Building a Data Foundation:

The Role of Data and Evidence in Advancing the President's Management Agenda

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Introduction

The President's Management Agenda is one of the primary tools an administration can use to communicate and facilitate its internal management priorities across the federal enterprise. The Biden administration published its PMA Vision in November 2021, emphasizing three key priorities: strengthening and empowering the federal workforce; delivering excellent, equitable, and secure federal experience and customer experience; and managing the business of government. This PMA builds on the priorities of past administrations, which also included priorities centered around the federal workforce, customer experience, financial performance and data transparency.[1]

The Partnership for Public Service, in collaboration with Guidehouse, conducted a series of events in 2022 with senior PMA priority area leaders, experienced federal management practitioners and former government executives to share highlights of the administration's management agenda and help federal employees think about how it relates to their work.

This report expands on these discussions by providing agencies with critical building blocks for meeting the PMA's goals, focusing on investments in strong data infrastructure and using data to improve internal operations and external services.

This report features case studies detailing how three agencies have successfully created a data infrastructure and used that data to drive lasting change on the three PMA priorities.

The case studies examine how the Department of the Air Force uses data to enhance management of its workforce; how the Department of Veterans Affairs gathers and applies data to deliver important services and improve the customer experience; and how the Bureau of the Fiscal Service at the Department of the Treasury uses data to better manage the business of government.

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[1] https://trumpadministration.archives.performance.gov/PMA/Presidents_Management_Agenda.pdf
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/omb/budget/fy2002/mgmt.pdf

The Role of Data and Evidence in Advancing the President's Management Agenda

The President's Management Agenda: From Priorities to Results Series

Current and former federal leaders from across the federal government participated in a series of events earlier this year hosted by the Partnership for Public Service and Grant Thornton Public Sector (acquired by Guidehouse on September 30, 2022) to discuss the PMA and share thoughts on how to effectively implement its goals.

The sessions offered federal participants the opportunity to learn what gives PMA initiatives staying power and how to drive enterprise-wide change while adapting to the needs of the federal workforce and the public.

The first event, hosted on Jan. 27, 2022, brought together members from both the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations to reflect on how the PMA came to be and lessons learned over 20 years of management agendas, with an eye on what makes certain PMA initiatives stick over others and how to successfully implement the new PMA vision.

At the second event on March 23, 2022, White House Office of Management and Budget officials provided an overview of the three priorities in the Biden administration's PMA Vision. Federal leaders discussed how agencies can make progress on the priorities while adapting to the current needs of the workforce and the public.

The third event, held on June 21, 2022, featured a panel conversation about how this administration, federal agencies and Congress can work together to drive enterprise-wide change in each area of the PMA.

Using Data to "Strengthen and Empower the Federal Workforce" at the Department of the Air Force

The first priority area in the PMA is strengthening and empowering the federal workforce. The focus of this priority, summarized on performance.gov, is to "make the federal government an ideal, modern and forward-thinking employer." To do this, the PMA notes, "We need to focus on those who keep our government running and deliver services each day."
Successful change in this area is measured through four broad metrics in the PMA.

Create a more equitable employee engagement experience across the federal workforce, including across employee groups and organizational units within agencies.

Improve the federal hiring process to efficiently hire the best talent.

Attract the right talent for the right roles.

Promote diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility strategies and practices across all human capital activities.

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Federal agencies have focused on improving employee engagement and satisfaction for many years as seen in the [Best Places to Work in the Federal Government](#) ® rankings and reports produced by the Partnership and BCG. The PMA encourages agencies to refocus and reprioritize these efforts. Data plays a key role in this priority, not only to measure success, but to help identify and solve problems.

The need for agencies to focus their attention on employee well-being has become increasingly important. "Taking care of our people and ensuring continuity of operations in support of our mission during an unprecedented global pandemic and amid multiple global crises has been one of the greatest challenges the department has taken on in its history," said a senior State Department official.[2]

In developing this report, we examined efforts to improve the employee experience at the Department of the Air Force. While military departments often operate differently than other federal agencies, our investigation of the Air Force shows that many workforce initiatives are equally well-suited for the civilian sector.

The Air Force has used data to better understand the staffing needs of its large workforce, and data is continually used throughout the lifecycle of a service member to create a better employee experience. The Air Force also provides data to service members to empower them to find solutions to issues affecting their work life.

