

National Geospatial Advisory Committee Economic Recovery Subcommittee Lessons Learned and Recommendations

This short paper is intended to identify Lessons Learned from the winter budget cycle whereby the geospatial community was largely unsuccessful in gaining funding support for geospatial related projects and to make recommendations to rectify the situation so as to be better positioned going forward. The reader may find that the recommendations below appear too tactical/procedural/narrow and missing a strategic foundation. If that is the case we have done our job. This is not to underplay the importance of or need for a more robust national geospatial; it just not the responsibility of this group. This group is focused on making a set of recommendations for better positioning this community the next time a major funding opportunity arises; whenever that occurs. The existence of a national geospatial policy should make the likelihood of success greater; however, pending the finalization of such a policy, there are smaller steps we can take.

Lessons Learned

External Issues – those issues that fall principally outside the public sector

- **Short Timeframe for Position Development** hampered the geospatial communities' ability to collaborate effectively on a common message. The community was caught flat footed by the stimulus efforts and because of the issues identified below, was ill prepared to respond in the short time frame required as Congress and the administration drove hard deadlines for the passage of the American Recover and Reinvestment Act.
- **No Common Vision for Multiple Groups to Rally Around.** The above mentioned short time would not necessarily have been an issue had the geospatial community had a pre-established common vision and strategy for national geospatial activities. This is due in part to the fact that there has not been an effective forum for geospatial organizations to come together to discuss policy, legislation and strategy and to mobilize the organizations of their grassroots into political action. The NGAC is the first forum for a national dialogue and that organization was not mature enough to have developed a common vision.
- **The Geospatial Community Has No Defined Political Base.** Only a handful of practitioners are politically active and therefore the community has limited clout. Few organizations in the geospatial community have active, fulltime government affairs program (e.g. MAPPS, major software companies), thus few organizations are positioned to even make a legitimate "ask" for a stimulus program.
- **Disparate Groups Drove Disparate Agendas.** Building on the above mentioned issues, those individual geospatial firms that have lobbyists in Washington have tended to be parochial and protective of their lobbying assets. They have not devoted their lobbyist resources to "greater good" issues for the community; rather, they are using lobbyists for earmarks and niches. Some of this behavior may be deliberate and some may simply be a result of the foregoing issues – the absence of common forum for discussing and creating a common vision and legislative strategy.

External and Internal Issue – issues shared by the public and private sector

- ***There is no Consensus in the Geospatial Community on Roles and Responsibilities.*** There is not an acquisition strategy in the government for geospatial services and products. We see large business pitted against small business. There is no consensus definition of quality.

Internal Issues – issues that fall primarily within the public sector

- ***There are Few Authorized Programs for Congress to Attach Funding.*** Because ARRA passed as quickly as it did, it was easier for Congress to put additional funds into existing programs (e.g. National Map) rather than create new programs. Without highly visible, politically supported *existing* programs, the geospatial community is likely to be overlooked again when legislation has to be enacted quickly. Along this same vein, there is inadequate governance for geospatial programs. The Geospatial Line of Business (GLOB) was a creation of the Bush Administration, and while admirable in its goal, Congress never formalized multi-agency initiatives such as this one. Although the E-Government Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-347) contained provisions that specifically address reducing data redundancy and promoting collaboration and use of standards for government geographic information, Congress did authorize in the eGovernment Act of 2002 an effort reduce the duplication of effort in obtaining geospatial data, Congress has not reauthorized the act. During the ARRA enactment, Congress was not likely to provide funds for geospatial when they know (through a GAO report, a CRS report and 3 Congressional hearings) that the governance structure can't efficiently handle the money.
- ***Solid Metrics Do Not Exist for Measuring Need in Priority Areas. Understanding current spending is the first step in documenting*** a need for more Federal money for geospatial activities. The Bush Administration is to be commended for establishing the first data call for geospatial procurement information as conducted by Geospatial Line of Business (GLOB). While the results of the data call were less than ideal, the GLOB staff learned much about geospatial investments and even recommended enhancements for future data calls. It is unclear what the current Administration's plans are for GLOB and the data calls.
- ***Focus on Data Rather Than Solutions Means it is Difficult to Articulate Priorities.*** Talk of parcels, soils, and aerial imagery often fall on deaf ears. There are no "data champions" in Congress and the geospatial community has been ineffective in translating data needs into national priorities. Although, the recent Congressional Research Study report, [*Issues Regarding a National Land Parcel Database*](#), is a good start.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are fairly tactical/procedural in nature. This is because there is an assumption that there is a very important strategic component to success in this arena, but that the strategic efforts are and will take place in a parallel manner. This

