



# **NGAC Comments on FY 2021 FGDC Summary of GDA Annual Reports**

A Report of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee  
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## 1.0 Overview

The Geospatial Data Act of 2018 (GDA) outlines annual reporting responsibilities for Federal agencies, including a summary and evaluation of the achievements of covered agencies and lead covered agencies. “Covered agencies” are defined in the GDA as having specific geospatial management responsibilities, and “lead covered agencies” are defined as ones that also have lead responsibility for coordination and management of National Geospatial Data Asset (NGDA) data themes. Specifically, the covered agencies and lead covered agencies are required to report on whether they:

- Meet expectations;
- Have made progress toward expectations; or
- Fail to meet expectations.

The covered agencies report on thirteen (13) agency responsibilities found in GDA section 2808(a), while the lead covered agencies report on the status of each NGDA data theme as defined in GDA section 2805(b)(3).

The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) developed a summary of these annual reports detailing the status of each covered agency and each NGDA data theme for fiscal year (FY) 2021. As required under GDA Section 2802(c)(11)(A), the FGDC provided this summary report to the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) for review and comment. The NGAC commends that all covered agencies and lead covered agencies complied with the reporting requirements.

The FGDC provided opportunities to engage stakeholders in the process and made preliminary reporting available for comment. All participants in the reporting process should be applauded for their efforts, as this is only the second reporting by agencies covered under the GDA. The depth and breadth of reporting was impressive. It is clear that significant effort went into organizing and completing the reports, as well as designing a comprehensive reporting process.

This paper provides the NGAC’s comments on the FY 2021 FGDC summary report. We have organized the comments in three categories. The first reflects positive elements or improvements from last year. Several improvements to the report itself follow recommendations from the NGAC that were successfully incorporated by FGDC in their guidance to the various agencies and that have improved the value of the summary report. The second category addresses areas needing improvement. And finally, we have provided recommendations for future reports.

## 2.0 Positive Elements / Improvements from Last Year

Several of this year’s NGAC reviewers also participated last year and were pleased to see that their recommendations did result in an improved report, reflecting growing maturity in the reporting process itself by both the agencies and the FGDC.

## **2.1 Changes to GDA Annual Reporting**

- 2.1.1 It is helpful to have a new section discussing the changes to GDA reporting that also discusses the comments provided by the NGAC.

## **2.2 Table 1**

- 2.2.1 Table 1 provides a good summary of agencies and their NGDA responsibilities.

## **2.3 Summary of Results – Covered Agency Annual Reports**

- 2.3.1 It is helpful that the dashboard indicated whether the self-assessment in the current year is higher or lower than the previous year.

## **2.4 Summary of Results – Lead Covered Agency Annual NDGA Data Theme Reports**

- 2.4.1 The summary mode of the dashboard was very helpful.

## **2.5 General Comments**

- 2.5.1 Agencies had the ability to provide more detailed responses given higher character limits for explanations to provide additional insights and details, which was a significant improvement from last year.

## **3.0 Areas Needing Improvement**

The NGAC reviewers noted additional points that would further improve future versions of this summary report.

### **3.1 Introduction**

- 3.1.1 Future reports should begin with an Executive Summary that addresses the health of the national geospatial program relative to the GDA reporting requirements, rather than a description of the reporting process. As the reports evolve, the process will become boilerplate and will no longer need to be featured at the front in the report.
- 3.1.2 Sections 1.1 through 1.4 should be an appendix to the report, rather than part of the report itself. Having these sections at the beginning of the report can derail readers before they get to the key part of the report.

### **3.2 Table 1**

- 3.2.1 Additional agencies with geospatial responsibilities, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), should be included in the reporting requirements as both a

Covered Agency and Lead Covered Agency. This recommendation was also made last year, but the EPA is still not described in the GDA as a covered agency.

- 3.2.2 (Typo) Footnote 3 appears twice at the bottom of page 3.

### **3.3 Summary of Results – Covered Agency Annual Reports**

- 3.3.1 The results in Table 2 and Table 3 should be expanded upon by descriptive or summary information discussing progress. The report should include highlights of achievements, progress toward goals, and deficiencies reported out by agencies with related explanations.
- 3.3.2 Even when reading actual report submissions, it is unclear how the change in self-assessment rating is determined. It would be helpful to understand the circumstances and rationale behind changes in self-assessment ratings.

