

# Participation and Open Government Web Sites

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The recently-released Open Government Directive requires all federal agencies to create an open government web site within 60 days that provides the public with opportunities to provide input on the agency's open government plan, publishes key data sets, and provides information about opportunities to participate in agency activities, among other things.

The Sunlight Foundation recently [published suggestions about what transparency elements](#) should be made available on these open government sites. Below are additional elements that may be included on the sites to address the participation and collaboration goals of the Open Government Directive.

The list below recognizes that some items will be a higher priority for agencies to act on in order to fulfill the requirements specified by the Open Government Directive by breaking out short and long-term elements.

## 1. One-Stop Shop for Participation Opportunities

**SHORT TERM:** Citizens and stakeholders need an easy way to learn about upcoming opportunities – online and face-to-face – that are available to participate in agency planning, rule making, public forums, public hearings, and advisory activities. Users need to know what the opportunities are, when they can participate, how they can participate, and they need an easy way to sign up. They should be able to sign up to receive notifications of opportunities by email, RSS feed, twitter, or other mediums. There should be a calendar of participation opportunities on all open government websites.

**LONG TERM:** Following participation opportunities, citizens and stakeholders should be able to go online to easily find reports and videos from the activities, and have an opportunity to comment on those reports and videos. Evaluations should be made available of the quality of the participation opportunities as rated by those who participate in them.

## 2. Interacting with Agency and Departmental Leadership

**SHORT TERM:** Citizens and stakeholders should have opportunities to interact with and share their views with agency and departmental leadership. An agency version of “Open for Questions” with the leadership responding to questions should be a regular feature of most agency web sites. This activity could be video or text-based depending on agency capacities. Citizens should be able to view and rate the questions and ideas generated by others. All questions, ideas and responses should be archived for future viewing.



### 3. Input and Feedback to the Open Government Plan

**SHORT TERM:** Agencies should provide the public with opportunities to provide feedback on the quality of the initial three data sets that are being made available and to prioritize options for subsequent data sets that should be made available. The public should also be able to prioritize the policies, programs and rules on which they will have an opportunity to provide input or about which they should have an opportunity to collaborate. Feedback and ideas in the development phase of the open government plan and post-release should be able to be viewed and rated by others on a platform like IdeaScale.

**LONG TERM:** Once each open government plan is published, a robust “suggestion box” on the web site should provide people with the opportunity to offer feedback to the agency on the progress of the agency’s open government activities, as well as provide input on the data for which people would like to have access and suggest how they’d like to be involved in agency planning and decision making. Indicators of each agency’s progress on implementing the directive should be published on the sites and the public should be able to comment on the indicator progress.

### 4. Input on Policies, Programs and Rules

**LONG TERM:** Each site should have an easily recognizable space where people can go to join online participatory and collaborative processes on policies, programs and rules—an online townhall. The online processes and tools for participation and collaboration should be established and made available, so that people readily know how to participate.

### 5. Action Center to Contribute to the Agency’s Mission

**LONG TERM:** Opportunities to take action in one’s community in order to contribute to the agency’s mission should also be available on the web site.

Citizens should be provided with tools to take action, educate others, collaborate with like-minded people to solve problems, and recruit their networks to get involved. Social media and social networking tools should help citizens who get involved feel like they are connected to the agency as a valued partner and member of a community. There should be a space for regular contests to collaboratively solve problems facing the agency or even present innovations that complement the agency’s mission.

### 6. Principles of Public Participation and Engagement

**LONG TERM:** As part of the open government directive, agencies must establish policy frameworks that facilitate transparency, participation, and collaboration. The policy framework should take into account established principles of public engagement should be visible on the site – see [IAP2](#) and [NCDD](#) principles – to provide a clear sense of the standards that each agency is holding itself to. Evaluations of participation and open government activities should be directly linked to these principles.

### 7. Internal Employee Consultation

An internal site should also be available for employee consultation and collaboration, like TSA’s Idea Factory. Employees should be able to anonymously share their ideas, questions and feedback. Employees should have “Open for Question” opportunities to interact with agency leadership as well.

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