Open Government Plan

Version 2.0
2012–2014

United States Small Business Administration

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My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of TRANSPARENCY, public PARTICIPATION, and COLLABORATION. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.

—PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

1 Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

On his first full day in office, President Obama set a theme for his Administration by issuing a Presidential Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government to establish a culture of *TRANSPARENCY* within the Federal Government and to increase citizen *PARTICIPATION* and *COLLABORATION*.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) fully supports the spirit and intent of the President's memorandum and subsequent Open Government directives. Over the past three years, we have worked diligently to integrate the principles of *TRANSPARENCY, PARTICIPATION,* and *COLLABORATION* into our activities. These principles guide our service to SBA's constituents— America's 20 million small businesses. Without the input of small business owners, entrepreneurs, and agency stakeholders, we cannot effectively meet their needs. Through the Open Government Initiative, we will continue striving toward SBA's mission in a manner that seeks and values public engagement.

- *TRANSPARENCY*: SBA has made high-value data and other information about Agency programs and activities easily available to customers and stakeholders. Greater *TRANSPARENCY* has helped us achieve greater accountability, accessibility, and responsiveness.

- *PARTICIPATION*: SBA has increased citizen *PARTICIPATION* by using new tools and strategies to encourage their input and feedback. Public engagement enhances our effectiveness and improves the quality of our decisions.

- *COLLABORATION*: SBA has improved *COLLABORATION* with agency stakeholders, and has enhanced our interactions with small business owners and entrepreneurs.

The second edition of our Open Government Plan updates the 2010 version and forecasts the next two years of open government at SBA. We welcome feedback on this plan at opengov@sba.gov or in SBA's online community (SBA.gov/community). Progress on the implementation of activities described in the plan is available on our website at SBA.gov/open.

1.2 Purpose of the Open Government Plan

SBA's Open Government Plan summarizes many of the things we have accomplished in support of *TRANSPARENCY*, *PARTICIPATION*, and *COLLABORATION*. The plan describes specific actions we have taken to create and institutionalize a culture of Open Government.
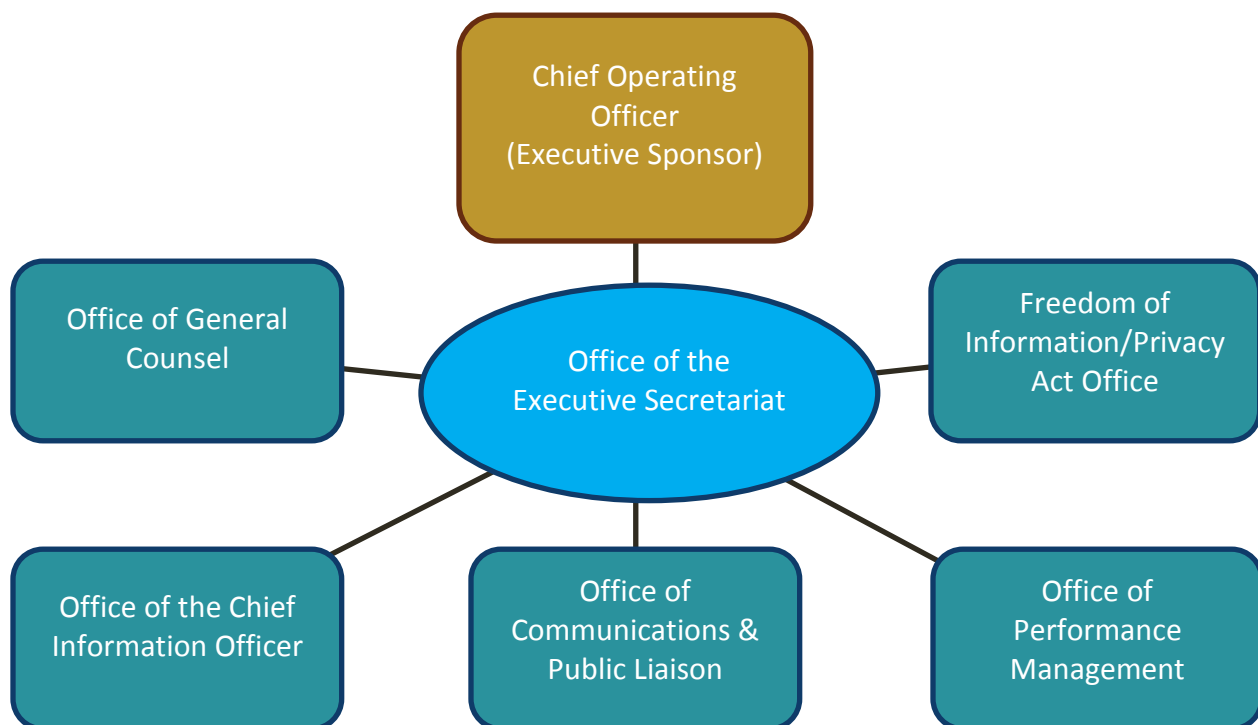
The most important achievement described in this plan is the complete redesign of our web presence—SBA.gov. This redesign has been a great success and has enhanced our ability to offer the public more interactive and relevant information, to do so more quickly and efficiently, and has increased our ability to benefit from the public's thoughts and opinions.