Using data to understand the staffing needs of a large workforce

The Air Force employs nearly 670,000 personnel, including active-duty military members, civilian employees and those in the reserve component. The Air Force's mission requires a diverse civilian and military staff covering more than 90 major installations around the world. In an average year, the Air Force recruits approximately 30,000 new active-duty personnel. Given the sheer size of the agency and the complexity and diversity of talent management, keeping track and making best use of employee data is a necessary function.

The Air Force has long been a leader in using data to understand its staffing environment, and in particular its staffing needs for both civilian and military personnel. Data can be a tremendous resource that informs changes to existing policies to support personnel needs.

For example, the Air Force reviews macro-level military recruitment and retention trends on a monthly basis to see whether it is on track to hit its annual target of active-duty military numbers. If recruitment and retention activities are off track, the Air Force can modify policies or approaches to better reach its goals. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Air Force saw historically high retention rates for active military members and was poised to surpass its needed staffing numbers. This provided an opportunity for the Air Force to revisit policies that constrained active-duty military members from leaving or entering the reserve component.

"We offered these voluntary measures and we incentivized people who wanted to leave sooner than they could to move into the reserve component where we knew we had holes and weren't hitting our numbers," said Gwen DeFilippi, the Air Force assistant deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel and services.

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[2] https://bestplacestowork.org/analysis/profiles-in-improvement/effective-leadership-senior-leaders/

In the Air Force, an airman's move to a new base or enrollment in an educational program can come with additional service requirements to ensure the Air Force's investment is well spent. DeFilippi said this changed during the pandemic; airmen who owed service because of these programs were no longer constrained by their service requirements and could enter the reserves. This agile approach benefited both the Air Force's staffing goals and its active military members' engagement and preferences.

Data also improved the Air Force's ability to hire civilian staff more quickly. For example, the Air Force developed a dashboard that shows the status of every job search and who is responsible for taking the next action and by what date. That transparency holds staff accountable and helped Air Force cut its time-to-hire from 120 days to under 80 days as of October 2019. This is a dramatic improvement since the federal government takes an average of 98 days to make a hire—more than twice the time it takes the private sector.

The Air Force is currently updating its information technology personnel systems to focus on the employee experience by combining disparate datasets and applying personnel data to a variety of uses. Like many other federal agencies, the Air Force's current HR systems depend on technologies that date back as far as the 1970s. Due to decades of HR IT systems being built on top of each other, employees were often asked to input data they had already given regularly and had to navigate a difficult user experience to complete both basic and complex tasks, such as reviewing benefits or searching current job openings.

The Air Force is in the midst of a massive IT overhaul to improve this employee experience. This initiative will be successful only if data sources that currently live across different silos of the organization can be combined. Because of this, the Air Force has been focusing on creating a data lake.

Prior to the existence of a data lake, employee information was kept in a variety of locations. For example, an employee's personnel record lived separately from information about their flying activities, which was often maintained by the air base where they are located. There were also separate medical databases that included information such as medical restrictions on where an employee could be assigned.

"[Medical restrictions] were in a totally different database and we have all of these [different] data sources, and we had very much limited ourselves. So with this data lake, we are now pulling in all the data so that you can have a better user experience," DeFilippi said.

As other agencies think about how to strengthen and empower their workforces, access to data will be critical. When all employee data is in one place, it allows an agency's personnel office to more easily make informed decisions about staffing and understand trends. The Air Force's experience demonstrates that upgraded data and IT systems around personnel pave the way for an improved employee experience.

Focusing on Employee Experience

In August 2020, Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., the Air Force chief of staff, published the report *Accelerate Change or Lose*, which emphasizes the empowerment of airmen as a key priority for the Air Force.

"We must empower airmen at all levels, delegating to the lowest capable and competent level possible, mindful that with empowerment and trust comes accountability," Brown wrote. "These efforts must also enhance the quality of service and quality of life for our airmen and their families, making the U.S. Air Force an attractive career choice for all Americans."

In addition to overhauling its HR IT system, the Air Force has made several substantial changes to improve the employee experience of uniformed and civilian personnel. These changes offer useful lessons in how other federal agencies can support the PMA priorities through a strong culture around data and evidence.

