U.S. Small Business Administration
OPEN GOVERNMENT REPORT
2016

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Introduction

President Obama famously demonstrated his commitment to open government by issuing, on his first full day in office, a Presidential Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government. His goals were unambiguously stated—his was to be an Administration that would promote a culture of transparency throughout the federal government, and one that would increase citizen participation and collaboration.

We at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) have enthusiastically embraced the President's vision. We have diligently worked over the past eight years to ensure that the tenets of transparency, participation, and collaboration guide all that we do in service to our 20 million small business customers. Among other things, these principles help to ensure that taxpayers can access information about how we employ the resources entrusted to us, and that entrepreneurs and the public at large can be true partners in refining and enhancing our impacts over time.

In the pages that follow, we demonstrate our unwavering commitment to an ongoing open conversation with all whom we serve.

Matthew Varilek
Chief Operating Officer
SBA Open Government Executive Sponsor

> 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

SBA's Flagship Initiative

Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)

Since 2014 the US Small Business Administration has taken the mantra of Smart, Bold, and Accessible to a new level in enabling open government and transparency via a number of initiatives from the Office of Investment & Innovation.

These endeavors included the SBIR Road Tours, the Growth Accelerator Fund Competition, and a slick, re-vamped, and redesigned SBIR.gov business intelligence data platform.

SBIR Road Tour

The SBIR Road Tour is a national outreach effort to convey the non-dilutive technology funding opportunity provided through the SBIR and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs. Federal and state program managers representing the $2.5 billion in early-stage funding were invited to attend a series of events alongside technology entrepreneurs and innovation supporters from across the United States. The SBIR/STTR programs annually provide $2.5 billion in funding to small, advanced technology firms to spur new technological discoveries and facilitate the commercialization of innovations. Together they represent America's Largest Seed Fund.

Local innovation supporters in communities who have historically underutilized the opportunities provided through the SBIR/STTR programs have invited representatives of the 11 federal agencies participating in the SBIR/STTR programs to engage the small advanced technology community, including women and minority-owned research and development businesses. Every SBIR Road Tour stop represents a coveted opportunity for entrepreneurs to meet directly with federal and state program managers, who fund a wide spectrum of innovative ideas, while also learning about state/local sponsored innovation support infrastructures.

SBA personnel traveled to 22 states and territories in 2015 and 18 in 2016. Over the last two years, SBA staff has met with thousands of budding entrepreneurs, startups, and innovators who are seeking to develop and scale up their next generation innovation through the power of a small business company. This road tour has not only made SBA products more accessible by bringing them directly to entrepreneurs in communities throughout America, but this road tour has also made more transparent the process by which SBA conveys funding through the SBIR and STTF programs.

Growth Accelerator Fund Competition

In 2014, the SBA launched the first ever Growth Accelerator Fund Competition to engage with and support organizations whose sole purpose is to help start-ups grow, become commercially viable, and have a real and sustained economic impact. The goal of the competition is to get an extra infusion of capital to qualified accelerators and the ecosystems in which they play, which in turn provides resources to boost the startup and entrepreneurship communities around them. Over 800 entities applied for $2.5 million in cash prizes. Accelerators and other entrepreneurial ecosystem models competed for awards of $50,000 each. SBA drew a baseline of 2014's 50 winners in a report to Congress. That ecosystem is made up of about 1,500 geographically dispersed startups across a broad array of industries that employ 5,000 people and have collectively raised over $600,000,000. Ultimately, this competition helped SBA move closer to achieving the President's objective of a more open and accessible government by bringing SBA resources directly to qualified accelerators.

Based on that success, SBA ran a second installment of the competition in 2015 with $4 million in funds appropriated by Congress, awarding another 88 prizes. Additionally in 2015, SBA's Office of Native American Affairs (ONAA) used the competition's framework to award an additional $400,000 to ecosystems primarily dedicated to Native American entrepreneurs and small businesses. Through the widespread outreach of this challenge, the SBA was able to reach burgeoning entrepreneurial ecosystems in all 50 states and provide awards across 39 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico. Importantly, the SBA reached some of the most overlooked areas for startups with an explicit focus on providing awards to accelerators that support the underserved, women, the maker community, and geographic regions that traditionally have limited access to capital. 44 percent of 2015's accelerator winners were run by women and 41% were classified as underrepresented groups.