1.3   SBA Leadership and Governance Structure

The Chief Operating Officer serves as SBA's senior official responsible for implementing the Open Government Directive. Similarly, the Chief Financial Officer is the senior official accountable for ensuring data quality of SBA's Federal spending information.

In December 2009, the Chief Operating Officer created a cross-functional working group to oversee implementation of short-term milestones, as well as formulate a plan to guide longer-term actions. The composition of the working group reflects the multiple disciplines necessary to implement our Open Government plans.

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                        Chief Operating
                            Officer
                      (Executive Sponsor)

Office of General                              Freedom of
    Counsel          Office of the         Information/Privacy
                  Executive Secretariat         Act Office

Office of the Chief     Office of             Office of
Information Officer   Communications &       Performance
                      Public Liaison         Management
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Office	Primary Responsibility
Chief Operating Officer	Executive Sponsor
Executive Secretariat	Open Government lead, Coordinating office
Communications and Public Liaison	Citizen engagement lead
Chief Information Officer	Data.gov oversight, information security and architecture
General Counsel	Legal and privacy review
Performance Management	Program-specific and financial data
Freedom of Information and Privacy Act Office	FOIA & Privacy Act implementation & reporting

2 SBA's Flagship Initiatives

2.1 Flagship Initiative Version 1.0: the Web Redesign Project

The Agency redeployed its website in late 2010, pursuant to our original Open Government plan, with the goal of making it more user-centric and focused on the needs of small businesses. The new website merged key elements of current SBA resources, in particular the services that were available on both SBA.gov and Business.gov.

This Flagship Initiative addressed the Open Government themes in the following ways:

TRANSPARENCY: The site includes an improved information architecture tested with small business owners and an advanced search function powered by Google. These improvements enable users to quickly and easily access the most relevant information and provide a targeted, personalized user experience.

PARTICIPATION: The site features the "SBA Direct" module, which allows users to customize their online experience and quickly access content that is relevant to them. When users provide business, geographic, and demographic information, SBA Direct displays content and services directly related to their individual needs, as well as information on the customer's nearest SBA offices and resource partner organizations.

The new SBA.gov includes interactive SBA web chats on the topics that small businesses want most to discuss and incorporates page tools to allow the public to rate content and provide feedback to the Agency for continual review and improvement. The new site also includes an improved version of the SBA.gov Community.

COLLABORATION: The site includes Web 2.0 tools, such as community discussions forums, that encourage networking, facilitate knowledge sharing, and provide real time, transparent feedback from the public.

