

OPEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES: REALIZING PRINCIPLES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

This paper reviews the current state of open government activities at the national level and offers possible approaches to better advance citizen understanding of issues and the consequences of this understanding for public discourse and participation. The paper suggests that if open government initiatives are to result in providing citizens with a deeper understanding of how the government works, and with information that will help them to become more knowledgeable about issues--thus able to engage with policymakers in a more substantive way, then public managers must advance open government efforts beyond those focused upon data and the information technologies used to manage and report that data.

The republican principle demands that the deliberate sense of the community should govern the conduct of those to whom they entrust the management of their affairs; but it does not require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to every transient impulse which the people may receive from the arts of men, who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests. . . . [W]hen occasions present themselves, in which the interests of the people are at variance with their inclinations, it is the duty of the persons whom they have appointed to be the guardians of those interests, to withstand the temporary delusion, in order to give them time and opportunity for more cool and sedate reflection. Instances might be cited in which a conduct of this kind has saved the people from very fatal consequences of their own mistakes, and has procured lasting monuments of their gratitude to the men who had courage and magnanimity enough to serve them at the peril of their displeasure.¹

Introduction

Thus far, much of the work in open government, both in its implementation and in the research undertaken to inform it, have focused on data and the information and communications technologies supporting their access, interoperability, and usability. This focus has not been proven to significantly increase citizen understanding of the complexities of issues and policies nor their participation in relevant policy deliberations. If the primary goal of open government is to achieve substantive engagement of citizens in the workings of their government, then current activities supporting open government initiatives must be re-evaluated and new approaches explored. The success of these new efforts rest primarily on their ability to provide citizens with the frameworks and contexts in which to assess relevant information, consider complexities, and struggle with tensions inherent in public policies and problems.

This paper will present an overview of the most recent activities undertaken at the national level to advance open government directives, principles, and plans. The paper also offers suggestions on how to achieve the primary goal of open government, which is to ensure

¹ Alexander Hamilton, “*The Duration in the Office of the Executive from the New York Packet*,” in *The Federalist Papers*, no. 71. March 18, 1788.

that the American public has access to objective, relevant, and reliable information that helps the public arrive at informed judgments about public problems and the government's role in tackling these problems.

Current State of Open Government Initiatives

Overview

Open government is widely understood as the leveraging of information technologies to generate participatory, collaborative dialogs between government and citizens. The most recent open government movement emerged from the adoption of e-government in the mid-1990s. The E-Government Act of 2002 pushed for the establishment of e-government initiatives, though policies such as the Freedom of Information Act of 1966 (FOIA) and the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 also were formative.² The application of e-government was focused on disseminating government information and delivering services through the web.³ Today, at all levels of government, public policy mandates the transparency of government information, and government transactions are largely available online.⁴

Overall, e-government generated a utilitarian approach towards technology, as exemplified by the widespread publication of “digitized” government data.⁵ Similarly, e-government research was directed at the use of information technology, including accessibility issues, with minimal attention placed on how citizen engagement and public policy could be

² Patrice McDermott, “Building open government,” *Government Information Quarterly* 27 (2010): 407-408; Jon Gant and Nicol Turner-Lee, *Government Transparency: Six Strategies for More Open and Participatory Government*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute and James L. Knight Foundation, 2011, 16.

³ Sharon S. Dawes, “Governance in the digital age: A research and action framework for an uncertain future,” *Government Information Quarterly* 26 (2009): 258.

⁴ Jon Gant and Nicol Turner-Lee, *Government Transparency: Six Strategies for More Open and Participatory Government*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute and James L. Knight Foundation, 2011, 13.

⁵ Chon, Soon Ae, Stuart Shulman, Rodrigo Sandoval, and Eduardo Hovy. “Government 2.0: Making connections between citizens, data and government.” *Information Polity* 15 (2010): 1.

harnessed to advance the goals of e-government.⁶ Technology dominated evolution of e-government, creating a data-driven unidirectional approach to citizen-government interactions.