For 2016, SBA's Growth Accelerator Fund Competition will be awarding prizes from a total funding pool of $3.4 million, paid from both SBA's appropriated funds and funds from its partners, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Education. SBA's Office of Investment and Innovation also partnered with ONAA for accelerators assisting the Native American community and added SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development to award additional prizes to the U.S. veterans start-up community.

SBA anticipates awarding up to 68 market stimulation cash prizes of $50,000 each to the highest-rated contestants that also represent the greatest degree of achieving national geographic distribution in both urban and rural areas, including at minimum:

- 14 accelerator models focused in Native American populations (American Indian, Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian)

- 2 accelerator models focused on the veteran community and Veteran entrepreneurship

- 20 accelerator models focused on life-sciences (medical)

- 10 accelerator models focused on science and engineering (non-medical)

- 2 accelerator models focused on education research technology

The SBA is also partnering with the Inter-American Development Bank to provide a prize to one accelerator model focused on assisting the African-descendant start-up community in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The winners of the 2016 Growth Accelerator Fund Competition were announced on August 31, 2016.

SBIR.gov

The SBA maintains the central, SBIR/STTR program-wide database of award and performance information, collectively referred to as SBIR.gov. The dual purpose of continual investment in SBIR.gov is to meet statutory requirements of providing a secure, web-based electronic system capable of collecting, cataloguing, and displaying program information in one centralized place, while also providing both public and private stakeholders with a one-stop-shop repository of valuable, searchable, SBIR/STTR program information. The complex platform collects and hosts multiple levels of programmatic information across seven relational databases:

- Solicitations— all SBIR/STTR solicitations and topics from all Agencies

- Company Registry—company-specific and proprietary information collected from all SBIR/STTR small business applicants and awardees

- Applications— all SBIR/STTR proposals from all agencies

- Awards—all SBIR/STTR awards by number and dollar as collected from all agencies

- Commercialization—company-specific and proprietary information collected from all SBIR/STTR small business awardees and awarding agencies on all SBIR/STTR award commercialization efforts

- Annual Report—required agency reporting of all SBIR/STTR activities to SBA

- Other—information required by statute to be submitted but does not fit into any of the other databases

Although certain database elements containing proprietary information are unavailable to non-registered users, the SBIR.gov portal allows visitors the flexibility to self-identify into roles based on individual interests and needs. Users may search award topics, solicitations, and award activity by agency or small business. Small businesses may connect with outside resource partners for SBIR/STTR-related support or services and utilize outreach tools and informational links to agency offices, conference listings, registrations, webinars, tutorials, and blogs.

Since 2014, the SBA has unveiled a newly revamped gateway for SBIR.gov that operates on a two-click GUI and makes it easier for high tech entrepreneurs to locate viable funding opportunities from agencies as big as the Department of Defense and as small as the Environmental Protection Agency. Since the official launch of the new site in May 2015, the SBA has attracted over a million unique visitors to the platform, and it continues to grow. The SBA is also now more effectively linking the SBIR.gov platform with USAID's Global Innovation Exchange, among others, to enhance channels of opportunities for small business firms to act locally, but think globally, from day one. We have also launched an online tutorial platform system to help demystify the SBIR/STTR application process and raise the SBIR IQ for

potential applicants, while ensuring the democratization of this information freely to the American public.

Eleven agencies, 12 counting SBA, took input from the entire innovation ecosystem and community across the United States, and a lot of amazing suggestions have come to life on the website. The site and robust database that powers it, works using smarter search and computational algorithms, employs a two-click UI/UX interface, and engages with not only federal agencies, but also state and local government support resource networks. The functionality of the multi-agency platform we believe is unique among the "dot govs."