SBA's Flagship Initiative has improved agency operations in a number of key areas including:

- Streamlined publishing process that increased information dissemination across the entire site by shortening the amount of time it takes to publish content

- User-centric site organization

- Case management and automated workflow capabilities that increased standardization of processes and improved activity tracking for content authors

- Audit tracking on all new records, updates and deletions

- Incorporates an employee directory

Throughout the last two years, SBA has continued to hold usability and focus sessions comprised of the Agency's diverse customer base as part of an ongoing dialog to make transactional and accessibility improvements to the site. In addition, the new site randomly

initiates customer satisfaction surveys that enable the Agency to delve deeper into key areas such as content, navigation, search, usability, online transactions, bounce rates, and other important elements.

Through a robust and integrated website analytics tool (Google Analytics), the Agency has set benchmarks, including online success rates, usage patterns, and customer feedback. These metrics are being incorporated into incremental usability improvements, as well as several new tools and apps being built for SBA.gov users.

2.2 BusinessUSA

BusinessUSA is an interagency effort, focused on improving the way small businesses interact with the federal government as a means to support growth and jobs creation. The interagency team consists of:

- Office of Management and Budget
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
- Department of the Treasury
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Small Business Administration
- Import-Export Bank
- Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- General Services Administration

These agencies have been working together to meet the goals of the October 28, 2011, Presidential Memorandum to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies entitled "Making it Easier for America's Small Businesses and America's Exporters to Access Government Services to Help them Grow and Hire." The effort focuses on businesses of all sizes that want to begin or increase exporting. The memorandum also created BusinessUSA.gov, a centralized online platform with a diverse mix of program information and other resources. While the efforts to achieve near-term goals are being addressed by the interagency team, a second effort is underway to establish midrange and long-term plans that will focus on sustainability and further outreach across all business communities, enabling the United States to make strides in creating jobs and sustaining business.

BusinessUSA is a common, open, online platform and web service with dedicated resources that disseminates information on the federal government's programs and services relevant to small businesses and exporters. The purpose of BusinessUSA is to make it easier for inexperienced small businesses and exporters to find the answers and assistance they need quickly, regardless of which agency provides the assistance. Goals of BusinessUSA include client

tracking/management functions across agencies (so clients have one single experience with the Federal government), standardized customer service practices, and a means to solicit input from users as to how to improve BusinessUSA.

3 SBA's New Initiatives

3.1 Start Young

SBA is working with the Department of Labor to provide Job Corps participants training to start their own businesses (*PARTICIPATION* and *COLLABORATION*).

3.2 Operation Boots to Business: From Service to Startup

SBA is working with the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs to create a path to entrepreneurship for returning servicemen and women within the Transition Assistance Program (*PARTICIPATION* and *COLLABORATION*).

3.3 Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development

SBA continues to work with Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs on the Task Force to further Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (*PARTICIPATION* and *COLLABORATION*).

3.4 American Supplier Initiative

SBA is leading the Administration's efforts to support small and medium-sized manufacturers. This initiative is a call-to-action to the private sector to invest in the development of small manufacturers through their supply chains. The initiative addresses four key challenges: Business Capacity, Access to Markets, Access to Capital, and Workforce Skills (*PARTICIPATION* and *COLLABORATION*).

3.5 Access to Capital

SBA continues to work toward streamlining all of our loan programs, as well as build awareness among both the lending and small business communities to increase funding for small businesses (*PARTICIPATION*).

3.6 Small Business Procurement

SBA continues to work with agencies across the federal government to increase opportunities for small businesses to compete for and win federal contracts (*COLLABORATION* and *PARTICIPATION*).

3.7 SBIR and STTR Act

The Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Act—passed in December—was a comprehensive 6-year reauthorization that requires SBA to implement a number of key provisions 180 days from the signing of the bill. We have already issued new guidance increasing the set-asides for both programs. We are also on track to meet the remaining deadlines within their intervals (*PARTICIPATION*).

3.8 Urban Economic Forums

SBA is working with the White House Business Council to host a series of nine forums in urban centers across the country to connect local entrepreneurs and business owners with resources, and to highlight Administration programs that can help local business owners expand and hire (*TRANSPARENCY*, *PARTICIPATION*, and *COLLABORATION*).