- ***Eliminate the zero-sum game mentality.*** Many of the "no common vision" lessons are driven by the mindset that if one program succeeds, another must lose, rather than viewing geospatial as synergistic. In reality, one dataset will by necessity encourage the creation of another (e.g.

parcels and orthos, lidar and buildings, hydro and topo). Therefore, the successful completion of one data layer, created for whatever reason, will positively impact all others.

- ***The NGAC should clearly support existing authorized programs and be flexible enough to support those that show evidence of success, regardless of individual agendas.*** When funding opportunities arise (through OMB or Congress), the geospatial community should coalesce behind those programs most likely to get funds. In 2009, that program was The National Map. The NGAC as a FACA did not offer supportive advice to the Department of Interior, nor did the NGAC members individually offer support in the halls of Congress. Despite our lack of support, TNM got some money, but not nearly as much as they might have, had the NGAC been united behind the effort. In the end, all would have benefited. For example, it could be that someday bathymetry has the attention of Congress. Although, such data may be of limited priority to many individual members of the NGAC, it would be important as a FACA to support the Administration as appropriate and to have individual NGAC members support the effort in Congress because the creation of that dataset may well require lidar/topo, imagery, and hydro. A perceived need will drive data or application creation and we need to support that likelihood of success even if it does not fit with our individual priorities (see above).
- ***Drive Tactical Steps Consistent with a New National Strategy.*** It is incumbent upon the Department and the FGDC to develop a ***National*** (emphasis added) Geospatial Policy and Implementation Plan. Through the development process, the NGAC and the broader geospatial community can identify priorities for making the vision a reality. Discussions today around individual layers of data are often out of context because a larger plan does not exist. However, until such time that a National Geospatial Policy and Plan exists, the NGAC recommends focusing on a limited set of data for priority execution. (See below.)
- ***Develop a Common View of Priority Data Sets.*** The NGAC should applaud the FGDC for identifying priorities for future stimulus funding (e.g. imagery, elevation, parcel, and infrastructure) and be willing to embrace these priorities as a FACA and individually. The NGAC should encourage all federal agencies to endorse these priorities.
- ***Build Common Ground around a National Geospatial Base Map.*** Adopt and advocate for a National Geospatial Base Map Strategy and Plan that meets national needs, including federal program requirements ***and*** the operations of local and state government. The Plan will align with the NGAC vision for a National Geospatial Strategy. The Plan will leverage existing work in progress on ‘for the nation’ and National GIS initiatives. The Plan will identify and maintain a list of business drivers and stakeholders that depend on the NGBM to be in place and maintained and to help define priorities and schedule
- ***Use traditional and nontraditional communications to seek input and support around a National Geospatial Base Map Vision and Plan.*** The NGAC recommends that the Department engage citizens and constituents in an on-line dialogue to help vet appropriate ideas and build support for a common vision. NGAC members should reach out to their constituencies and encourage participation by academia, geospatial professionals, national associations, and the federal, state and local programs (example: COGO, NGAC, Individual Organizations, and FGDC).

Next Steps

- *Endorse FGDC list of priority data sets: imagery; elevation; parcel and infrastructure;*
- *Work with Department to determine how the NGAC can offer advice on scoping of each data set;*
- *Collectively and individually support all efforts in the future to complete the four above-mentioned data sets;*
- *Encourage and assist the Department in developing strategies, including the use of social media, to develop the National Geospatial Policy.*
- *Actively engage in those discussions when scheduled.*
- *In the longer term, use the framework of a National Geospatial Policy for all decisions, communications and recommendations for prioritizing and funding geospatial activities.*

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