The programs touch, catalyze, and seed the creation of STEM driven innovations in industries critical to the nation's long-term competitiveness and growth, ranging from nanotech to robotics, mobile communications, genetic therapies, clean energy, advanced weapons, and space exploration. Many of today's technology giants, or their underlying technological components, received seed funding through SBIR or STTR awards via the eleven participating federal agencies.

Open Data 2014 Flagship Update

In an unprecedented move designed to increase openness and transparency at the SBA, the SBA has published 447 datasets to its Public Data Listing at www.sba.gov/data. The metadata of the data sets are available from www.sba.gov/data.json and on the data.gov site at http://catalog.data.gov/. The Open Data Working Group updates the Public Data Listing and the Digital Strategy page at www.sba.gov/data and www.sba.gov/digitalstrategy every quarter to report the updated datasets. The SBA maintains, on the OMB MAX site, an ongoing Enterprise Data Inventory (EDI) to catalog the Agency's data assets.

SBA proposed building an Enterprise Data Hub (EDH) to address the challenge of data that is significantly increasing in volume, variety, and velocity. As the quantity of SBA data grows at an ever faster pace, data discovery, management, and analysis becomes a much more complex process.

In support of the open data initiative, SBA will continue to release more data sets on an ongoing basis and improve the completeness of its EDI. In addition, the SBA will:

- Continue to explore and implement more transparent, two-way communication mechanisms to enhance the public engagement process to understand the value of published data and the need for additional valuable datasets

- Continue to enrich SBA's metadata by:
    - Documenting public domain and open license information for existing and new datasets
    - Identifying and publishing all public, restricted public, and non-public APIs
    - Grouping datasets into collections to provide meaningful information to consumers

- Collect usage metrics on published open datasets to analyze usage patterns

- Leverage SBA's EDI to improve internal efficiency and service delivery by identifying reusable datasets/APIs, de-duplicating data, and improving business processes

- Continuously evaluate and improve our data governance process by managing ownership and data quality

- Continue to promote interagency data-sharing by identifying and collaborating with other agencies and internal SBA data stewards

The SBA will also participate in the First ever White House Open Data Innovation Summit on Wednesday September 28th, 2016. The White House, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the General Services Administration (GSA), and the Data Foundation will co-sponsor the summit to showcase the benefits of open data through best practices and success story examples

to emphasize crosscut open data solutions and data-driven innovations at all scales of government.

New and Expanded Initiatives

The Office of Field Operations: Serving SBA's Special Needs Clients

The Office of Field Operations (OFO) is primarily responsible for the direct execution of the Agency's products and services for America's small businesses, representing the critical link between the small businesses that we serve and the policy makers at agency headquarters. As OFO is in the business of connecting customers to resources, OFO is defined by the relative utility to our customers of the products and services that we have connected them with. Additionally, OFO is a critical part of the Agency's responsibility to ensure stewardship and accountability over taxpayer dollars through prudent financial management and oversight.

Using OFO's videophone services and digital technology, the SBA's deaf or hard-of-hearing customers can now connect with SBA employees who are fluent in both American Sign Language and the language of business.

Also, in OFO's district office and SCORE offices, OFO provides direct service to the deaf community, allowing hard-of-hearing customers with questions about loans or services or growing or starting a small business instant communication with staffers who are expert in meeting their special needs.

Additionally:

- OFO has developed sensitivity training for SBA management and staff to assist them in interacting with the disabled

- Classes are available to SBA management and field offices on sign language and working with interpreters

- All SBA district and regional offices can coordinate requests from field offices to ensure interpretative services and other accommodation requests for people with disabilities

The Office of Field Operations is working to expand SBA's accessibility and outreach to the deaf and hard of hearing community. OFO can provide information on SBA's services, to include counseling, contracting, capital, and disaster assistance. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may dial 1-855-440-4960 to connect to the SBA.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Center for Employees

