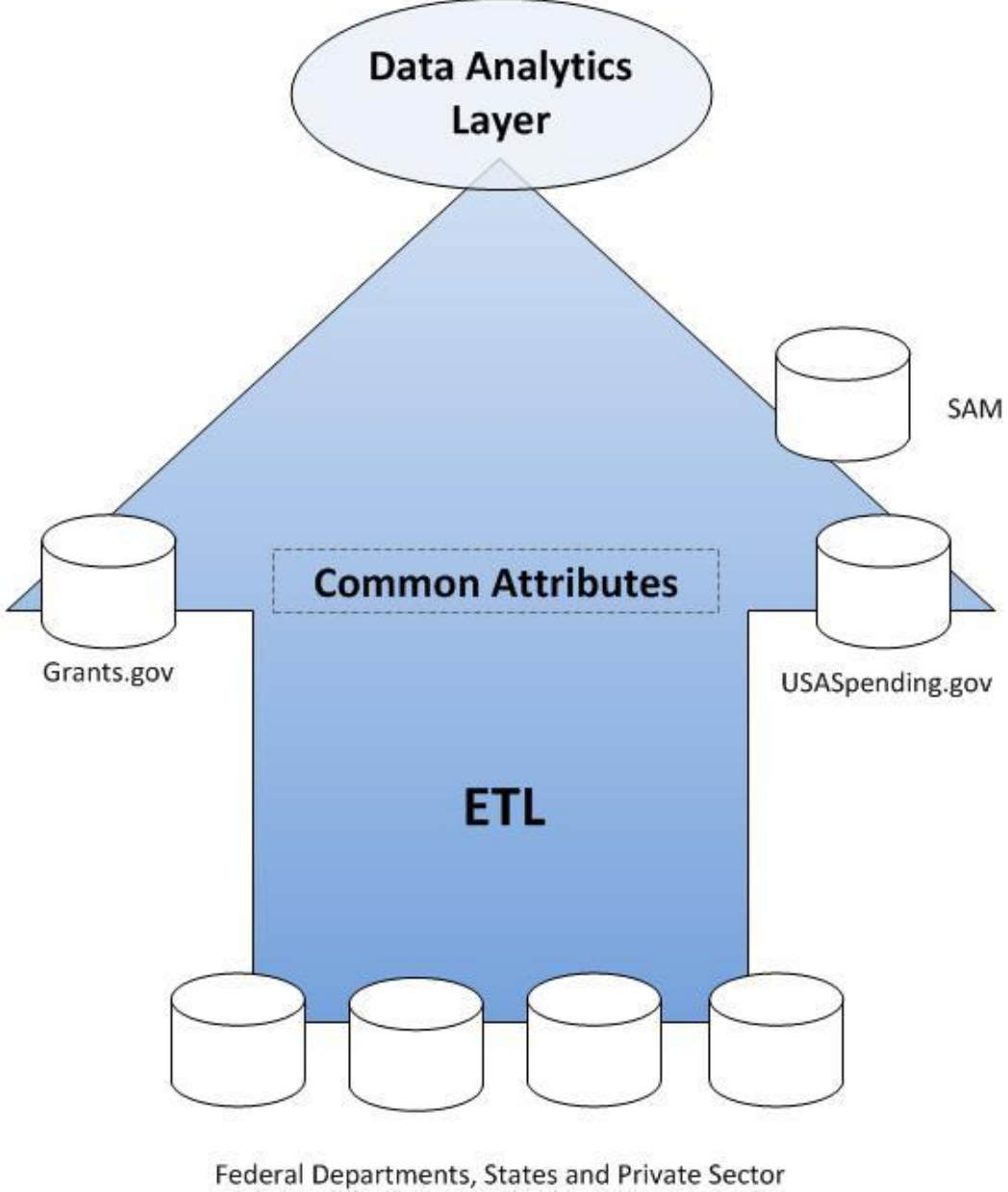
Business Problem

- Two issues
  - Transparency
  - Accountability
- Improved data collection, display, and analytics are needed
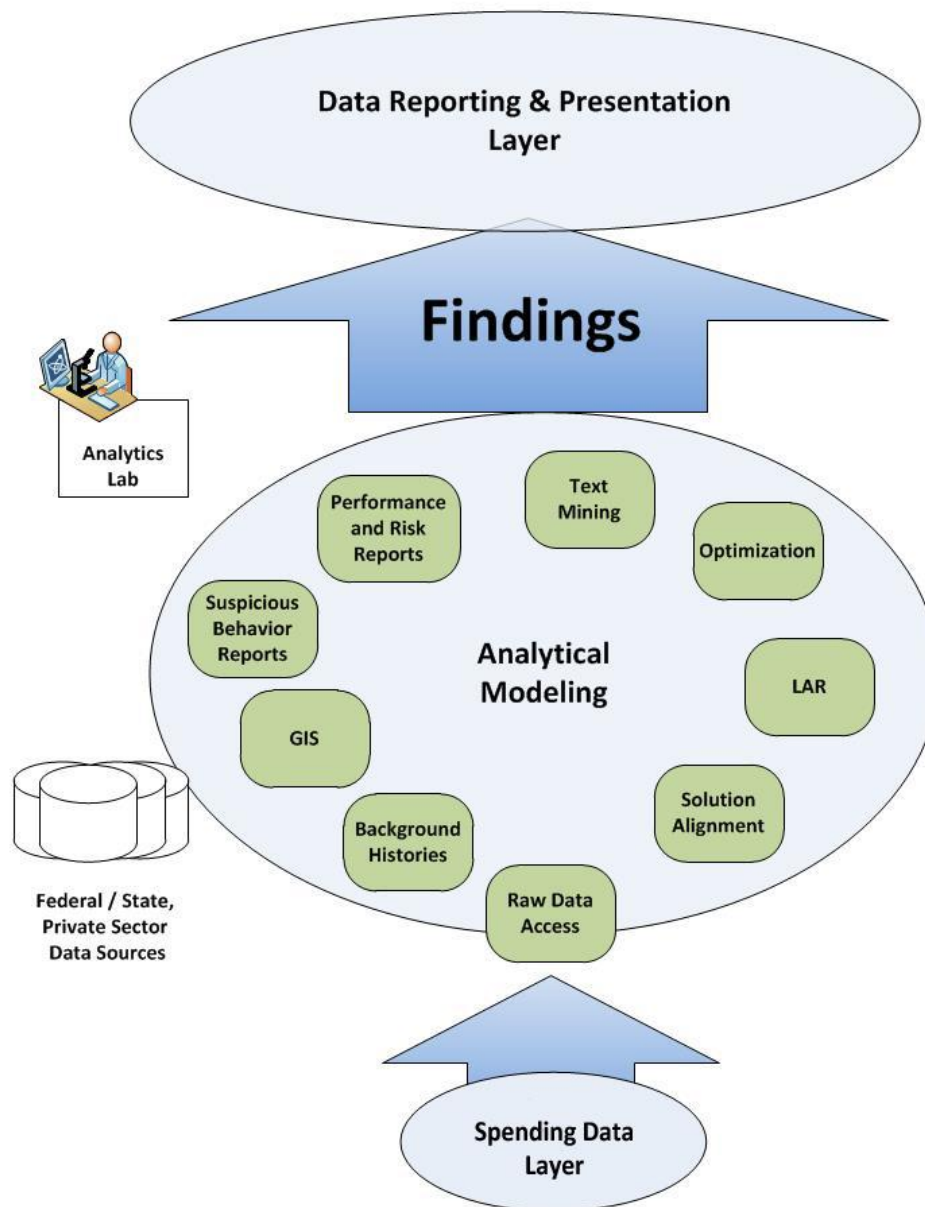- Fragmented silos, erroneous data, confined fraud detection
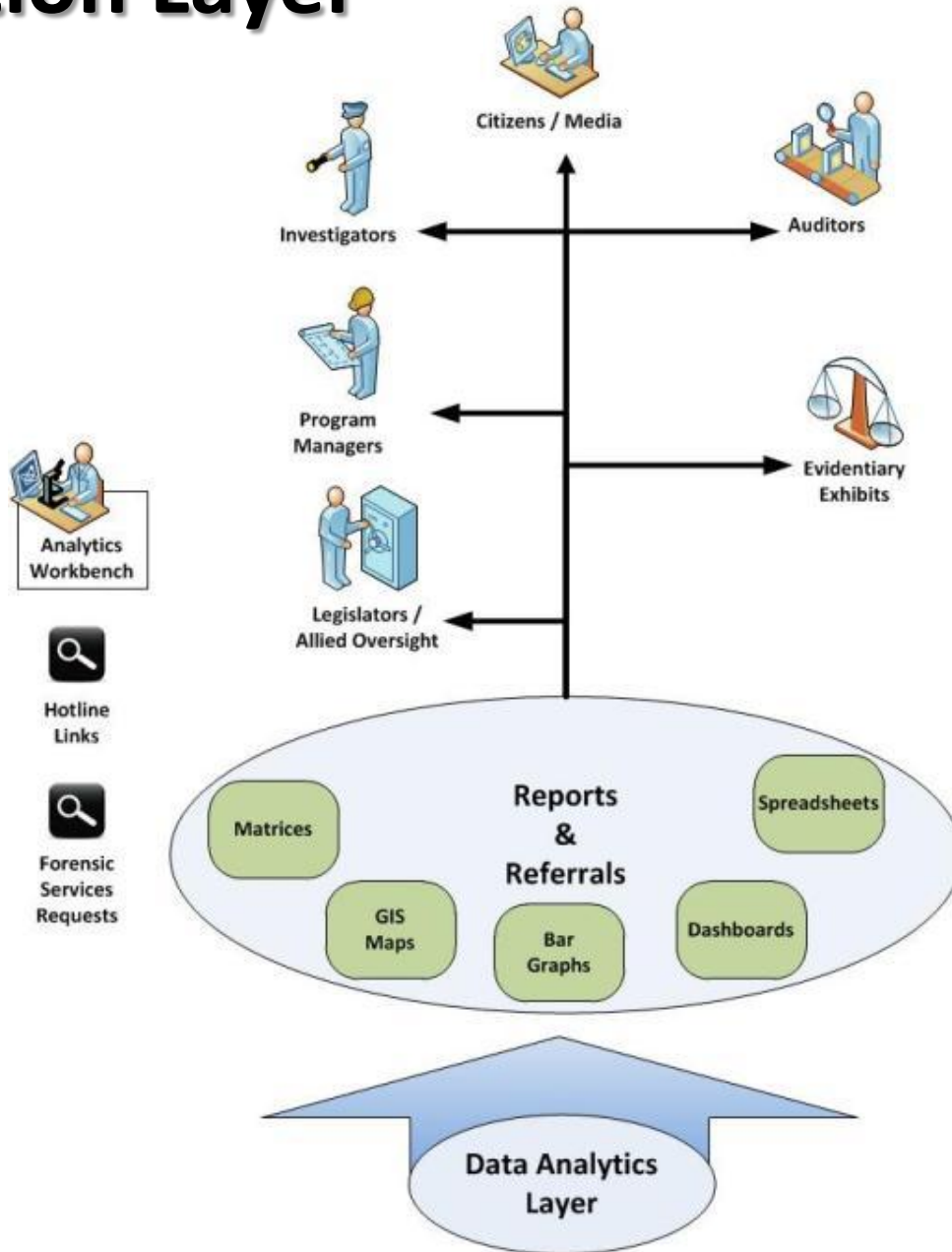
Shared Platform Layers
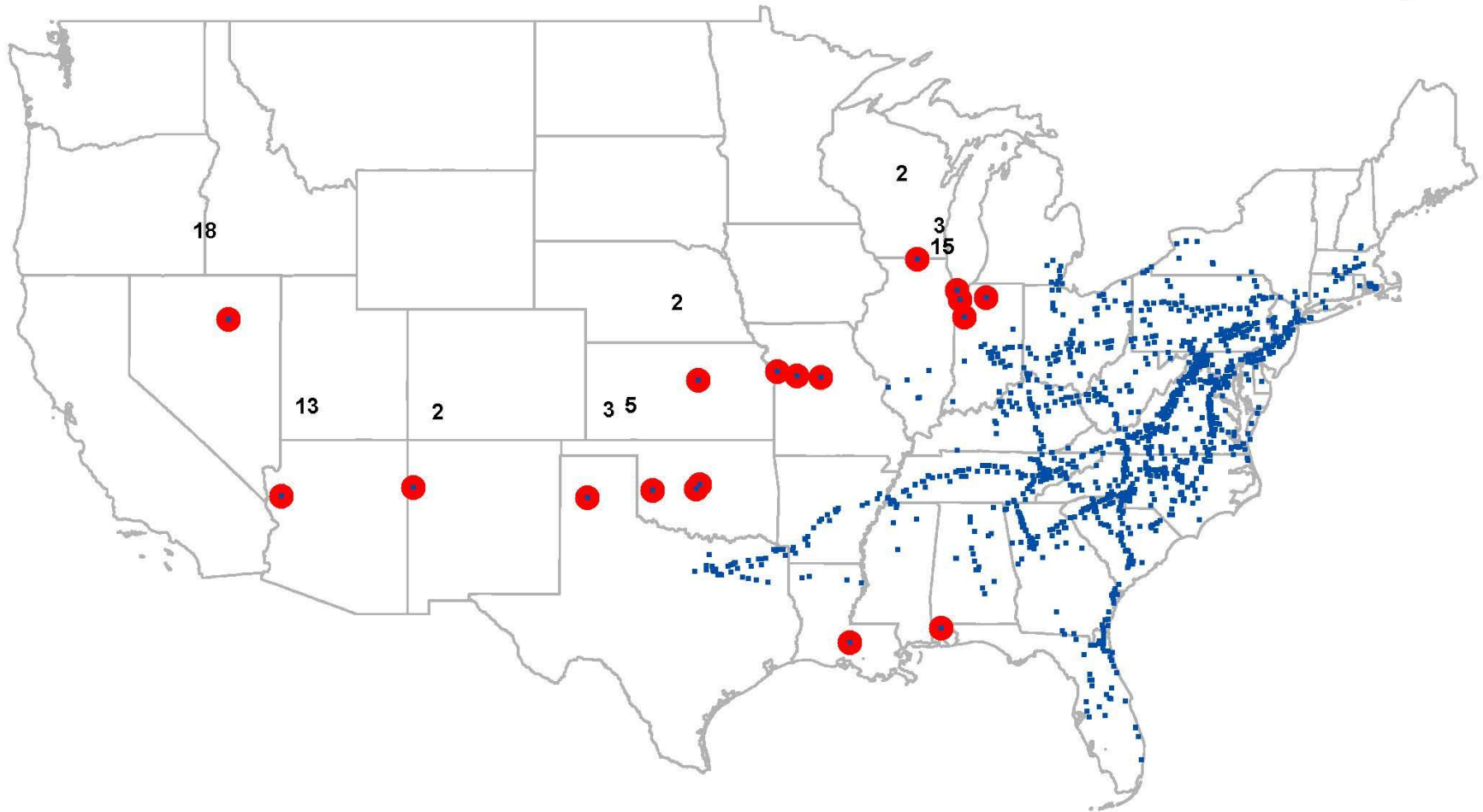
Presentation Layer

Data Analytics Layer

Spending Data Layer

Spending Data Layer

Data Analytics Layer

Presentation Layer

Voyager Card Transaction Locations
Data from May 2012

18

13   2

2

2

3   15

2

3   5

- All Voyager Card Locations
- Outliers of Voyager Card Locations

Implementation Challenges

- Reach consensus on common set of attributes, how data are used, and legal authority

- Review and amend outdated laws

- Consolidate data mapping, user training, and help desk support into a single system

Implementation

- Successor entity assures seamless transition
- Options for establishing proposed platform:
  - Distributed IT support responsibilities
  - Large users provide analysts to successor operational center
  - Users provide seized funds from recoveries for equipment, software purchases and licenses

Summary

- Single automated collection system that uses a defined set of data attributes on a shared platform
- Allows analytical models to be applied across government
- Reduce expenses incurred by redundant systems
- Increases fraud detection and recoveries
- Enhance common understanding between Federal Government and States