As technology has become more advanced, the utilitarian and unidirectional model of e-government has become limited, giving rise to open government initiatives. These initiatives have focused on enhancing proactive citizen participation and collaboration, as well as openness and transparency.⁷ The application of technology in the more recent open government initiatives is directed towards two-way collaboration between government and citizens. The rise of Web 2.0 technologies and social media, which are web-based tools that facilitate social interaction, have accelerated the impetus for the government to fulfill open government goals.⁸

The Open Government Directive (issued by President Obama's administration in January 2009) and the Open Government Progress Report to the American People (issued by the Executive Office of the President in December 2009) have served as further catalysts for open government by attempting to better define the nature of open government and by establishing specific protocols for involving executive agencies. The Open Government Directive charged federal agencies to implement several steps to uphold the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration.⁹ The memorandum instructed agencies to "[p]ublish government information," "[i]mprove the quality of government information," "[c]reate and institutionalize a

⁶ Sharon S. Dawes, "Governance in the digital age: A research and action framework for an uncertain future," *Government Information Quarterly* 26 (2009): 258; Rose, Wade R. and Gerald G. Grant. "Critical issues pertaining to the planning and implementation of E-Government initiatives." *Government Information Quarterly* 27 (2010): 26-33.

⁷ Patrice McDermott, "Building open government," *Government Information Quarterly* 27 (2010): 410.

⁸ John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, Sean Munson, and Tom Glaisyer, "Engaging the Public in Open Government: Social Media Technology and Policy for Government Transparency," *Technology Mediated Social Participation*, 2010.

⁹ Peter R. Orszag, "Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies," (Washington, D.C.: Office of Management and Budget, December 8, 2009): 1.

culture of open government,” and “[c]reate an enabling policy framework for open government.”¹⁰

The timing of this Directive and the discretion afforded to executive agencies in complying with its provisions may have inadvertently limited the creation of new ways to make the government more transparent, collaborative, and participatory. The Directive was issued on the first day of President Obama’s Administration and agencies had less than 6 months to comply with its provisions. This left heads of agencies, some with little or no expertise in this area, relatively little time to consider how best to meet the Directive’s charges. Of the four charges noted in the Directive, two specifically focused upon the publication of data and information technology management. The other two charges instructed agencies to create new cultures and policy frameworks to support open government principles.¹¹ These charges are more broad and difficult to achieve, and were not accompanied by guidance on what those charges mean specifically and how best to achieve them. Perhaps that is why agencies looked to already existing data and information, which did not contain confidentiality or privacy risks, as the focus of their compliance efforts. This focus seemed to inhibit, perhaps unintentionally, consideration of the context in which the information produced by public agencies is generated, collected, and shared.

The progress report on the Directive, which was issued nine months after the Directive’s publication, adds additional nuances to the original charges of the Directive. It places the citizen as the focal point of the open government initiative: for transparency, “[g]overnment should provide citizens with information about what their government is doing so that government can be held accountable;” for participation, “[g]overnment should actively solicit expertise from

¹⁰ Orszag, “Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies.”

¹¹ Orszag, “Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies.”

outside Washington so that it makes policies with the benefit of the best information; and for collaboration, “[g]overnment officials should work together with one another and with citizens as part of doing their job of solving national problems.”¹² Again, there is virtually no guidance on how agencies could accomplish these directives. But by making the citizen central to the initiatives, the Obama Administration has linked openness and accountability to citizen empowerment.

Executive Agency Efforts

Executive agency efforts to implement the Directive generally have been oriented towards providing government data and accelerating freedom of information efforts, echoing the e-government movement. Government web sites fall into two main groupings: those that collect data from across the executive agencies and then offer that data in a central site and those that are developed and maintained within individual agencies.

Government-wide Websites

Government-wide websites have gathered a significant amount of data and information from executive agencies regarding government activities, such as grant spending and proposed rulemaking. However, the features of these sites, which are associated with citizen participation, seem oriented towards collecting feedback from the public, without providing a context within which the public could assess their conclusions, opinions, or positions before offering their official feedback. These web sites also use technical jargon assuming that the public understands government terminology, acronyms and legal citations.