In March 2015, SBA launched the Workplace Conflict Resolution Center (Center), which helps its workforce address conflict at the earliest stage possible by providing the tools and support needed to deal with conflict constructively. The Center is an informal, confidential, and voluntary resource that helps empower employees to resolve conflict in a way that strengthens relationships and creates better understanding of diverse perspectives. The launch of the Center represents the agency's commitment to being a model workplace, as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission encourages the implementation of programs such as this as a best practice in federal government. The Center offers significant value to SBA, including:

- Reducing time and money spent on formal complaints

- Increasing organizational performance and productivity

- Fostering communication and collaboration

Serving Veterans Through Open Government

SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development (OVBD) embraces the concepts of open government and those ideals drive OVBD's work in service to veterans. OVBD's mission is to empower veteran entrepreneurship by formulating, implementing, administering, and promoting policies and programs to equip veteran, service member (active duty, National Guard, Reserve), and military spouse owned small businesses with counseling, training and education, access to capital, and contracting opportunities.

OVBD accomplishes its mission by managing programs directly and through collaboration with SBA's Office of Entrepreneurial Development, Office of Capital Access, Office of Government Contracting and Business Development, and Office of Field Operations and by administering grants to a network of Veteran Business Outreach Centers to ensure SBA programs, services and products are available, accessible and effective for veteran owned small businesses (VOSB). OVBD formulates policy impacting VOSBs through a federal interagency task force, and an advisory council, and as an agency partner of the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program. To maximize its effectiveness, OVBD maintains additional partnerships with private and non-profit sector entities such as academic institutions and veterans service organizations.

Since SBA's last report in 2014, OVBD has experienced growth in the delivery of its core mission area to empower veteran entrepreneurship. This growth in delivery of programs and corresponding outreach required a proactive approach to open data collection and disclosure

across a range of initiatives. The following summarizes OVBD's activities in support of Open Government.

Data Collection and Release and Performance Management Affiliated with the Entrepreneurship Track of the Transition Assistance Program—Known as Boots to Business (B2B)

On January 1, 2013, SBA as part of an interagency effort to expand the DOD's Transition Assistance Program (TAP), launched Boots to Business, the Entrepreneurship Track of TAP. The program provides assistance to transitioning service members (TSM) and their spouses interested in pursuing small business ownership as a post service vocation. The training is delivered on over 213 military installations worldwide and over 47,000 TSMs have participated.

The B2B curriculum assists participants exploring self-employment opportunities by leading them through the key steps for evaluating business concepts and the foundational knowledge required for developing a business plan. Participants are also introduced to SBA resources available to help access start up or growth capital and additional technical assistance.

B2B has exemplified open government principals in multiple ways.

- *Collaboration with Non-Government Organizations (NGO)*

   Boots to Business is delivered in partnership and via cooperative agreements with SBA Resource Partners Small Business Development Centers, Women's Business Centers, SCORE, and Veterans Business Outreach Centers and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. These cooperative agreements enable NGOs to participate in the government program as delivery partners and enables local community resources to be leveraged for the mutual benefit of the citizens that are employed or volunteer to deliver business assistance for an SBA partner and the service members/military spouses that receive support for their transition to civilian life.

- *Interagency Collaboration on Program Performance Management and Data Sharing*

   SBA is a member of the TAP Executive Council and Senior Steering Groups. These executive governance bodies developed and maintain cross-agency program performance reporting. SBA reports program metrics, such as participation numbers and rates, utilization of follow-on training, and tracking of business formations by program participants. This governance structure routinely reports to Executive and Legislative branch stakeholders and serves as an on ramp for non-government stakeholder /general public input to the program by hosting and soliciting input from

guest speakers, research organizations, the Government Accountability Organization etc.

- *Privacy and Data Sharing infrastructure*

  To facilitate program data collection and performance management, OVBD created a data system of record and made multiple public notices via the Federal Register in compliance with the Privacy and Paperwork Reduction Acts. Doing so allowed the public to comment on the program data we collect and its uses.

- *Congressional Requests for Information*

  Throughout the launch and growth of B2B, OVBD maintained staff to proactively and reactively inform Congress on all aspects of the program.

Grants Management and Open Government Principals

OVBD administers multiple grant programs. The largest is the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Program which funds 20 centers to provide transition assistance and other business assistance support services to veteran owned businesses.