### **3.4 General Comments**

- 3.4.1 Overall, the agencies' self-assessment approaches need to be better explained and better documented.
- 3.4.2 More work should be put into determining and describing how to assess progress toward "Making Progress". It would be helpful to understand the tangible measures that lead to this rating.
- 3.4.3 The focus of this report should be on the results, rather than the process.

## **4.0 Recommendations for Future Reports**

NGAC's confidence in the FGDC's intent to improve the Summary Report based on changes implemented this year encouraged us to make recommendations for the future reports.

### **4.1 Geospatial Data Act Reporting Requirements**

- 4.1.1 The list of reporting elements found in Section 2.1 - Common Reporting Process should be moved to Section 1.1 - Geospatial Data Act Reporting Requirements.

### **4.2 FGDC Reporting Approach**

- 4.2.1 The word "results" should be replaced with "experience and resulting recommendations from."

### **4.3 Table 1**

- 4.3.1 Table 1 should be ordered by level of responsibility, rather than alphabetical by agency. Organization by level of responsibility could be done by organizing the table by the totals of theme leads and number of datasets they are responsible for in descending order.

#### **4.4 Summary of Results – Covered Agency Annual Reports**

- 4.4.1 The report should note during what fiscal year activity occurred.
- 4.4.2 The size of the +/- indicator should be larger. Alternatively, every entry could have a +, -, or =.

#### **4.5 Table 2**

- 4.5.1 Table 2 should be ordered by level of responsibility, rather than alphabetical by agency. Organization by level of responsibility could be done by organizing the table by the totals of theme leads and number of datasets they are responsible for in descending order.

#### **4.6 Summary of Results – Lead Covered Agency Annual NGDA Data Theme Reports**

- 4.6.1 When a minus is indicated on the dashboard, an explanation should be included if the dataset went from Meets Expectations to Progress Made. It is unclear whether criteria changed or if there is a currency factor.

#### **4.7 Key Observations**

- 4.7.1 The section's language surrounding the templated approach should be clarified.
- 4.7.2 Key successes resulting from the GDA should be added. For example: "Agency X has been able to make dataset Y available to the public, which has been downloaded Z times in the past year."
- 4.7.3 There should be an "at-a-glance" observation of the improvements or setbacks made in Tables 2 and 3. If this cannot be summarized, a few examples should be highlighted--particularly if the progress reverts from Meets Expectations in the prior year to Progress Made in the current year.

#### **4.8 Challenges and Observations**

- 4.8.1 Add key challenges for the Covered Agencies whose reporting fails to meet expectations for specific requirements as shown in Table 2. By doing this, this report section could be used to identify areas where agencies need some level of assistance to meet expectations.

#### **4.9 General Comments**

- 4.9.1 NGAC members should read the agency reports, which provide helpful context. The summary reports alone do not give enough context to allow sufficient insight, especially on elements on which an agency reports that it is making progress.

- 4.9.2 More information needs to be shared regarding efforts that failed in the last report and continue to fail in this report. If possible, a cause should be identified.
- 4.9.3 More information should be shared about any identified specific efforts that more than meet expectations.
- 4.9.4 It should be made clear in the report whether agencies made further progress toward achieving GDA goals.
- 4.9.5 We suggest exploring the use of other technologies that may be more applicable to this specific use case in lieu of Survey123.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The NGAC acknowledges the complex and daunting coordinating effort that went into producing both last year's and this year's agency reports and FGDC summary report. Designing, refining, and using a template approach helped considerably. There is significant advantage to a consistent reporting mechanism, as it resulted in organized covered agency and lead covered agency (NGDA Theme) reports. Future iterations of these reports can be improved with some specific changes to the process, some of which were outlined in section 4.0 of this report.

The NGAC would like to thank the FGDC for the opportunity to review and comment on the summary report and it applauds the thoroughness and completeness of the GDA reporting. The results of these individual reports will inform NGAC, Congress, and the broader geospatial community on the future of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). The NGAC plans to spend additional effort over the coming months to review the individual agency reports and NGDA reports in more depth and to identify additional recommendations for the future.

### Acknowledgments:

This paper was developed by an NGAC subcommittee consisting of Mark Meade (Chair), Chad Baker, Tony LaVoi, Felicia Retiz, Cy Smith, and Tim Trainor.