The proliferation of government data that has been open to the public through executive agency sites also can be duplicative. For instance, Recovery.gov offers users information about

¹² Executive Office of the President, *Open Government Progress Report to the American People*, (Washington, D.C.: December 2009): 1.

how the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds are being applied. In addition to its extensive use of technical jargon and the lack of contextual information, some of the data do not match what is reported on individual agency sites. Inconsistencies of data exist in other web sites: for example, data about Freedom of Information Act requests provided by FOIA.gov can be found on individual agency websites; in contrast, USASpending.gov data does not seem duplicated on agency websites. Table 1 below compiles and describes the major government-wide websites that have been the focus of open government activities at the federal level.

Table 1: Brief Description of Government-wide Websites

Websites	Content	Lead Responsible Agency	Duplication (Data appears on individual agency websites)
Recovery.gov	Enables users to track use of Recovery Act funding by maps and data by agency, state/local/territory level, and type of funding (e.g. contract, grant, etc.).	Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board (established by Recovery Act; consists of 12 Inspectors General (IG). President Obama appointed 2 of these IGs and also named Chairman, Earl Devaney).	Agency websites have different information than Recovery.gov; alignment between data not clear; agency websites difficult to navigate.
Data.gov	Portal of government data sets. Data available in raw form, as applications, or geo-spatial data.	Office of Management and Budget/Executive Office of the President	Data often linked to agency websites, but difficult to find same data on agency websites.
USASpending.gov	Searchable database of federal award spending (e.g. contracts, direct payments, etc.).	Office of Management and Budget/Executive Office of the President	Difficult to find same spending data on agency websites.
USA.Gov	Portal to government websites by topic (e.g. jobs, health, travel) and agencies.	U.S. General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies	Information consists of links to agency websites.
ITDashboard.gov	Offers data regarding federal investments in information technology.	Office of Management and Budget/Executive Office of the President	Data difficult to find on agency websites.
Regulations.gov	Provides information about regulations, including proposed rules and notices issued by federal agencies, and allows for users to submit comments and read others' comments.	eRulemaking Program (established by E-Government Act of 2002) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Some information duplicated on agency websites.
FOIA.gov	Provides data and reports about FOIA requests, by federal agency level and fiscal year. Does not provide detail about types of requests or how quickly FOIA requests were processed.	U.S. Department of Justice	FOIA.gov data is duplicated on agency websites.

Source: Compiled by authors from government-wide and agency specific websites.

Individual Agency Websites

In addition to the government-wide websites, individual agencies have strived to meet the goals of the Open Government Directive by sponsoring more than 300 open government initiatives. Some agencies, such as NASA, have designed their open government initiatives to encourage the public to explore and collaborate on government projects.¹³ Other agencies also have employed social media platforms to engage the public. For instance, the Transportation Security Administration has developed mobile device applications, and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has developed a citizen-focused project, Peer to Patent, to seek public input on pending patents.¹⁴

A review of these individual sites reveals that agencies have attempted to honor the three principles set forth in President Obama's Directive: transparency, collaboration, and participation. A selection of websites is provided below as illustrative of these agency efforts.

Transparency:

- Department of Health and Human Services (HealthCare.gov): users can find information related to health insurance and health care, and can compare services
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA Track): users can obtain data on program performance of FDA offices and programs.
- Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President (RegInfo): users can obtain information about the regulatory plans at various stages in the rulemaking process.

Collaboration:

- National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA Citizen Scientist): users can collaborate on NASA data and projects.
- Veterans' Administration (VAi2): users can submit ideas to launch improvements in veteran health care services and employment services.
- U.S. Department of State (Global Pulse 2010): users participated in 3-day interactive online discussions regarding different topics, such as global health and sustainability.

¹³ Jon Gant and Nicol Turner-Lee, *Government Transparency: Six Strategies for More Open and Participatory Government*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute and James L. Knight Foundation, 2011, 19-20.

¹⁴ Bertot et al. 2010: 4.

Participation:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture (MyPyramid): users can find information on healthy eating and local health services.
- U.S. Department of Transportation (Regulation Room): provides the public with the opportunity to track proposed regulations, offer ideas to the agency, and interact with the agency in other ways.
- U.S. Department of Defense (Open Government Plan): users can submit feedback via live virtual roundtables and comment forms, as well as through an Ideascale¹⁵ tool.