Until recently, active-duty military members were not allowed much input into their place assignments. Airmen might request to be placed in a location without knowing whether their skills were needed there. To improve both the employee experience and efficiency, the Air Force adopted an algorithm, similar to the one used for medical school internship matching, to allow airmen to have a bigger say in where they would like to be stationed. Now, airmen can see what positions are available in an online talent marketplace and bid on jobs accordingly.

"We're better able to accommodate individual preferences and start to move ourselves into where we need to be for the 21st century, which is to recognize that human capital is probably the most precious resource we have. So we need to nurture and retain it," DeFilippi said.

At the Air Force, workforce data is available from the time a prospective service member starts thinking about enlisting through the end of their career. The Air Force launched a Work Interest Navigator that helps prospective service members understand what kinds of jobs are available to them in the military and how their skills may be used.

The Air Force continues this engagement after a service member joins the Air Force by making opportunities available to new airmen that include classes and degrees through the Community College of the Air Force. These opportunities are tracked throughout the employee lifecycle to allow the Air Force to better understand what type of training is being used most often. The data can also be analyzed to demonstrate how upskilling opportunities tie to promotions, and which educational investments are most likely to result in desired outcomes.

This approach to collecting and analyzing upskilling data can prove highly useful to other agencies. By tracking professional development outcomes of staff during the employee lifecycle, leaders can better understand which efforts are most beneficial for employees in the long run.

Letting Staff Use Data to Solve Problems

The Partnership's 2021 [Best Places to Work in the Federal Government](#) rankings place the Air Force in the upper quartile for "Effective Leadership: Empowerment" for its civilian employees.
This theme of empowerment permeates several data initiatives implemented recently by the Air Force. Most notably, the Air Force empowers employees and service members to take control of their careers through a process called functional community management.

A key element of functional community management is the development team, which reviews individual cases to provide specific career advice. For example, if a development team notices the individual has a high school background, they can recommend the Air Force's community college program so that their workforce over time will have more graduates with stronger writing and analytical skills.

In addition, the teams have been critical to understanding diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility needs across the workforce. These development teams have been charged to think about barriers to success, but in 2021 placed an emphasis on DEIA.

The personnel team gave the development teams all the diversity data available for their department, including historic promotion rates by race, ethnicity and gender. The development teams were then tasked to use the data to understand barriers to success within their departments and how they planned to address them. This process has now gone through its second cycle with updated data and is seeing improved action plans. The Air Force also provided facilitators to these development groups to help drill deep into what can be difficult conversations. This program highlights an important process of equipping leaders with the data they need to identify concerns and take corrective actions.

In addition to asking functional communities to evaluate barriers to service, the Air Force has barrier analysis working groups composed of volunteers who provide grassroots perspectives on barriers to service. The Air Force now has six teams that represent different races and ethnicities, along with an LGBTQ initiative team as well. These teams are given dashboards on diversity so they can look at the data while making recommendations. The teams also have access to the agency's survey team "so that when they have a hypothesis, they can go out with survey research to see if we can confirm that it's an issue," DeFilippi explained.

Through these efforts, the Air Force has worked to both strengthen and empower its workforce. Employees are given knowledge from their personnel teams to better understand and help solve workforce problems across the agency.

Takeaways
Organization: Collecting workforce data and maintaining it in an accessible database allows multiple stakeholders to access the same information and plan for future staffing needs. This also improves the employee experience by preventing employees from having to input the same information multiple times.   **Collection:** Tracking professional development opportunities of employees allows leaders to understand which efforts are most beneficial for employees (for example, those that correspond to higher retention and promotion rates).   **Employee-Led:** When employees are given access to aggregated HR data, they can provide context to the data and help solve workforce problems across the agency.

Using Data to "Deliver Excellent, Equitable, and Secure Federal Services and Customer Experience" at the Department of Veterans Affairs

The second priority outlined in the PMA is delivering excellent, equitable, and secure federal services and customer experience. The PMA vision states that "the federal government must deliver a simple, seamless and secure customer experience, on par with or more effective than leading consumer experiences." The vision also calls for an improved understanding of customers' needs by gathering feedback, conducting research, sharing insights and testing new approaches to ensure agencies are designing with their customers in mind every step of the way.

Success around this priority is measured using three broad metrics.

Increasing experience quality to be on par with the best consumer experiences, or other appropriate comparisons.