In administering programs, OVBD utilizes public-facing websites such as grants.gov and sba.gov to inform interested parties of funding opportunities, and to release detailed program announcements to request proposals. Throughout the process, OVBD staff is dedicated to responding to inquiries and providing any and all appropriate information to assist applicants in the preparation of their proposals.

At the conclusion of VBOC grant competitions, unsuccessful applicants have the opportunity to receive detailed debriefs on their proposals and the evaluation criteria utilized for selection of awardees.

OVBD continuously engages in outreach activities, such as speaking engagements, relevant conferences, and targeted communications with stakeholders such as veteran service organizations, etc. throughout the year to inform the general public and our program beneficiaries on the programs, policies, and additional ombudsman activities administered through our office.

All grant funding information is released on usa.spending.gov and records are maintained in accordance with governing statutes, regulations and policies.

Open Government in Veterans Business Development Policy Formulation

To maximize public and interagency input into policy formulation activities, OBVD administers two Federal Advisory Committees—The Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs (ACVBA), and the Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development

The ACVBA serves as an independent source of advice and policy recommendations to Congress, the President, the SBA Administrator, and the Associate Administrator for veterans' business development. OVBD actively solicits for vets and maintains membership on this committee and supports its work. Meetings are open to the public and a report is written and released annually.

The Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development coordinates the efforts of agencies to improve access to capital, support business development, and achieve pre-established federal contracting goals for small businesses by veterans and service-disabled veterans. The task force is chaired by the SBA and includes representatives from Treasury, Defense, Labor, Veterans Affairs, OMB, General Services Administration, and four non-government members. Like the ACVBA, task force meetings are also open to the public and a report is published each year. In addition, transcripts are released publicly via the SBA website.

Other Successful Initiatives

Entrepreneurial Outreach

SBA joined with US Census, Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, and others on a series of open data events including the National Day of Civic Hacking. SBA supports the White House Opportunity Project that will put data and tools in the hands of civic leaders, community organizations, and families to help them navigate information about critical resources such as access to jobs, housing, transportation, schools, and other neighborhood amenities. Public-sector, private-sector and non-profit organizations have collaborated to share data sets and build tools to promote economic access, small business training, and skills building resources across the country.

The SBA Learning Center continues to provide free, open access to business education for those thinking about startups and others taking their company to the next level. SBA adds new content on a regular basis and openly shares its educational material with partners whose mission supports entrepreneurship education. Nearly 250,000 course registrations were logged in FY15. The service was recognized for the second time as a Federal Government Distance Learning Association honoree this past fiscal year.

SBA continuously updates partner location data sets that power digital tools directing entrepreneurs to more than 1,500 training locations and 12,000 business coaches that provide free/low-cost assistance across the US.

SBA.gov—The Business Gateway

SBA.gov—the Business Gateway investment represents an important part of the US Small Business Administration's digital strategy on providing information on and access to capital,

counseling, federal contracting, disaster assistance, entrepreneurial education and agency initiatives. This includes:

- Access to agency reports and program information
- Online tools to support entrepreneurs and potential small business owners
- Distributed network of program, regional, and field office websites
- Digital communications and outreach targeting small businesses
- Dissemination of content through APIs in machine readable format

TRANSPARENCY

SBA communicated its intentions to redesign the SBA.gov homepage and primary templates to SBA.gov visitors. Visitors were asked to provide feedback on a different design approaches and rank site features and overall designs. The most popular design elements were incorporated into a new layout that promotes small business and SBA program topics, announcements on in-person events, training opportunities and live blog feeds. Blogs provide useful information on agency-level business, key announcements regarding programs and services, and small business-related content, all of which help drive traffic throughout the site and increase visitor retention. Approximately 23% of site visitors have visited at least one blog.

In addition, all the sections of the site have been revamped to improve online accessibility and usability, 508 accessibility and access to key agency and small business related information. This includes information regarding Starting and Managing a business, Loans, Government contracting, senior leadership, open government, budget information, key agency reports, and press information, in addition to headquarters and field offices Web sites.

