DATA
TRANSPARENCY
COALITION

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Press Release

Coalition Applauds Complete Federal Spending Data Standards
Vague Plans for DUNS Future and Section 5 Pilot Program Pose Challenges

Today, applying the DATA Act of 2014, the Treasury Department and the White House Office of Management and Budget finalized the 57 data fields that could deliver transformative transparency to U.S. citizens, data-driven management within federal agencies, and automated reporting for grantees and contractors. Supporters of modernizing government should applaud the nearly sixteen months of hard work by Treasury and OMB leaders that brought us to this point.

OMB's blog post today says that this milestone follows "a robust engagement with stakeholders." Treasury and OMB did, indeed solicit electronic input on all 57 data fields on the GitHub web platform. But it isn't clear that they took this input into account. Notably, Treasury and OMB chose to adopt the proprietary DUNS Number as the favored, government-wide identifier for recipients of federal funds - even though *every* GitHub comment said they shouldn't. The agencies did promise to announce a process that will re-evaluate how the government tracks this crucial detail; the details are not available yet.

It also seems that all the input submitted by stakeholders is no longer public, meaning we'll need to file a Freedom of Information Act request in order to test claims about engagement.

Our Coalition is committed to supporting full data transparency for federal spending. This means supporting Treasury and OMB's leadership as they mandate the 57 data fields, and the schema that explains how the fields relate to each other, across all information reported by federal agencies on their finances, budgets, payments, and awards. The deadline for compliance with the standards is May 9, 2017.

We also will be watching OMB's Section 5 pilot program, which is intended to test the data standards within the reports that recipients of federal contracts, grants, and other assistance must file. The DATA Act requires OMB (or its designee) to recruit recipients and invite them to submit their official reports in electronic formats consistent with the DATA Act standards. This crucial step has not yet been taken. The National Dialogue OMB has announced falls far short of a real pilot program.

Ultimately, the DATA Act will only succeed if agencies are able to use federal spending information in new ways after it is standardized. Our members' technologies can do that - and some of those solutions are already being deployed in early standardization and visualization projects. On September 23rd at Data Transparency 2015, our annual policy conference, live DATA Act solutions will be on display.

We are grateful for the work of Fiscal Assistant Secretary Lebryk, Controller Mader, and their teams, and will do everything we can to ensure the goals of the DATA Act - full transparency, data-driven management, automated reporting - are realized in the years ahead.