An examination of these initiatives illustrates that while these exemplars may reflect principles of transparency, collaboration, and participation, the focus tends to be on providing information to, or collecting information from, citizens. Agency-provided information is primarily in the form of facts or statistics regarding programs or services, and citizen-provided information consists of feedback or comments on agency policies and programs. In addition, these initiatives seem focused on facilitating access, rather than engaging citizens to participate in the policymaking process and to understand policy issues and their implications.

Assessment of Open Government Efforts

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget created a formal evaluation system in which twenty-nine executive agencies rank themselves in terms of their success in meeting the open government directive.¹⁶ There are three levels in the ranking: “meets expectations,” “progress towards expectations,” and “fails to meet expectations.”¹⁷ Twenty-seven out of the twenty-nine agencies (the two remaining are: Office of Personnel Management and the Council on Environmental Quality) report that they have produced three-high level data sets and posted

¹⁵ Ideascale is a proprietary software application using “crowdsourcing” principles to determine consensus on ideas. It allows users to submit ideas to a site then vote on those and other submitted ideas. The most popular voted ideas rise to the top. Agencies using the software also can offer comments during the process.

¹⁶ These twenty-nine agencies include each of the 15 executive departments, various offices within the Executive Office of the President, Environmental Protection Agency, National Science Foundation, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Nuclear Regulatory Committee, Office of Regulatory Reform, Office of Personnel Management, General Services Administration, Agency for International Development, Small Business Administration and the Social Security Administration.

¹⁷ Executive Office of the President, the “The Open Government Initiative Scorecard.” Accessed May 22, 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/around>.

them to data.gov¹⁸. With respect to three open government directives--transparency, collaboration and participation—all but one (National Science Foundation)-- claim they are meeting expectations for citizen participation; twenty-two report that they are meeting expectations for collaboration; and only eighteen report that they are meeting expectations to achieve transparency. In addition, all agencies report that they have met expectations with regard to public consultation.

According to this self-evaluation, it appears that agencies seem to believe that they are relatively successful in meeting expectations regarding citizen participation and public consultation.

Researcher and scholars also have assessed the state of open government efforts. Several scholars have noted that the array of open government and transparency requirements and standards have hindered implementation.¹⁹ Napoli and Karaganis (2010), for example, found that open government transparency and access standards were not consistently applied within federal communications policymaking.²⁰

Some researchers have found that the processing and incorporation of citizen input through open government projects have presented challenges to agencies. Government-citizen interactions via social media lack established frameworks and policies to guide the application of social media technology in open government projects.²¹ Similarly, others suggest the need for feedback mechanisms between agencies and users to enhance data tools²².

¹⁸ Transparency is defined in the open government scorecard as whether the open government plan fulfills the requirements for opening the doors and data of the agency.

¹⁹ Ginsberg, 2011; Chang and Kannan (2008); Bertot et al. (2010)

²⁰ Napoli, Philip M. and Joe Karaganis. "On making public policy with publicly available data: The case of U.S. communications policymaking." *Government Information Quarterly* 27 (2010): 384-391.

²¹ Bertot et al. (2010)

²² Dawes and Helbig (2010)

Some researchers point out that public managers also have faced the ongoing challenge of providing information to stakeholders while managing internal objectives and structures. Meeting demand for open government can be difficult to accomplish within the environment in which public agencies operate; internal capacity, for instance, may limit agencies' ability to provide accurate, timely information while engaging with citizens.²³ Another key issue has been concern over the misinterpretation and abuse of open government data and initiatives.²⁴ These issues suggest that the initiatives undertaken thus far have not addressed the importance of providing citizens with a context.²⁵

Scholars also have noted that while the government utilizes technology tools, it has not been able to harness these tools to manage and engage citizen participation and collaboration.²⁶ As the Knight Commission notes, information alone does not guarantee positive outcomes and government information lacks context, hindering citizen engagement.²⁷ Lappe and DuBois point out that public judgment emerges only in hearing other points of view, thinking through clashes of values. They distinguish public judgment, which results from engaging respectfully and creatively recognizing our differences, from public opinion, which often present a knee-jerk reaction to, an unchallenged perception of, or non fact-based advocacy for policy alternatives.²⁸

While, there has been a significant amount of activity, and investment of resources, dedicated to the open government movement, it remains unclear how these activities have improved citizen participation in government. If the ultimate goal of open government activities is to assist the public in its understanding of the nature and complexity of policies and, with that understanding,

²³ Dawes (2010)

²⁴ Ginsberg (2010), Bertot et al. (2010), Dawes, Pardo and Cresswell (2004).