New microsites have been developed to promote SBA initiatives and include "Small Business Technology Coalition," "Hispanic-American Entrepreneurship Summit" and "Main Street Road Tour," in addition to a regular refresh of National Small Business Week Website.

The agency's e-mail newsletter has experienced significant growth over the last few years with over one million users who have registered to receive weekly information regarding the SBA and small business topics, providing a unique opportunity to reinforce the agency message of supporting small businesses in a variety of ways.

PARTICIPATION

Since visitors to SBA.gov are accessing the site via a mobile device in greater numbers (more than 30%), the Office of Communications and Public Liaison (OCPL) undertook a major redesign project utilizing a responsive design architecture that eliminated content replication costs and improved mobile access. Online trends indicate that within two years, more visitors to SBA.gov will be accessing SBA content and online tools through a mobile device than through a desktop. As a result, digital information and transactional tools will continue to be updated with mobile accessibility in mind.

SBA created a tool called Linc which connects small businesses with SBA Approved Lenders. Through SBA.gov, small business can now communicate directly with an SBA lender by

submitting an online business questionnaire and lending requirements in order to determine if and SBA loan program is available to meet their needs.

OCPL also enhanced its online small business plan tool which allows site visitors to create and save business plans through a step-by-step process. The small business plan tool drives retention on the site and provides the agency with an opportunity to expose repeat visitors to new online features, tools and digital content.

In addition, SBA launched a local assistance online tool which integrates small business events and displays SBA local office and resource partner location data. Users can filter information based on their needs and determine the type of small business training events that are available within their geographic area.

Social media continues to play an important role as more information about the agency's programs, services and initiatives are promoted via SBA's social media sites. OCPL is very active on Facebook, Twitter and regularly deploys video content on YouTube. In addition, digital campaigns integrate SBA.gov, blogs, SBA's national newsletter and social media sites which allow the agency to amplify important information to the public.

COLLABORATION

SBA launched a new National Small Business Week website which features live streaming of conference events along with Google+ hangout events, that allows the public to engage on a variety of small business topics. In addition, a National Winners Nominations Portal was launched to enable electronic submission of nominations packages and improve internal collaboration for judging winners. This has reduced the paper based submission significantly.

Additionally, a new Digital Services team was established and works collaboratively with OCPL on priority projects and digital strategies to drive traffic and increase the value proposition of SBA.gov to small businesses.

Through a robust and integrated website analytics tool (Google Analytics), the Agency continues to set benchmarks, including online success rates, usage patterns, and customer feedback. These metrics are being incorporated to incrementally improve the website and online user experience.

FUTURE

OCPL will continue to integrate its content strategy across its digital platforms in order to reach those thinking about starting a business and small businesses at various stages of their lifecycle. In addition, though significant strides regarding 508 compliance have been achieved, OCPL will continue to improve accessibility through the use of focus sessions and user acceptance testing.

And as the public becomes more engaged with online content through mobile technologies, SBA will continue to streamline key agency content and tools into mobile-accessible formats.

Whistleblower Protection

The Hotline Director for SBA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) is the designated Whistleblower Protection Ombudsman. In this capacity, the Hotline Director collaborates with members of the Whistleblower Ombudsman Federal Working Group and the SBA. SBA OIG completed the OSC Whistleblower Protection Act (WPA) Certification Program for the OIG and collaborated and facilitated the Certification for the Agency in May 2015.

The requirement that new employees be advised of their rights under the Whistleblower Protection Act has been implemented. Distribution of materials advising employees of their rights and remedies under the WPA is expected during the next scheduled orientation.

Information concerning the processes for making confidential disclosures to OSC, and the "Whistleblowing," "Whistleblower Retaliation," and prohibited personnel practice posters are posted prominently throughout SBA HQ and have been distributed to every field office.

Annual written notification of the WPA and OSC's role in enforcing the laws were published in the "SBA Daily," an internal electronic newsletter distributed to all employees. Whistleblower information is posted on the SBA OIG homepage, on our website; and our intranet. The requirement to provide a direct OSC link also has been instituted.

