



Your top six action items

Six things you can do now to prepare for the DATA Act

Agencies are already preparing themselves to meet the requirements of the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act). With the adoption of data standards and the May 9, 2017 deadline approaching, now is the time to prepare for the DATA Act and future reporting requirements. If approached with the proper objectives—better accountability, automated compliance with laws, and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of programs—agencies will do more than simply comply with the DATA Act. Agency leaders have the opportunity to provide their agencies with value that will extend beyond the DATA Act. By completing these six activities, agencies will make marked progress toward being a high-performing organization.

There are several critical activities you can initiate today:

- 1. Get the right people in the room.** It is critical to engage key stakeholders as early as possible. This not only includes those at the executive level but also includes technical/systems experts, policy experts, and business process/operations experts. This will allow for key parties to discuss roles and responsibilities for DATA Act implementation. For example, is there a DATA Act project management office? What questions are stakeholders needing answers for and what are leading practice analytics? Who will be responsible for the implementation and will there be designated functional area leads?
- 2. Get ready to govern in a new way.** Establish data management, data collection, and data analytics policies and standard operating procedures (SOP) that will facilitate consistency and support the agency in its efforts to improve the quality of financial and grants reporting. Policies and SOPs, particularly in the development of a project team and reporting to support analytics, are essential to developing reliable operational metrics and identifying and resolving implementation issues successfully.
- 3. Know the data.** In order to get to a future state, there must be a comprehensive understanding of the current “as is” state of the agency’s systems, business processes, operations, and data. This includes a detailed landscape of the data flows and data validation processes across all functional lines of business (finance, budget, acquisitions, and financial assistance).
 - a. **Speak the same language.** Across the functional lines of business and with stakeholders, a standardized nomenclature can be adopted to understand how each defines or uses common terms. This will lead to less confusion and a common platform to discuss cross-functional agency data and business processes.
 - b. **Inventory data.** Perform a comprehensive inventory of agency data and associated business processes and systems. Effective efforts should result in recommendations to address gaps and inconsistencies in the data, business processes, and technology across the agency’s lines of business and existing silos in order to increase productivity, reduce costs, and provide more meaningful reporting. Agencies should assess and analyze their current data landscape and answer the following basic questions about how it currently reports data:
 - i. *What data do we have? What are the gaps? What reconciliations are performed?*
 - ii. *How do we currently report data in other submissions? What are the error rates?*
 - iii. *What systems, databases, etc. are used to send and store data?*

c. **Leverage integrated service offerings.**

Although requirements may not be finalized, agencies should be prepared to be flexible and adapt to evolving requirements. This may entail using “big data” technologies and tools, such as data discovery and data lineage, that will accelerate analysis and assessment of the agency’s data.

4. Prove reliance and increase use. Agency data quality will be significantly improved if cross-community data controls are reconciled. So, leverage the CFO Act and other existing data “crossovers” to broaden the spectrum of agency and DATA Act reporting. This gets to the agency’s process-level controls and the general information technology (IT) control environment. Data quality and compliance assessments using the agency’s data can help establish thresholds for completeness, timeliness, and accuracy of data reporting. There are a number of activities agencies should be doing, some of which include:

- Obtaining data populations from the full federal spending life cycle (appropriations, obligations, outlays) from target systems
- Assessing existing linkages in the financial system and award management systems
- Profiling master data recipients (suppliers/vendors)
- Assessing the effectiveness of key IT controls (application change management controls, access to application and data controls, interface controls).

5. Implement IT tools. With the anticipated level of effort from agencies for the DATA Act, the implementation of IT tools is integral to the success of DATA Act compliance. Agencies should expect that it will take some time to align their data with the finalized DATA Act taxonomy. Although there is contingency upon finalized requirements, there

are technology tools available to help agencies accelerate their options to implement a solution. Some of the tools that can be implemented to assist in the process are:

- a. **Collaboration tools.** These tools enable rapid decision-making across all levels of the organization and help accelerate the validation process by collecting a broad range of data in a real-time setting.
- b. **Process and value assessment tools.** Process assessment tools allow for identification of impactful changes to unlock unrealized business value within the data and design more mature processes.
- c. **Road map assessment tools.** These tools help facilitate a holistic assessment of the agency by considering all the data layers of the agency to set out a course of action to implement the desired future state.

6. Achieve “true” value from your investment.

Finally, the DATA Act is intended to support better accountability and transparency in government and the improvement in efficiency and effectiveness of government programs. The DATA Act could significantly improve the capabilities of federal managers and establish their agencies as high-performing organizations. Agencies who view preparing for the Act’s implementation as a simple “check-the-box” exercise may miss the chance to fully recognize the promise of the DATA Act.

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