4 What We've Done

4.1 Open Government Accomplishments to Date

	Transparency	Participation	Collaboration	Status
Web Redesign Project	✔	✔	✔	Complete (See section 2.1)
"In the Loop" Blog	✔	✔		Complete (See section 4.2f)
Apps for Entrepreneurs Challenge	✔	✔		Complete (See section 4.3d)
Audit Visibility and Tracking Tool	✔			Complete (See version 1.0)
Business.gov Metrics Dashboard	✔		✔	Complete (See section 4.4b)
Business.gov Web Services	✔	✔	✔	Complete (See section 4.4b)
Create Mobile Applications to Enhance Access to Information and Services	✔	✔		Complete (See version 1.0)
Customer Relationship Management Tool	✔	✔	✔	Complete (See section 4.3g)
Green.SBA.gov	✔	✔	✔	Complete (See section 4.4a)
New Datasets	✔			Complete (visit SBA.gov/api and green.sba.gov/apis)
Reducing Barriers Roundtable	✔	✔	✔	Complete (See section 4.3c)
SBA Recovery Act Performance Reports	✔			Complete (See section 4.2a)
SBA Web Chats	✔	✔		Complete (See section 4.3e)
Webinars for SBIC/SBIR	✔	✔	✔	Complete (See section 4.3b)

4.2   Other Successful Initiatives: Transparency

4.2a   SBA Recovery Act Performance Reports

The Recovery Act was signed into law by President Obama on February 17, 2009. SBA received $730 million to help unlock the small business lending market and improve the flow of capital to America's small businesses. Due to the success of these programs, SBA received additional funding to continue some Recovery Act provisions. SBA disseminated the results of the Recovery Act programs and ongoing reports through the online Recovery Act Performance Report. Report topics and statistics included copies of SBA's Recovery Act plans, monthly program performance reports, weekly financial reports, and registered lobbyist communication disclosure documentation. All reports are available as syndicated feeds. In FY 2012, SBA continues to produce weekly financial reports related to its Recovery Act obligations that are posted on the Agency website and the Government-wide Recovery Act site.

4.2b   Online Contracting or Disaster Loan Application Status

The SBA provides a number of certifications (e.g., 8a, HUBZone) for small businesses. To better inform applicants on their status, we have started work on a simple interface to allow users to monitor the progress of an application. The interface is expected to launch in early 2013.

4.2c   Online Employee Directory

In December 2010, SBA published its Employee Directory. This tool can be accessed through the "About SBA" section of the site or directly at web.sba.gov/sbaphone/search.cfm. The tool allows users to search for employees and organizational units based on various criteria.

> **Get Involved:** As part of the Green.sba.gov API, the Agency allows developers to access this information via web service. More information can be found at Green.sba.gov/apis.

4.2d   Licenses and Permits Tool

SBA.gov's Licenses and Permits tool allows users to receive a listing of the federal, state, and local permits, licenses, and registrations needed to start and manage a business.

> **Get Involved:** This tool is available to developers through an API (SBA.gov/api) and was prominently featured in the Apps for Entrepreneurs Challenge.

4.2e   Consolidate Listservs into an E-mail Marketing Program

In order to better promote SBA's services and programs, an outdated listserv system was phased out in favor of a more robust email subscription service, now provided through GovDelivery. As of March 2012, all 68 district offices have been trained on email marketing best practices, including industry standard techniques, plain language writing, and Section 508 compliance for email.

SBA currently has over 225,000 email subscribers and has sent over 200 newsletter bulletins to stakeholders since adoption of GovDelivery. This has resulted in over 5 million inbox deliveries to our constituents.

> **Get Involved:** You can sign up for email alerts from SBA at <u>SBA.gov/updates</u>. All emails are available via RSS which can be found on our district office pages or the master RSS at <u>public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USSBA/feed.rss</u>.

