



Enhancing the Utility of Transparency Data

The Obama Administration's Open Government Initiative has improved and fortified democracy by revealing government data and enabling the public to hold the government accountable for its actions.

In response to the First Open Government National Action Plan (2011), award-winning websites like Data.gov, USASpending.gov, Performance.gov, and ITDashboard made more and better data available for public consumption. These websites made significant headway toward the creation of a more transparent, participatory, and collaborative government by enabling access to datasets across agencies and providing spending, performance, and investment health data.

In December 2013, the government released the Second Open Government National Action Plan, reaffirming that the Open Government initiative remains a top priority. To effectively execute against the Second Open Government National Action Plan, we must move beyond the data collection and exposure efforts that initially dominated the transparency space, and create innovative ways to make this data more useful to constituents.

Open Data Helps Create Innovative Solutions

Combats Fraud



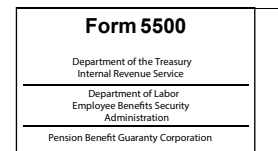
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Complaint Database, refreshed daily, contains 100,000+ anonymized complaints with provider name, complaint type, date, and zip code.

Enhances Education



Open Badges allows organizations to award micro-credentials (badges) to students, who can then showcase badges from different organizations in one place.

Secures Retirement



Form 5500 Annual Reports provides operations, funding, and investment information for ~800,000 401(k) plans, employer-sponsored retirement, and welfare benefit plans.

The innovations that will take government transparency to a new level of real-world utility will:



Focus on customer interests. Hundreds of thousands of datasets are exposed; focus should shift to determining which types of data people are most interested in viewing and analyzing.



Facilitate independent research and analysis. Selecting the right tools will enrich the utility of existing transparency websites and turn them into collaborative analysis engines.



Create opportunities for new insights by combining data in different ways. To provide new value to the government, make the combination of existing open source data streams and data manipulation easier and more intuitive.



Transparency data is only useful if people want to use it.

The salient challenge of forward-looking transparency initiatives will depend on the ability to determine which datasets customers are most interested in using, and then applying those determinations to enhance the quality, availability, and functionality of the datasets. Decision-makers can use tools like website traffic analysis on government transparency sites to determine whether the site is efficiently putting data and analysis tools in the hands of citizens. Objective assessments of customer interest can also increase public participation in government. For example, REI's website traffic analysis on BusinessUSA.gov provided information on the number of returning and unique visitors, the ability for keywords to drive traffic to the site, recurring and new topics searched for, geographical locations of visitors, and the devices used to access the site.

This information has helped decision-makers provide new and higher quality data within the most popular domains in the ways that customers want to see it. A focus on customer interests will increase the real-world value of transparency initiatives and improve government effectiveness, while strengthening public trust.



Transparency's future is informed by trends in technology.

The future of government transparency will depend on the ability for vendors to leverage innovative trends in technology. The Comprehensive Knowledge Archive Network (CKAN), a web-based open source data management system, represents the future of transparency websites because it does not rely on manual processes to pull data from sources, provides geo-spatial capabilities out of the box, and has a high adoption rate—over 70 local, national, and international governments. Developers must equip websites with data management systems that make data easily accessible and provide tools to streamline publishing, sharing, finding, and using data. CKAN's features help constituents access a greater variety of data at the click of a button, with greater opportunities for collaboration across the transparency space.



Real transparency enables critical thinking and creativity.

While making data available to the public is a critical step toward a transparent government, the ability to use this data to create new mashups, visualizations, and predictive analytics is the crux of real transparency. Audiences hoping to leverage transparency will be asking: "What have we never thought of?" The next wave of successful transparency initiatives will enable these answers through innovative, intuitive ways to conjure and critically evaluate potential relationships between data and will reveal new insights that have lasting impacts on government operations, performance, and spending.

About REI Systems

REI Systems delivers reliable, effective, and innovative solutions by partnering with our customers to address complex business challenges. We use web-based technologies to create open source, data analytics and presentation, and full life-cycle case management solutions in the areas of open government, decision and data analytics, grants management, performance management, and cloud implementation. REI has developed over 20 open government sites including Checkbook NYC, Data.gov, USASpending.gov, Performance.gov, IT Dashboard, and BusinessUSA.gov.