

# Open Government Advocates and White House agree: Room for Improvement on most Open Government Plans

May 3, 2010

Earlier this month, agencies released their [Open Government Plans](#) [1] – roadmaps for creating agencies that are responsive and engaging to the public, as well as transparent with their work and their information. As part of a broad coalition of open government advocates, convened by [OpenTheGovernment.org](#) [2], CDT has been working to [independently evaluate](#) [3] the Open Government Plans against the Open Government Directive. While openness advocates we hope to see a number of gains that are not addressed in the [Directive](#) [4], we decided it would be best to [measure government plans](#) [5] according to the letter of the directive that described the plans. We did award bonus points for those agencies that chose to reach beyond merely meeting the letter of the directive - such as creating multiple points of engagement for ongoing projects, or actively facilitating and moderating discussion around their plan.

As part of an ongoing process within the executive branch to change agency culture, these plans are intended to move agencies towards openness and ensure that internal processes and information are made transparent, that deliberation is made participatory, and agencies are better able to collaborate with each other in their work. All the plans express at least these vague goals, [simply expressing the desire](#) [6] to be open does not make it a plan. Plans require achievable goals, and steps for getting there, in order to be effective and fulfill the Directive. The plans that scored well on both evaluations contain deadlines and specific steps to accomplish goals – three months until a data set is released, six months until implementing a flagship initiative – that will allow advocates and agency employees alike to track how effective the Plans are in creating change and affecting policy.

There are some notable differences in our evaluations and the White House evaluations of the plans released earlier this week - no one “failed” the White House’s official evaluation (actually based on a self-evaluation), but a number of plans were judged by our evaluation to be quite disappointing - failing to meet even the basic requirements of the Directive. Plans lacked specifics and timelines, did not provide information about internal policies that is called for as part of the Directive, and failed to create implementable plans. We are calling on agencies with plans that don't fulfill the requirements of the directive to revise their plans, which we will re-evaluate.

Looking at the breakdown in how agencies fared in both evaluations, it seems clear that those agencies with staff and resources already in place around openness were able to do a much better job on the plans. Perhaps this is because their agency culture already rewards initiatives for openness, or perhaps it is because other agencies did not have the resources to create good plans. However, we hope that agencies will look to see what others did and learn from the successes and failures of these first drafts of plans.

I've made a more thorough analysis of the plans in a policy post, if you're interested in the details of some of the plans. Overall, agencies with standing experience in engaging the public and sharing their information did the best on their Open Government Plans. While the intention of the Directive may be to foster openness in agencies that don't tend towards it, clearly it is an ongoing process that many agencies will need to work on.

- [White House](#)

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[2] <https://sites.google.com/site/opengovtplans/>

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[4] <http://www.ombwatch.org/files/21strtkreecs.pdf>

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[6] <http://govfresh.com/2010/04/flagship-initiatives-shine-in-open-government-plans/>