Future plans include a new method for signing up to make it easier for users to subscribe and an audit of inactive topics to reduce the amount of subscription topics.

4.2f   Introduce Blogs to Discuss Agency Issues and Programs

In late 2010, SBA opened its first official blog, "Open For Business." Appearing in the <u>SBA.gov Community</u>, Open For Business joined several other "how-to" blogs, which publish daily. Administrator Mills, Deputy Administrator Johns, and various agency officials routinely blog on subjects of interest to the small business community.

SBA considers blogging essential to our Open Government strategy. Alongside our official blog, we write a new post every day on one of our other blogs devoted to helping small business owners understand the federal government and succeed in managing their businesses. The other blogs are "Business Law Advisor," which explains legal issues; "Small Business Cents," which deals with loans, grants, taxes, and financial strategies; and "Small Business Matters," which discusses managing employees, marketing, and current trends.

> **Get Involved:** The SBA blogs can be found at <u>SBA.gov/blog</u>. All blogs allow users to post their own comments, share on social networking sites, or obtain an RSS feed.

4.3   Other Successful Initiatives: Participation

4.3a   Citizen Engagement and Plan Development

As the working group began constructing SBA's original Open Government Plan in 2010, the team launched a dedicated web page (<u>SBA.gov/open</u>) to provide an overview of the Federal Open Government Initiative and provide a central resource for the public to find information. From the Open Government web page, a citizen engagement tool—OpenSBA—was available to encourage feedback from the public on what should be included in our Open Government Plan. From February 6 through March 19, 2010, the public was invited to submit ideas to guide the development of the plan. Furthermore, our ForeSee Analytics (pop-up survey) is another important, ongoing source of feedback from the public.

> **Get Involved:** Since the OpenSBA engagement, we have maintained a dedicated forum for feedback about open government and SBA.gov. Visit <u>SBA.gov/community/discussion-boards</u>.

4.3b   Webinars for SBIC/SBIR

The Office of Investment and Innovation held two webinar series over the past few months. The first set of webinars targeted SBIC companies and future applicants on the Early-Stage Investment Fund, and it educated several hundred potential program applicants about the new ruling and timelines for execution. The second set of webinars targeted potential SBIR applicants and related stakeholders about future SBIR solicitations from participating agencies.

The webinars for applicants to the SBIC and SBIR programs has now ended, but the webinar series has contributed to greater outreach, and the compiling of lists of interested applicants to both programs. The series set the foundation for a steady stream of webinar-based outreach and education to the greater public through targeted sessions.

4.3c   Reducing Barriers Roundtable

The SBA released feedback from 1000+ entrepreneurs in the Startup America: Reducing Barriers report to highlight ways we can make government work better, such as making federal programs and processes more entrepreneur-friendly. Administrator Mills commented on its release on the SBA blog and a fact sheet has also been posted.

As part of the administration's Startup America initiative, senior government officials visited eight cities to meet with entrepreneurs and hear directly from them about what processes and regulations we need to improve to build a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship and innovation. As President Obama has made clear, support for startups and entrepreneurs is what it takes to grow America's economy and win the future.

The Reducing Barriers Roundtable series has now ended, but we continue to use the report to evaluate entrepreneur feedback on the Administration's policies, and we're working towards evaluating and implementing the recommendations.

4.3d   Apps for Entrepreneurs Challenge

For most entrepreneurs and small businesses, the Federal government has useful programs and services, but it can be hard to identify, engage, and navigate Federal websites. Small businesses often do not know of the many Federal government programs that are custom-tailored just for them. The Apps for Entrepreneurs Challenge was created to give small businesses and entrepreneurs new tools by encouraging those same private sector entrepreneurs to create apps that they would find most helpful.

> **Get Involved:** The Challenge ended in December 2011 with $20,000 in prizes awarded to seven winners. The applications are available for download via entrepreneurs.challenge.gov.