²⁵ Ginsberg (2010), Dawes (2010), Meijer (2009).

²⁶ Dawes (2009); Dawes and Helbig (2010); Bertot et al. (2010); Tapscott, Williams, and Herman (2008)

²⁷ Meijer and Thomas (2010); Pew Internet and Knight Commission 2011

²⁸ Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin DuBois, *The Quickening of America: Rebuilding Our Nation, Remaking Our Lives*. (San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1994), 275.

to inform policy decisions, then the efforts of open government activities have fallen short. These activities also may have diverted scarce resources away from those more directly linked to the preparation of citizens for their participation in government.

Federal agencies have struggled to fulfill the principles proposed by the Directive.²⁹ Agencies have been expected to adapt open government principles in meaningful and long-lasting ways—integrating them into agency operations, procedures, and governance structures. In undertaking the responsibilities attendant to the open government directive agencies have been confronted by challenges in formulating effective open government strategies—with no clear direction from the Executive Office of the President.³⁰ The Directive, and subsequent pronouncements about its implementation, did not provide clear guidance on the implementation of open government plans, producing disparate approaches across agencies and raising questions about the extent of government transparency.³¹ The Directive generated a data-driven *process* of open government without considering the *purpose* for open government. As government agencies posted data on the Web, there seemed to be little thought given to questions such as: why did agencies collect this data, how is the data used within the agency, of what relevance is this data to policy deliberations, of what relevance is the data to informing citizens about public policies, how are policymakers going to apply this information, and are the limitations of this data easily understood?

Therefore, there remains a need to rethink current open government activities: public managers must consider ways to transform the breadth of information available in open

²⁹ Wendy R. Ginsberg, “The Obama Administration’s Open Government Initiative: Issues for Congress,” (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2011):

³⁰ Jon Gant and Nicol Turner-Lee, *Government Transparency: Six Strategies for More Open and Participatory Government*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute and James L. Knight Foundation, 2011, 19-20.

³¹ Ginsberg, “The Obama Administration’s Open Government Initiative,” 28-29.

government activities to contexts in which citizens can learn about public policy problems. This is a daunting task.

The following sections offer suggestions for how public managers might consider tackling these questions. The first section will discuss the feasibility of adapting an analytic framework for creating contexts in which information about public policy problems can be offered to the public. The second section will outline a research agenda aimed at understanding the nature and context of information that would best assist citizens to engage with their government in an informed way.

Adapting an Analytic Framework to Inform Citizens

Currently public policymaking is informed by many sources through a wide array of formats. These sources have access, either directly or through dissemination of their work, to policy makers in executive and legislative governing bodies across the nation. They represent a wide variety of disciplines and practices, including scholars who are anchored in academic fields, those who work in and for the benefit of the operation of government, members of the media, members of special interest groups, and a wide variety of political constituencies, the courts, and policymakers themselves. In this vast mix of sources that inform and influence public policy making are scholars and practitioners from a field of intellectual inquiry called “policy analysis”.³² Through the years of its development, this field has focused upon developing analysts who could identify policy problems, validate them through the identification of relevant data, information and authoritative research, offer ways these problems can be addressed and analyze the potential advantages and disadvantages of these various options.

³² Policy analysis evolved after World War II as an interdisciplinary field of practice and has been formally recognized through degree granting programs in a number of universities, with an early concentration of programs established in the 1970’s. The Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) was founded in 1979.

Tapping into this expertise, and applying the skill sets of those who possess it, could provide public managers with a ready resource for developing contexts that could be used to help the public think about problems, their consequences, and determining what might be reasonable approaches to solving them.

Policy analysts currently populate executive and legislative agencies. In the executive agencies they can be found in policy, planning, and evaluation offices; in the legislative branch policy analysts work in the Government Accountability Office, the Congressional Research Services and the Congressional Budget Office, and in congressional committees. Their role in the development, deliberation and formulation of policies is defined by their abilities to understand complex policy problems; assess data, research and information used to substantiate the problem; synthesize research to develop possible options for addressing the problems; and weighing the advantages and disadvantages of these options according to numerous measures of feasibility.

