



Discussion Paper – Potential Intergovernmental Coordination Approaches for the Geospatial Platform

ISSUE SUMMARY

The Geospatial Platform, a service-oriented geospatial initiative described in the President’s FY 2011 budget, will require an intergovernmental coordination framework to incorporate the views and requirements of both Federal and non-Federal government entities. This paper describes options for an interim intergovernmental coordination approach to facilitate the development of the Geospatial Platform and help define a longer-term shared governance model.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Are there modifications to either of the two approaches outline below that should be considered?
- Are there other options than the two outlined below that should be considered?
- What should the relationship of the federated governance structure be with respect to existing FGDC bodies (Executive Committee, Coordination Group, NGAC)?
- What measures of success should be utilized to monitor the effectiveness of the approach selected?

BACKGROUND

I. The Geospatial Platform

The Geospatial Platform (Platform), a Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) initiative described in the President’s FY2011 budget, will provide a managed portfolio of common geospatial data, services, and applications for use by Federal, State, local and Tribal governments. The Platform builds upon ongoing Federal geospatial efforts and technological advances, including the existing Geospatial Line of Business initiative. The Platform, which will utilize shared infrastructure, will make common data, services, and applications available through the GeoPlatform.gov website. The Geospatial Platform Modernization Roadmap (Roadmap) is a conceptual implementation plan for the Platform initiative. The Roadmap was developed by the FGDC partner agencies, with input from the NGAC. The Roadmap (Version 3) was distributed to agencies by OMB for formal review and comment in August. A broader review of the Roadmap by non-Federal stakeholders is planned over the next several months.

II. Governance Approach

The governance model for the Platform will not only need to define requirements for the data, services, and applications offered on GeoPlatform.gov, but it will also need to involve stakeholders from inside and outside of the Federal Government. As described in the President’s FY2011 budget, the governance model should ensure that *“this transformation will be facilitated by improving the governance framework to address the requirements of State, local and tribal agencies, Administration policy, and agency mission objectives.”*



The interim governance committee will be advisory in nature. Roles and responsibilities may include the following:

- Provide advice and recommendations to facilitate the development of the Geospatial Platform
- Help define a longer-term shared governance model
- Assist in defining requirements for the data, services and applications offered on the GeoPlatform.gov website.
- Engage stakeholders from inside and outside the federal government
- Advise on operational aspects of the Platform

III. Intergovernmental Coordination Options

To ensure that non-Federal governments have a voice in Platform governance, the FGDC may choose from a number of options. The two most feasible interim options are examined below:

a. Establish a Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)-authorized Intergovernmental Subcommittee of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC).

Advantages

- **Quick Stand Up:** The NGAC already exists as a FACA committee. Creating an intergovernmental subcommittee to provide advice and recommendations on Platform governance through the existing NGAC structure and utilizing already existing NGAC procedures would be much faster than creating an entirely new group.
- **Legitimacy:** NGAC members have already been selected to represent key sectors and stakeholder groups within the geospatial community. Furthermore, NGAC itself is a known and respected organization in the geospatial arena.
- **Relevant Expertise:** If current NGAC members do not have the required expertise, the FACA regulations allow additional individuals with appropriate skills to be appointed to subcommittees of FACA committees. In addition, as part of FACA's two-year review cycle, the NGAC's charter will be reviewed in 2011, allowing for possible alterations to ensure that Platform governance requirements are addressed.

Disadvantages

- **Possible Mismatch of Skill Sets:** Since NGAC is primarily a policy-oriented advisory body, its membership may not be fully aligned to provide advice on the operational aspects of the Platform. Current NGAC members may not have the required expertise to provide advice on the operational components of a technology platform.
- **Limited Participation Time:** Current NGAC members may have limited time to focus on Platform governance.

b. Create a non-FACA Intergovernmental Subcommittee of the FGDC, consisting of representatives of non-federal governments.

The Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) provides a limited exemption to FACA, allowing, under certain circumstances, for the establishment of advisory bodies composed of elected officials from State, local, and Tribal governments (or their employees with authority to act on their behalf). This process could potentially be used to allow the Platform's Managing Partner agency to create a panel of advisors from non-federal governments selected specifically to provide advice on Platform operations.



Advantages

- Customized Expertise: A panel of advisors created specifically for the purpose of providing advice on Geospatial Platform operations would result in a dedicated advisory body with appropriate technical skills.
- Availability to Participate: Panel members would be selected to work specifically on this single issue and would not have multiple advisory responsibilities.

Disadvantages

- Slow Start-up: It could be difficult and time consuming to identify and designate appropriate advisory body members. These representatives would also have to have the requisite geospatial skill set. The process of establishing and operationalizing this group could be slow as it would be a new start.
- Legitimacy: A new, unknown group may initially be less trusted and respected in the geospatial community than an existing body.

IV. Next Steps

The options for intergovernmental coordination to support the Geospatial Platform will be reviewed and discussed within the Federal community (FGDC Executive Committee/Coordination Group, OMB, etc.), as well as with key external stakeholders, including the NGAC. The DOI Solicitors Office will be consulted to review the FACA implications of the alternatives. The Platform Managing Partner agency, in collaboration with partners, will need to more fully define the roles and responsibilities for the intergovernmental coordination group. For any roles that would require new statutory authority, the Administration would need to decide whether to pursue legislation.