4.3e   SBA Web Chats

SBA sponsors an ongoing web chat series that gives the public a chance to interact with Agency officials and industry leaders. The web chats have recently featured topics of high interest, like women's government contracting programs, disaster recovery, and starting a business. These chats have been well-attended—since September 2011, we have had over 3000 participants attend disaster preparedness webinars—and offer business owners a chance to interact with SBA in real-time.

SBA's web chat series helps to promote the Agency's core programs and services to the small business community and serves as a platform for industry experts (December 2011's chat on tax planning, for example) to provide small business owners with vital business knowledge.

Under the previous Flagship Initiative—the redesign of SBA.gov—the web chat series was highlighted as an ongoing, interactive resource for the small business community.

4.3f   Solicit Public Feedback to Determine Training Needs

The SBA offers training and counseling for entrepreneurs through a variety of resource partners. We also offer a series of online training courses, and we plan to coordinate a centralized engagement for the small business community to suggest the types of training they would like to see us produce for the online training.

By asking the small business community to suggest training topics, we will better understand the needs of the small business community. This direct feedback will create further efficiencies in our entrepreneurial education initiatives by providing a source of baseline information.

4.3g   Customer Relationship Management Tool

SBA deployed a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Tool to assist headquarters and field staff in creating and managing events (seminars, conferences, etc.) and to help interested small businesses to register for these events. The CRM Tool was released in early 2011 and is being enhanced as needed to better meet user needs.

The CRM Tool brings together data from a variety of systems and allows employees to access information in less time and in a more unified fashion. The Tool allows us to manage and track communications with our stakeholders. In conjunction with the AccessPro Case Management system used by our FOIA/PA Office, CRM contributes to more timely and effective responses to FOIA requests and other requests for information.

4.3h   Cosponsorships

SBA has a statutory authority to engage in cosponsorships with associations, corporations, and other government agencies to meet short and long-term goals of training, educating, and disseminating information to benefit the small business community. Our external partners have resources and specialized knowledge or expertise that we can leverage for the benefit of the small business community. Through cosponsored activities, the Agency can provide a greater degree of outreach than it could alone.

The SBA engages in cosponsored activities on a continual basis at both the district office and national levels. Examples of cosponsored activities include National Small Business Week, Procurement Workshop Series, Small Business Resource Workshop Series, Women's Business Roundtables, Veteran Entrepreneurial Training, Youth Entrepreneurial Summits, and various webinars.

Over the past two years we have participated in a total of 351 cosponsored events and activities across the country. There was a lapse in authority from July 31, 2011, through December 23, 2011, which precluded our entering into any new cosponsored activities during this timeframe. Cosponsorship Authority was reinstated and valid through September 30, 2012.

4.3i   Idea Exchange

The Agency continues to offer to the public an open Idea Exchange. Through the SBA.gov Community, we collect suggestions on ideas ranging from new product requests to thoughts about how to improve Federal products or services.

The Idea Exchange allows users to submit their own ideas and fellow members can rate, rank, and sort them according to their popularity, relevance, or importance. When appropriate, we can take action on a user-submitted idea by announcing that we are reviewing, developing, or implementing it. For example, a past Idea Exchange asked users to comment on the industries for which they are seeking loan and grant information. User feedback was taken into account, and more financing data was added to the website's loans and grants search tool.

4.3j   Online Community

Since SBA launched one of the first online communities managed by a Federal agency in 2009, our site has continued to grow and improve. The SBA.gov Community enables conversation between small business owners, government representatives, and industry experts. The Community engages citizens to participate through discussion forums that include a broad range of topics relevant to starting and managing a business, staying in compliance with regulations, and understanding government assistance and support programs. As of March 2012, the Community has grown to over 30,000 small business owners. In our 2010 report, the Community had 9,000 users, which represents a 233% increase.

In order to better serve the public, the Agency must be aware of the issues that small businesses are concerned with and understand the information and services that small business would value most. Our online community allows us to engage in this ongoing dialogue. Online discussion is a channel through which SBA now provides direct support to small businesses and gains insight on everything from discovering underserved business segments to getting feedback on new service ideas.

