U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Press Center

Testimony of Fiscal Assistant Secretary David A. Lebryk Before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

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As Prepared for Delivery

WASHINGTON - Chairman Hurd and Ranking Member Kelly of the Subcommittee on Information Technology, and Chairman Meadows and Ranking Member Connolly of the Subcommittee on Government Operations, thank you for inviting me to discuss the Department of the Treasury's (Treasury) efforts to increase transparency and accountability in Federal financial management and implement the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act).

More than 225 years ago, the Department of the Treasury was established to collect, safeguard and disburse public money and account for its collections and payments. We published the first Monthly Treasury Statement in 1789 and over time we have expanded our work to include the Daily Treasury Statement and the Financial Report of the U.S. Government. And now, Treasury is working to improve transparency for all federal spending through the implementation of the DATA Act.

Treasury and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) are leading the implementation of the DATA Act to provide more accessible, searchable, and reliable spending data for the purposes of promoting transparency, facilitating better decision-making, and improving operational efficiency. Once implemented, the DATA Act will not only make it easier to understand how the Federal government spends taxpayer dollars, but also serve as a tool for better oversight, data-driven decision-making, and innovation both inside and outside of government. We believe that better data leads to better decisions and ultimately a better government.

By May 9, 2017, Treasury, in consultation with OMB, is required to expand the award-specific information currently posted on USASpending.gov to also include summary-level agency spending data. To accomplish this, agencies will be required to link their agency-level spending data with their contract, grant, loan, and other award data. Treasury will be required to provide the public with a comprehensive view of federal spending by collecting these data from agencies and displaying the information online. Today, I will give you an update on our efforts to meet these requirements.

Implementation Approach

I have been in the federal government for more than 25 years – and generally, when we approach an information technology project implementation we begin with a few traditional steps. First, requirements are issued, then a multi-year process would begin to work on the new system or website that needs to be developed – and you then define the entire scope of the project in the beginning and execute to the deadline. Our approach for implementing the DATA Act has taken a different path. We established a transparent and interactive process to ensure that Federal agencies and external stakeholders can participate in the implementation. Two key principles that we've embraced in the DATA Act implementation are the Agile Development Methodology and User-Centered Design. These principles will help contain implementation costs and provide the greatest chance of success in meeting the transparency objectives and the statutory deadline. Our approach is also based on many of the best practice principles included in the U.S. Digital Services Playbook.[1]

1. **Agile Development Methodology**

   Treasury is using an Agile Development Methodology to create the DATA Act Information Model Schema (DAIMS), the DATA Act Broker, and the future USASpending.gov website. Agile is a software development methodology that is characterized by short build-cycles, an emphasis on working software, and responsiveness to evolving requirements and solutions. Our Treasury team works in two-week sprints with each sprint focused on completing discrete, time-boxed tasks with clear acceptance criteria. At the end of the sprint, the team participates in an evaluation and review of the work accomplished and then plans for the tasks ("user stories" or "issues") for the next sprint. This two-week cadence will continue throughout the development lifecycle.

   In addition, the team participates in a stand-up call every morning to review the previous day's work and to report any challenges, questions, or blockers so they can be addressed and resolved quickly. Treasury's Agile process is open and transparent and stakeholders can follow the progress of the tasks in the development and publication of work streams on our Federal Spending Transparency Github site.[2]

2. **User-Centered Design**

   Treasury is applying a User-Centered Design process to gain a better understanding of who will be using the new USASpending.gov site and its related data upload vehicles. Through meetings, workshops, analytics, and user interviews, Treasury has worked to learn more about users' needs, including what they want from the data, their technical environments (e.g., browsers, other software used), and their "pain points" with the current system. Our aim is to better understand the users' context when using these products: their motivations, requirements, and goals.

   To help make the USASpending.gov user research digestible and actionable, Treasury has developed a preliminary set of "Personas" or snapshots of user types that capture and organize information that can inform design decisions. Examples of our latest personas can be found on the User-Centered Design page on the Federal Spending Transparency Github site.[3] We have also developed a comprehensive plan for conducting recurring usability testing to help us identify potential design concerns. Initial, usability testing focuses on agency users. Later, the focus will expand to "data consumers," including grant recipients, researchers/reporters, and interested citizens. Usability testing will continue in a regular cadence in sync with the development cycles of our Agile development environment.

Implementation Updates

The DATA Act implementation includes several key work streams that Treasury is leading. The DAIMS will include reporting submission specifications for the agencies and will identify the authoritative sources for the data. The DAIMS is based on the 57 data definition standards that we established last year. The DATA Act Broker is another significant work stream; it serves as a platform for agencies to submit their data to Treasury. Other work streams include the development of the future USASpending.gov site, providing technical support to Federal agencies, engaging public and private stakeholders, and developing a governance model for the data standards. I will give you an update on all these work streams today.

1. **DATA Act Information Model Schema (DAIMS)**

Since July 2015, Treasury has issued four draft versions of the DATA Act Schema. Our latest version, released in December 2015, formalized the DAIMS. The DAIMS captures the data elements needed, their relationships, and the overall context of how they fit together. It also provides clarity, guidance, and instruction on the need, submission, and use of the DATA Act elements. One of the most effective ways to minimize any adverse agency impact is to design a data model that reflects the various business process subtleties, functional nuances, and complex relationships. The current draft version 0.7 of DAIMS [4] can be found on the Spending Transparency Collaboration Github Site for review or public comment. The DAIMS version 1.0 will be issued in the coming weeks and will include a stable version of the Reporting Submission Specification which federal agencies will use to submit data to Treasury.

