

National Geospatial Advisory Committee Messaging Committee 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 policy; 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 and the role of the NGAC.

- **Short Timeframe for Position Development** hampered the geospatial community's 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. The lack of a vision was 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 grassroots into political action. The NGAC is the first forum for a national dialogue and certainly aspires to help the geospatial community develop a national vision. However, a Federal Advisory Committee it is prohibited from engaging in such behavior before Congress. The geospatial community may look to COGO as an organization that could develop a common agenda or at a minimum energize their individual membership to engage in appropriation discussions.
- **The Geospatial Community Has No Defined Political Base.** A relatively small portion of geospatial practitioners are politically active and therefore the community has limited recognition on Capitol Hill. Few organizations in the geospatial community have active, full-time government affairs programs (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 Messages.** Building on the above mentioned issues, , and the fact that no organization stepped up to convene an expedited effort to develop a consistent Stimulus GIS message those individual firms that lobby in Washington worked independently to spread varying GIS messages on the Hill. This caused confusion on the part of congressional

members (asking how these papers related to one another) rather than building collective support. The absence of a common forum for discussing and creating a common vision and legislative strategy will continue to result in scattered, inconsistent and ineffective activities on the Hill.

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. Too often 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 to which Congress may 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) 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 has not reauthorized the act. During the ARRA enactment, Congress was not likely to provide funds for geospatial when they knew (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. While the results of the GLOB 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 falls on deaf ears. There are no "data champions" in Congress and the geospatial community has been ineffective in translating data needs into national priorities. However, 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 process.

- ***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. . Further, if a National Geospatial Policy and Implementation Plan existed it could help eliminate this competitive attitude as all program and data areas would be planned for and could therefore be funded individually or in parallel as opportunities arise.
- ***The NGAC should consider resolutions supporting programs that show evidence of success, regardless of individual member agendas.*** As an advisory committee, it is useful when the committee can unite and offer advice to the Department of Interior that demonstrates support for priority initiatives. Not all programs can receive priority treatment every year. Yet, if members of the NGAC can come to the table with the larger good in mind, it can collectively provide supportive advice to the agency and individually offer support through appropriate non NGAC channels. Success breeds success. Having Congressional support for one program in the short term, could lead to broader support for other programs in the long term.
- ***Drive Tactical Steps Consistent with a New National Strategy.*** It is incumbent upon the FGDC in concert with the National Geospatial Community 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. This plan should articulate that what is needed is an ‘information system’ with a well designed enterprise architecture focused to meet business needs , not just a set of data sets. 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 The National Map (TNM).*** Adopt and advocate for a National Map Strategy and Plan that meets requirements defined by the current TNM strategic planning process. The Plan should align with the NGAC vision for a ***National*** (emphasis added to ensure SLG needs are met) Geospatial Strategy. NGAC TNM subcommittee members will take the lead in providing input to the strategy and plan.
- ***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, Individual Organizations, and FGDC).

Next Steps

- *Endorse FGDC list of priorities: imagery, elevation and parcel layers; and geospatial infrastructure for future funding decisions;*
- *Collectively and individually support all efforts in the future to complete the three above-mentioned data sets;*
- *Support the development of a National Map Strategy and Plan through the NGAC TNM subcommittee;*
- *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 proposed National Geospatial Policy as a framework for all decisions, communications and recommendations for prioritizing and funding geospatial activities.*

November 25, 2009

Note: Nothing in this document shall be construed as suggesting that the NGAC would take any action that is inconsistent with the specific or implied limits on advisory committees created under the powers of the Federal Advisory Committee Act.