Get Involved: Join the SBA Community at SBA.gov/community.

4.4   Other Successful Initiatives: Collaboration

4.4a   Green.sba.gov

In October 2011, SBA and the Department of the Navy launched a new website (Green.sba.gov) focused on providing small businesses with access to Green Government Opportunities. The website allows small businesses to gain access to green contracts, grants, and partnerships with the Navy. Its primary feature is a consolidated search capability that allows small businesses to filter procurement opportunities using keywords important to them.

4.4b   SBA Web Services (API)

As a direct result of SBA's efforts to provide easily accessible data sets, the Agency launched the first of many web services, through which we hope to collaborate with the business community to build web applications and solutions. Web services refer to open software systems designed to support machine-to-machine interaction over a network. The SBA.gov web services use an Application Programming Interface (API) to enable this interaction. The API is free of charge, requires no registration, and allows for unlimited calls.

The initial web services launched included Licenses and Permits, Grants and Loans, and Geographic Data (SBA.gov/api). These web services provide programmatic access to data aggregated by SBA. The second set of web services was launched under the Green.SBA.gov

site (Green.sba.gov/apis). These web services include Small Business Programs offered by the federal government, green contracting opportunities for small business, all contracting opportunities for small business in the Green.sba.gov database, and an SBA Office location database.

The SBA will continue to explore avenues for providing better access to data and enabling both private and public sector entities to create new or enhanced services.

You can see all datasets available via web service at SBA.gov/open.

4.5   Other Successful Initiatives: Values

4.5a   Improve Information Sharing Amongst Employees

Investing in our people is a priority for the Agency. One improvement in information sharing amongst employees is the creation of the SBA Daily, a single email message sent to all SBA employees with the day's announcements. The SBA Daily includes standard operating procedure changes, messages from the Administrator, job listings, tips to implement the Plain Writing Act of 2010, and training opportunities for employees. The SBA Daily also updates our employees on ways to participate in agency and government-wide initiatives such as the CFC campaign, the SAVE award competition, and the SBA Employee of the Day during Public Service Recognition week.

To achieve "real-time Government," SBA employees need accurate and easy-to-find information about agency programs and services. Employees who have increased organizational awareness are more productive. Armed with accurate, accessible information, and a culture of sharing, employees are better equipped to make quick decisions. Likewise, improving access and efficiency of support services allows employees to spend more of their time on mission-related tasks.

Plans to improve information sharing include internal instant messaging capabilities, an improved employee directory, and a redesigned Intranet.

4.5b   Integrate Open Government Principles into Employee Training

SBA has incorporated principles of open government in its new employee orientation by ensuring employees are familiar with the Agency's 5-Year Strategic Plan, and by reviewing Agency policies, procedures, and best practices. The Administrator also routinely updates employees on critical issues affecting the Agency through the SBA Daily. Additionally, SBA's Deputy Administrator hosts the Agency's Quarterly Town Hall, in which she briefs staff on the Agency's most pressing issues. The Deputy Administrator also solicits input and questions from employees.

SBA's new Strategic Human Capital Plan (SHCP) for FY 2013–2016 is currently in final clearance. The new SHCP strengthens the Agency's ability to proactively meet many of the issues facing small businesses today, as well as supports the three goals identified in SBA's Strategic Plan, particularly the second strategic goal: Building an SBA to meet the needs of today's small businesses. The Plan reflects a partnership between SBA's Program Offices and Human

Resources. The Plan ensures SBA has an agile and diverse workforce with the right skills to get the job done, and it promotes a culture of excellence where employees' talents are leveraged to build the Agency's capacity to achieve its critical goals. The Agency will continue to create and sustain the organizational excellence needed to deliver our four strategic human capital goals:

1. Build Strategic Partnerships
2. Prepare for Retirement Waves
3. Invest in SBA Employees
4. Incorporate Human Capital Flexibilities, Best Practices, and Innovation