

Comments on the Revision of OMB Circular A-16

A Paper of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee

Background

The Geospatial Data Act (GDA) of 2018 (P.L. 115-254) requires the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue updated guidance to the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) within one year of the passage of the Act, which will be before October 2019. OMB plans to issue an updated version of OMB Circular A-16 to meet this requirement. Circular A-16, *Coordination of Geographic Information and Related Spatial Activities*, is the primary Federal policy document promoting the coordinated use, sharing, and dissemination of geospatial data and activities supporting the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI).

FGDC has asked a workgroup of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) to provide comments and advice on the revision of Circular A-16. Similar direction was provided by the FGDC to the NGAC in 2016, prior to the passage of the GDA. The recent FGDC guidance provided the NGAC the opportunity to 1) provide additional perspectives related to the Circular A-16 and the GDA and 2) revisit previous comments from the 2016 paper.

1. Comments related to the Geospatial Data Act

The NGAC has reviewed the requirements of the GDA and has identified several important points that should be addressed in the planned revision of Circular A-16:

- The geospatial ecosystem has changed significantly since the Circular A-16 was released. Then, the Federal government was a dominant funder, and functioned as a key data producer, aggregator, and consumer of geospatial data. Now, all levels of government, as well as private industry and individuals, are inclusive of the same. Geospatial users, for instance, are everywhere thanks to mobile technology. Data production and access is not all about creating and owning data, but how to reliably advance access to satisfy both the casual consumer and methodic aggregators to make informed – not just data driven - decisions. The dynamism of this ecosystem will continue to offer opportunities and challenges.
- The Circular A-16 Supplemental Guidance outlines the National Geospatial Data Asset (NGDA) portfolio management process. In the 2016 paper, [Comments on the National Geospatial Data Asset \(NGDA\) Portfolio Management Process](#), NGAC commended the agencies on their progress. The GDA and Open Government Data Act will continue to foster this approach. As in 2016, NGAC recommends evaluation of the portfolio management process to assure clarity, effectiveness, and collaboration with a focus on data integrity, readiness, and availability. Specifically, the NGAC recommends identifying common performance metrics and reporting mechanisms in collaboration with non-Federal stakeholders. As OMB revises Circular A-16, components of the Supplemental Guidance should also be revisited and considered for inclusion in the Circular.

- The NGAC is excited by the prospects of several Federal data initiatives, including the Federal Data Strategy, Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, and Open Government Data Act. The revision of Circular A-16, and potentially the Supplemental Guidance, should accurately reflect the positioning of the GDA within this data renaissance. The ever-changing landscape of data, innovation, and decision making truly make this a challenge; however NGAC believes that the groundwork of the geospatial community reflects on the nexus of opportunities the GDA and related initiatives affords.

2. Review of the NGAC's previous advice related to Circular A-16

The NGAC has reviewed the requirements of the GDA and has identified several important points that should be addressed in the planned revision of Circular A-16:

In 2016, the FGDC provided guidance to the NGAC to solicit perspective and advice on how Circular A-16 and the geospatial policy framework might be updated to reflect changes in technology, organizational capabilities, partnerships, and the evolution of the geospatial community. The NGAC established a subcommittee to address this task. The subcommittee met with the FGDC team, reviewed relevant resources and documents, gathered input from NGAC members and other contacts, and compiled a report summarizing their findings and recommendations. The report, [Comments on OMB Circular A-16 and the Geospatial Policy Framework](#), was adopted by the NGAC in December 2016. Key points from the paper included the following:

- A complete revision of Circular A-16 is needed
- A broad set of Federal and non-Federal stakeholders should participate in the revision
- Stakeholders should be recognized for their roles and interests as producers, aggregators, and consumers of geospatial data
- Roles of non-Federal stakeholders should be expanded and clarified to include ongoing governance and data stewardship
- OMB should take a lead role in the A-16 revision process
- The Administration should consider legislative action to enable development and maintenance of the NSDI and FGDC
- The new Circular should emphasize the value of geospatial resources

The NGAC recommends that OMB and the FGDC team revising Circular A-16 closely review the recommendations in the 2016 NGAC report. The NGAC also recommends that OMB and the FGDC review several other related NGAC reports:

- [Comments on the National Geospatial Data Asset \(NGDA\) Portfolio Management Process](#)
- [Geospatial Data as a Service](#)
- [Emerging Technologies and the Geospatial Landscape](#)
- [Toward a New Strategic Vision for the NSDI](#)