2. **DATA Act Broker**

The DATA Act Broker is a tool that Treasury is developing to allow agencies to submit the required data in a standardized format. The Broker will accept data submitted directly from agencies and it will also pull data from existing data sources when needed. The Broker will validate agency data, allow agencies to certify the data, and complete the data submission and uploads to the DATA Act operating infrastructure. Treasury created a prototype Broker last year and used it to test agency data. Eighteen Federal agencies have participated in "sandbox" testing and used the prototype Broker to view their data and provide feedback on improving the Broker. The DATA Act Broker is being developed using open source code, which can be accessed on the Federal Spending Transparency Collaboration Github site.

3. **Future USASpending.gov Website Development**

For eight years, USASpending.gov has been a key resource for the public to find information on federal spending. As we prepare for the expansion of the site for DATA Act implementation, we want to make this website more useful to users. In November, Treasury launched OpenBeta.USASpending.gov, our new beta site for testing ideas and obtaining feedback from the American people on the design of the future USASpending.gov site that will be completed in 2017. The new OpenBeta.USASpending.gov provides a unique opportunity for the public to review, test, and provide feedback on data display and search functionality components that will inform Treasury's efforts to support the needs of data users. Over the next year, Treasury will add new features and functionalities for the public to review on a rolling basis in preparation for the launch of the new USASpending.gov site in May 2017.

4. **Technical Support to Federal Agencies**

Treasury established a DATA Act Program Management Office (PMO) to support government-wide implementation and organize the sharing of best practices and resources across Federal agencies. Treasury supports Federal agencies through communications and events, including hosting workshops, publishing artifacts to support and aid agencies' implementation efforts, producing the DATA Act Biweekly Digest, and meeting regularly with staff, Senior Accountable Officers (SAOs), and leaders from relevant Federal councils/committees. Treasury consistently reaches all CFO Act agencies and Federal Shared Services Providers each month through communications and events. The strong participation by agencies across the government in DATA Act PMO outreach is reflective of the growing community surrounding this initiative and the open, transparent way in which implementation efforts have been conducted. Treasury also shares information with financial management software providers to brief them on the technical requirements of the DATA Act and the open source code available from Treasury that could reduce implementation costs.

5. **Stakeholder Engagement**

Since Treasury and OMB's DATA Act implementation involves the entire Federal enterprise, and impacts state and local government and the private sector, we have made outreach a priority. From the beginning, we have worked to ensure that our many public and private stakeholders are kept informed on key milestones for the implementation and that we receive their input on our work.

In November 2015, Treasury hosted an Open Data Roundtable with the Center for Open Data Enterprise at our offices in Washington, DC. The Roundtable focused on how to improve the quality of Federal spending data and the ways that this data can be made more discoverable, accessible, and usable. The day-long Roundtable included participants from federal, state and local governments, academics, transparency advocates and other users of federal spending data to offer their suggestions for improvement. In addition to the Roundtable, Treasury hosts monthly calls with public and private stakeholders to keep them updated on the DATA Act implementation and offer an opportunity to ask questions of the Treasury and OMB staff.

6. **Data Governance Model**

Treasury is working to establish a long-term, sustainable governance structure for maintaining the DATA Act data standards, including a decision-making framework, defined roles and responsibilities, and supporting processes. Treasury has received input from more than fifty DATA Act stakeholders from the government, non-profit, and the private sector on their needs, preferences, and objectives to help us gain a clear understanding of what type of governance model is feasible, desirable, and sustainable for the users and their organizations. We also performed benchmarking research with similar organizations that maintain data and reporting standards within the government and in non-profit or private-sector contexts. We are currently working on recommendations for a future state governance model for the data standards that include identifying the types of decisions that the body would need to make and the related authorities needed.

Next Steps

While we have made significant progress in the past year to implement the DATA Act, we still have a long way to go. In the coming weeks, Treasury will finalize version 1.0 of the DAIMS, which will include the stable version of the Reporting Submission Specification for agencies. After the DAIMS is final, Treasury will update the DATA Act Broker and continue to test it with the agencies before finalizing it later this year. Treasury will also ramp up our work on the development of the new USASpending.gov and share more visualizations with the public on OpenBeta.USASpending.gov. The display of the summary-level financial data with the current cadence of the award data on the present site is one of the challenges we will need to resolve, and we will pursue public input and engagement to ensure the data is presented clearly and accurately.

Conclusion

The DATA Act provides a unique opportunity to unlock spending data across the Federal government and access it in new ways that will create public value. Our long-term goal is to capture and make available financial data to enable data consumers to follow the full life cycle of Federal spending – from appropriations to the disbursements of grants, contracts and administrative spending.

Over the past 225 years, Treasury has consistently delivered on our core mission to collect, safeguard and disburse public money and account for its collections and payments. Technology has advanced to allow us to provide more transparency than our founding fathers could have imagined – and our challenge is to connect this data and allow it to be exchanged to inform agency management decisions, stimulate innovation and provide greater transparency for the public. Better data leads to better decisions and ultimately a better government.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today

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[1] *U.S. Digital Services Playbook*: https://playbook.cio.gov/#introduction

[2] "DATA Act JIRA," *Federal Spending Transparency Collaboration Github*: https://federal-spending-transparency.atlassian.net/secure/BrowseProjects.jspa?selectedCategory=all&selectedProjectType=software

[3] "User Centered Design," *Federal Spending Transparency Collaboration Github*: http://fedspendingtransparency.github.io/user-centered-design/

[4] "Data Model," *Federal Spending Transparency Collaboration Github*: http://fedspendingtransparency.github.io/data-model/