If policy analysts were given the task to analyze public policy issues for general public use, they could provide the context in which data and other relevant information is offered to the public. This type of activity may not be reasonable or feasible to undertake for every public policy or issue, but it might be worthwhile for those issues that are complex, have broad constituency bases, and where there is no agreement on how to address them. Agencies would be offering the general public an opportunity to learn about complex problems and the public could be exposed to information that would better prepare them to formulate positions on issues and to participate in government deliberations.

To illustrate how this approach might be implemented, executive agencies could use the elements of basic policy analysis to create the context for data and information. Each of these

elements, if presented to the public, has the potential of better informing citizens about the nature and scope of public policy problems. A brief description of these elements and what they can offer follows.

Defining public policy problems

Policy analysts have the ability to identify and communicate the root of policy problems. This is the most difficult of the steps since it provides the basis upon which the feasibility of options is judged. If not done correctly then problems are unclear and a risk of developing inappropriate solutions to the policy problem emerges.

Analysts can help determine answers to critical questions, including the following: What is the problem of concern to the public? Is it a policy problem—a problem that has no immediate solutions? Why has it come to the level of the federal government? Why have other levels of government not been able to solve them?

Substantiating the problems

Analysts know how to determine the reliability, relevance, and authoritativeness of available data sources. They can describe how data, research, and information is used and can identify gaps in these sources such as faulty collection techniques; methodological limitations and assumptions; and selective reporting protocols.

Analysts can apply these critical assessment skills to evaluate data and information sources in ways that allows the user of this information to better assess the validity of the sources.

Developing options to address the problems

This element of the analytic framework is the most work-intensive. Due to the complexity of issues most important to the public, there exist numerous competing approaches

on how these issues might be addressed. Analysts can formulate options that are balanced and that are representative of the array of options that have been offered by others. Options could be sorted into broad categories depicting the origin, approach, and criteria used to develop and analyze these options. For example categories could include:

Origin:

- Status quo/current—what exists now and what we know about how it works.
- Research—what options are or have been evaluated by the research community.
- Benchmarks—if appropriate what state and localities have adopted to address the problem at their level; also, if appropriate what other countries have implemented to address similar problems.
- Past efforts—what options have been offered in the past and what were the reasons why they were not adopted. What, if anything has changed since these options were first put forth.

Approach:

- Do the options increase, decrease, minimize, substitute, combine, re-arrange, centralize/decentralize, shorten, or lengthen various possible options.

Criteria:

- Economic efficiency: what are the costs/benefits of the options.
- Financial feasibility: how will the options affect revenues/outlays.
- Distributional adjustments: will the option have a disparate effect on those with varying income levels, certain demographic characteristics (married, single, with/without savings); will the option have disparate effects caused by where they live (location) what they do for a living (occupation).
- Operational capacity: does the federal agency (ies) have the authority and resources to implement the option, and if so, what might be the impact on that agency.
- Legal grounding: would the options offered require a change in existing law and/or regulations.
- Reliability: have options like this had proven success.
- Stability: would these options prevail if socio-economic, political, etc., conditions change.
- Reversibility: what would a return to the prior state entail?
- Adaptability: will the option stand the test of time or will it need to be adjusted in future state?
- Applicability: would the option result in multiple accomplishments?

Preparing Nonpartisan Analysis

The public expects to receive information from the government that is free of political bias. Producing analysis that is non partisan and objective depends on the presence of three important conditions: the analysis must be based upon facts and sound research; the work environment must stress the educative rather than advocative role of the analyst; and analyst must have access to a broad range of resources—experts and data.

A benefit of using an analytic framework is to assist citizens in understanding that nearly every solution, option, or choice, has shortcomings as well as strengths. This type of analysis allows for a shared exploration of how best to address policy problems. Decisions resulting from a clear understanding and broad vetting of the advantages and disadvantages of options are informed decisions.

Research

As government continues to struggle to improve citizen access to and participation in government deliberations, the conduct of specific research aimed at these outcomes could help public managers decide on how best to design and evaluate relevant efforts.