The SBA OIG has developed an online training module for managers and supervisors that provides information and knowledge-based assessment questions to ensure managers and supervisors are aware of the whistleblower protection provisions of Title 5. The training module is available on the SBA intranet website and is a mandatory training for all supervisors and employees every three years.

Records Management

SBA's Records Management Division is working to complete an important email project, required by the 2012 OMB/NARA Managing Government Records Directive (M-12-18). Specifically, Directive Goal 1.2 requires federal agencies to transition from a paper-based "print to file" email preservation policy to an electronic format preservation policy by December 31, 2016. This requirement is intended, in part, to provide greater access and usability to the general public.

The SBA has chosen to follow the Capstone Approach to email management, designed and promoted by the National Archives and Records Administration. This approach allows agencies to direct email management and preservation based on positions within the organization and the work those positions perform.

A Capstone Working Group is creating a technological solution driven by policy. Ultimately the SBA envisions an email management solution automatically enacting disposition and preservation that fulfills the obligations of the Federal Records Act and meeting the requirements of M-12-18.

FOIA

This year marked the 50th anniversary of President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) into law on July 4, 1966, and ushers in a new era of open government with President Barack Obama signing the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 on June 30, 2016. The change in law includes proactive disclosure of federal agency records according to the "rule of three," requiring that agencies publish any federal record or data set that has been requested by members of the public at least three times. SBA's FOIA office regularly publishes frequently requested agency documents and operations data at www.sba.gov. The resource tools and agency records posted to the website are of great interest to emerging entrepreneurs, small business owners, community business partners, attorneys, news media, academics, and the general public. In recent years, SBA's growing commitment to open government through proactive disclosure has been in direct correlation to the declining number of FOIA requests that it receives each year.

In addition, SBA has automated its FOIA system to make FOIA requests and replies more readily accessible. SBA is now using the FOIAonline system, foiaonline.regulations.gov, to make FOIA requests and document production easier for the general public.

SBA FOIA requests

(Bar chart showing Number of Requests)
- FY 2013: 4946
- FY 2014: 1312
- FY 2015: 926
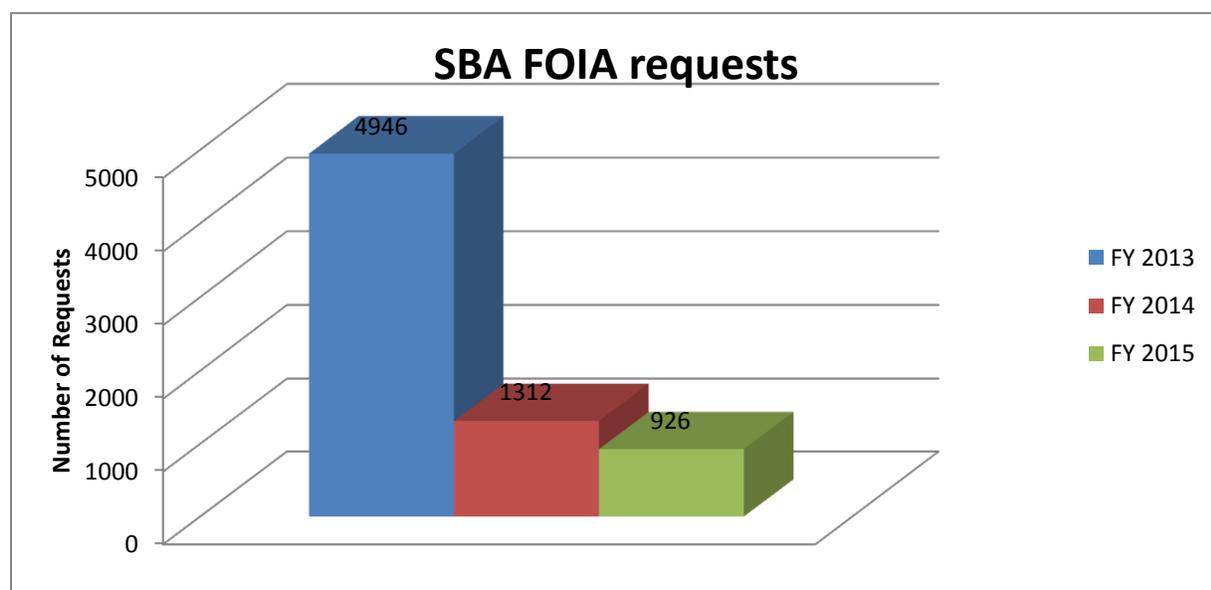
SBA will continue to identify frequently requested records and data sets for proactive disclosure and leverage the expertise of internal, cross-functional teams (Office of the Chief Information Officer, Office of Communications and Public Liaison, FOIA, and other SBA programs) to achieve greater transparency and open government through FOIA.

