

GAO Highlights

Highlights of GAO-[GAO-21-29](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies create and collect large amounts of data in support of fulfilling their missions. Public access to open data—data that are free to use, modify, and share—holds great promise for promoting government transparency and engendering public trust. Access to open data is particularly important in the current pandemic environment as government agencies, scientists, and the public work to understand and respond to COVID-19 using data-focused approaches.

The OPEN Government Data Act includes a provision for GAO to report on federal agencies' comprehensive data inventories. This report examines the extent to which 1) OMB, GSA, and NARA met their statutory requirements to facilitate the establishment of federal agencies' comprehensive data inventories; and 2) CFO Act agencies developed data inventories in accordance with OMB guidance.

GAO reviewed agencies' websites and related documentation, and interviewed OMB staff and GSA and NARA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to OMB to issue required implementation guidance and report on agency performance. GAO also recommends that OMB and GSA establish policy to ensure the routine identification and correction of errors in agency data. GSA concurred with GAO's recommendation and OMB did not comment on the report.

View [GAO-21-29](#). For more information, contact Michelle Sager at 202-512-6806 or SagerM@gao.gov.

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OPEN DATA

Agencies Need Guidance to Establish Comprehensive Data Inventories; Information on Their Progress is Limited

What GAO Found

The Open, Public, Electronic and Necessary Government Data Act of 2018 (OPEN Government Data Act) codifies and expands open data policy and generally requires agencies to publish information as open data by default, as well as develop and maintain comprehensive data inventories.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has not issued statutorily-required guidance for agencies to implement comprehensive data inventories, which could limit agencies' progress in implementing their requirements under the act. OMB also has not met requirements to publicly report on agencies' performance and compliance with the act. Access to this information could inform Congress and the public about agencies' open data progress and statutory compliance.

Implementation Status of Selected OPEN Government Data Act Requirements

	Assessment
Federal data catalogue: By July 2019, the General Services Administration (GSA) must maintain a point of entry dedicated to sharing agency data assets with the public, known as the "Federal data catalogue". The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and GSA must ensure agencies can publish data assets or links on the website.	✓
Online repository: By July 2019, OMB, GSA, and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) must collaborate to develop and maintain an online repository of tools, best practices, and schema standards to facilitate the adoption of open data practices across the federal government.	✓
Implementation guidance: By July 2019, OMB must issue guidance for agencies to implement comprehensive inventories.	✗
Biennial report: By January 2020, and biennially thereafter, OMB must electronically publish a report on agency performance and compliance with this act.	✗

Legend: ✓ Requirement fully met | ✗ Requirement not met

Source: GAO analysis of Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529 (Jan. 14, 2019), resources.data.gov, www.data.gov, and an interview with OMB staff. | [GAO-21-29](#).

GAO found that all 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies display their data inventories on their websites, as well as on an online catalogue of federal data assets. Agencies took a variety of approaches to providing public access to individual data assets such as using Data.gov as the human-readable public interface, hosting searchable inventories on their own agency websites and providing lists of data or downloadable files on their websites.

Information on the extent to which agencies regularly update their data inventories is limited. OMB and GSA do not have a policy to ensure the routine identification and correction of errors in electronically published information. The absence of such a policy limits publicly available information on agency progress.

As of September 2020, seven of the 24 CFO Act agencies had also publicly released COVID-19 related datasets or linked to related information from their open data web pages as required by the Federal Data Strategy. These datasets provide data on a range of COVID-19 related topics including data on disease transmission and loans provided to businesses.