This section of the paper presents a possible research agenda for public managers and policy analysts and builds upon existing research. Each subsection provides the purpose of the research, a selection of research already published, and suggestions for what might be needed.

I. Purpose: To enhance or develop open government policies *across* government (between and among agencies, organizations, and levels of government).

Current Research: Reflects disagreement about whether government should centralize or decentralize open government policies.

- Dawes (2010) views current set of compliance policies as obstacle for open government. How can government meet requirements and use technology? What are the implications of sharing data across agencies/levels of government?
- Similarly, Robinson et al. (2009) posit that online government data is hindered by diverse policy requirements and establishing uniformity also presents challenges to meeting agency-specific needs.

- Tapscott Williams, and Herman (2008) argue that government’s approach to technology must be integrated and fluid.
- Ginsberg (2011) suggests the need for establishing uniform criteria for agencies to fulfill to meet Open Government Directive.
- Bertot et al. (2010) advise on the need for establishing comprehensive policies for government use of social media and other technologies.
- Chang and Kannan (2008) recommend developing inventory of common Web 2.0/open government policy issues that are confronting agencies in order to pool resources and solutions.
- Dawes, Pardo, and Cresswell (2004) indicate that release of sensitive data requires policies, evaluation, and human resources.
- Napoli and Karaganis (2010) find that transparency and access standards are not being applied consistently, primarily because of “an incomplete set of legal and regulatory safeguards.”
- Robinson et al. (2009) and Tapscott, Williams, and Herman (2008) suggest that government should collaborate with or allow third-party intermediaries to play larger roles in the provision of data and information

New Research:

- Determine the advantages and disadvantages of collecting large data sets into centralized sites.
- Identify and analyze barriers, benefits and costs of the current approaches used to collect data.
- Examine evaluation techniques that would determine the appropriate balance between centralized and decentralized efforts.
- Research citizen search strategies and how best to accommodate these when offering policy issues in contexts.
- Identify the selection criteria used by public managers when selecting data and information for public use.
- Identify where within government agencies the responsibility for open government initiatives is assigned. Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of this placement given the knowledge, skills, and abilities to analyze public policies for consumers outside the agency.

II. Purpose: To study the purpose for soliciting input from citizens and to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods in collecting and incorporating this input into policy deliberations.

Current Research: Government seems to have limited capacity or understanding of this arena.

- Bertot et al. (2010) note lack of tools and frameworks to manage social media interaction with stakeholders and constituents.
- Chang and Kannan (2008) indicate that agencies should evaluate levels of citizen engagement and feedback to fine-tune their technology use.
- Tapscott, Williams, and Herman (2008) observe that governments are not equipped to manage mass participation and collaboration.

- Dawes and Helbig (2009) suggest the need for feedback mechanisms between users and agencies to enhance data tools, as well as a greater understanding of users' needs.

New Research:

- Identify best practices to address citizen engagement in open government.
- Conduct pilot studies to determine the success of different formats in achieving citizen understanding of policy problems.
- Study the feasibility of using an analytic framework for conveying information to the public for purposes of educating them about public policy problems.

III. Purpose: To better describe the nature and scope of public demand for information and the public's expectations for transparency.

Current Research: Government faces ongoing challenge of providing information to stakeholders and managing internal objectives and structures.

- Ginsberg (2010) indicates that while agencies are releasing data to meet open government standards, it is not clear that this movement is increasing *government* transparency.
- Meijer (2009) notes that availability of information in short time frames enables immediate access by public, which in turn demands more information to fill in gaps, thus creating a cycle.
- Dawes (2010) comments on tension between public demand for large data sets on the one hand, and limitations of government structure and capacity to meet this demand on the other hand; another tension Dawes identifies is providing useful information and protecting confidential data.
- In case studies conducted by Dawes and Helbig (2009), stakeholders had diverse uses of government data, but accuracy, timeliness, and consistency were common interests.

New Research:

- Identify needs of users—how do citizens currently assess the quality of the information provided to them, how do citizens use this information, what information is most accessed by the public.
- Evaluate the consequences on the public's perceptions of government operations and policies of focusing open government initiatives on data.
- Identify the nature of data and information collected by executive agencies and determine which data is the gap between the supply of information and demand.