Proactive FOIA

The Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts Office routinely encourages the proactive disclosures and postings of information that is of interest to the public. Examples are:

- News and Press Releases

- Disaster Press Releases

- Speeches

- Congressional Testimony

- Weekly Lending Reports

- Media and Press Contacts

- Regional and local Media

- Fiscal Year Budget Summary

- Press Release Archive

- Congressional Correspondence (redaction of sensitive information)

- Field Office Home Pages and staff directories

- Headquarters Program Offices Home Pages and contact information

- Annual FOIA Reports

- Quarterly FOIA Reports

- List of FOIA Public Liaisons and FOIA Service Center Representatives

- Frequently Requested Records

- Privacy Act Systems of Records

- Privacy Impact Assessments

Since August 2012, we have been posting Congressional correspondence that does not contain personally identifiable information at https://www.sba.gov/content/congressional-correspondence. This ongoing program has seen 135 pieces of Congressional correspondence posted since our last open government report, and 441 letters since inception.

These letters cover every program and every aspect of what we do at the SBA, from our loan programs, to disaster assistance, to public events like SBIR Road Tour.

Congressional Requests

The mission of the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (CLA) is to assist in the development and enactment of SBA legislative proposals and to serve as the liaison for SBA's communications on all legislative and congressional activities with Congress and the agencies that support Congress. CLA also serves as the primary point of contact with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to provide comments on legislation and Administration initiatives. The Associate Administrator for CLA reports directly to the Administrator in carrying out this mission.

In carrying out this mission, CLA is the primary contact for all communication with Congress. This includes being the point of contact for all requests for information about SBA programs and

preparing SBA management to testify for Congressional hearings, roundtables and other meetings with Members of Congress

The SBA Answer Desk

The SBA Answer Desk is the national call center and the public face of the Small Business Administration. The Answer Deck is the focal point for inquiries from potential/current small business owners, federal/local government agencies, borrowers and lenders. It responds to inquiries regarding SBA programs, federal, state, local, public, and private programs for small businesses.

The Small Business Administration has launched a new program to provide deaf and hard of hearing customers a better option for communicating with the Small Business Administration to obtain support for their current/potential small business. The Answer Desk now responds directly to deaf and hard of hearing customers via the American Sign Language Video Customer Support Line. We have responded to over 200 clients via our video support line.

The Answer deck takes more than 40,000 phone calls per year, approximately 2,300 of which are non-English. It also handles almost 16,000 emails in a year. Contact the SBA Answer Desk at 1-800-U-ASK-SBA (1-800-827-5722), or e-mail answerdesk@sba.gov.

Answer Deck Agents are knowledgeable, friendly and they take pride in determining the needs of callers and ensuring they provide the right answers.

The Answer Deck is available to customers via phone, e-mail, and letter Monday–Friday 9am–5pm (EST).

The Answer Desk will continue to do its part in furthering the open government initiative by:

- Providing direct links so clients can find the information they need at sba.gov
- Communicating with program offices on the number of inquiries that it responds to regarding their programs
- Reporting any recurring problems with programs or web pages
- Providing agencies with answers on programs and services or direction on how to get answers
- Using local assistance and the events calendar to provide local resources to clients