IV. Purpose: To identify and evaluate formats and venues most appropriate for providing information that can be widely available and easy to obtain.

Current Research: Executive agencies have developed a limited understanding of user needs, thus accessibility to their information by citizens at large remains a challenge.

- Ginsberg (2010) highlights issue of releasing government data based on assumption that users will have “knowledge, capacity, and resources to evaluate data, offer valid insights, and reach replicable results and verifiable conclusions.”

- Dawes (2010) points out inherent tension between providing comprehensive data and accessibility by citizens without technological knowledge; likewise, Dawes, Pardo, and Cresswell (2004) observe that public managers must consider knowledge/capacity of users and provide data accordingly.
- Dawes and Helbig (2009) recommend that evaluation research could improve government capacity to identify and generate data that can meet diverse stakeholder or community interests and strengthen democracy.
- Bertot et al. (2010) suggest need for research to determine what kind of information users want and in what formats (particularly in social media context).
- Chan and Kannan (2008) identify the need for addressing accessibility by all citizens, in addition to the need for providing data in formats conducive to third-party interpretation and manipulation (data mash-ups).
- Tapscott, Williams, and Herman (2008) urge policymakers to ensure that citizen engagement, via open government, does not become dominated by organized interest groups.

New Research:

- Determine what kind of information should be published and what formats are most appropriate for conveying this information.
- Analyze the role of non-governmental entities in educating citizens about public policy problems.
- Determine the inherent government responsibilities for educating citizens about public policies and the consequences of sharing these responsibilities outside government.

V. Purpose: To examine techniques to help managers ensure that information provided to the public is free of political bias.

Current Research: Researchers have not explicitly discussed the role of politics, but suggest there is need for policies to address issue of decontextualized data.

- Concern over the possibility that government data is being misconstrued or misinterpreted was expressed by Dawes, Pardo, and Cresswell (2004), Ginsberg (2010), Bertot et al. (2010) and Meijer (2009). This concern suggests the significance of providing (objective) context for data/information.

New Research:

- Identify mechanisms/protocols to limit misinterpretation of data.
- Study how current government operations affect objectivity in work processes and services; for example, what review processes are in place, what written guidelines and standards govern objectivity, how are managers held accountable for producing objective information and analysis.

VI. Purpose: Are there methods to assist managers to ensure that information is authoritative and how can limitations be conveyed to the public.

Current Research: Researchers seems hesitant of the authority and capacity of government to ensure authoritativeness and authenticity over data.

- Chan and Kannan (2008) speculate that as intermediaries appropriate government data and create new applications, government will have to relinquish some authority over content and service; they also assert that government should communicate the authority and authenticity of content to users.
- Dawes (2010) observes that some government information may not be valid or accurate (cites examples of performance reports).
- Dawes and Helbig (2009) identified that users of government data demanded easy access to authoritative data sources.

New Research:

- Examine how agencies ensure the validity of their data and information.
- Examine how executive agencies determine what data to procure and what research and information sources are available to managers and analysts.
- Identify systems /methodologies used by executive agencies to elicit feedback from data users who have identified problems in the data or information provided by the agencies.

These research suggestions are meant to be illustrative. Given the diversity of open government initiatives, the amount of resources--both financial and human--that have been allocated to them, and the work that remains to achieve citizen participation, it seems that a more thoughtful, organized approach to research on open government is needed. To help formulate this research two possible approaches are offered. First, the President could establish a bi-partisan commission or task force empowered to review the progress of open government initiatives and to offer suggestions on how best to continue to advance its principles. The commission could provide a government-wide perspective on what we know, what we do not know, and how best we might fill this knowledge gap. The second approach would be to solicit the assistance of the National Academy of Public Administration to construct a possible research agenda. The Academy could focus on similar objectives as those suggested for a presidential commission, but also could examine how to provide context to citizens as they learn about public policy and how to be best informed about those policies.

Concluding Remarks

The realization of enhancing citizen participation in government through open government initiatives is an evolving quest. As executive agencies continue to comply with the spirit of the open government principles, they should consider ways to build upon those efforts by improving the relevance and accessibility of information that they offer citizens, by creating contexts in which they offer that information, and by developing methods for assessing the success of these new approaches.