Reducing burden for government's customers.

Improving trust in government.

If users feel their needs are not met, it can reduce trust in government overall. "When we don't meet their expectations, it actually undermines their trust in government. We undermine trust both in our competence and the extent to which we understand and care about those in need of our service." said

Federal Chief Information Officer Clare Martorana in the Partnership's 2021 "Government for the People" report.

This case study focuses on customer experience efforts at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The agency is a trailblazer across the federal government in the use of data. The VA collects relevant data on its customers, uses that data to provide relevant services and then collects more data on the user experience to continue improving services that are most useful to veterans.

Leading the Practice: The Robust History of Customer Experience at the Department of Veterans Affairs

Leadership at the VA has spent the past several years transforming the organization to better serve veterans. In 2015, the department established a Veterans Experience Office led by a chief veterans experience officer reporting directly to the secretary to provide central leadership on initiatives to improve veterans' interactions with VA healthcare, benefits and memorial services.[3] Department leaders recognized that the agency was collecting a multitude of performance measures that most often centered on internal operations such as how long a process takes to complete. Few metrics were based on feedback from veterans themselves on how they viewed their experience with the department.

This changed when the VA started collecting more data and providing it to senior leaders to inform decision-making. A portion of this new data collection process was facilitated through a customer experience data platform called Veterans Signals (VSignals).

VSignals gives veterans the option to provide feedback in real time through user surveys. The VSignals system aggregates data from these surveys into one feed to identify issues that are top of mind for veterans or illustrate whether one particular service area is improving or declining rapidly. The system helps the VA sort through customer experience priorities and determine what issues need immediate attention.

For example, the Veterans Health Administration learned that veterans were concerned with the lack of information about receiving prescriptions. To address this concern, the VHA created an online tool that allows veterans to track their prescriptions independently rather than requiring them to contact the agency for updates. The percentage of customers surveyed who cited this as a challenge dropped to 9% in the first half of 2021 from 21% in 2019.

The Partnership's annual "Government for the People" report, produced with Accenture Federal Services, highlights the dramatic change in the VA's overall approach to customer experience and its results. "Agencies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs have demonstrated it is possible to shift the mindset of an entire agency to a customer-first ethos. Its enterprise-wide, comprehensive customer experience initiatives raised trust in the VA among veterans by 24% since 2016."

When it comes to performance management, customer experience data can too easily fall off the list of critical metrics for federal agencies. The VA led the charge in reversing this trend, creating a model for what a customer-experience-focused, data-driven agency can look like.

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[3] https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Time-for-a-Change-10.23.18.pdf

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[Barbara C. Morton](), the deputy chief veterans experience officer, noted, "Now what we're seeing is customer experience is sort of elevated as a co-equal measure of performance and a type of evidence to help us think through how we might best serve veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors."

Morton also emphasized that this is an ongoing goal for the department: "I think for us, at a macro level, trust is our north star. We're never going to rest until we reach 90% or above where veterans … either agree or strongly agree with the statement that they trust VA to fulfill its cut [of] this country's commitment to veterans. And how do we get there?"

The VA has shown that customer experience data is not simply nice to have, but critical to an agency's ability to deliver services to its customers. Leaders need relevant customer experience data to understand how their customers are using agency services, how those services are received, and what aspects of service delivery need attention, funding or adjustments in the future.

Using Data to Give Veterans Services That Are Most Useful to Them

One of the ways the VA uses data and evidence to create a better customer experience is by having extremely targeted customer communications outreach. The VA has worked to collect more accurate demographic data to improve its internal database. By doing this, the VA can share data with program officers so they can target outreach based on zip code, demographics, service era or other factors to ensure veterans are receiving only communications that are important to them.

"It's moving away from the concept of a … one-size-fits-all communication and thinking about the art of possible in terms of more nuanced and potentially customized, personalized communications," Morton said. By collecting relevant data, sharing it with the correct internal stakeholders, analyzing pertinent characteristics of the data and applying that analysis to programs, the VA creates a recipe for success.

This approach proved to be extremely useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the VA wanted to provide critical medical services to veterans who had been deported from the United States to Mexico due to a change in immigration status. Using its demographic data, the VA could identify deported veterans and deliver COVID-19 vaccines to them at a border crossing site in California. Veterans and their relatives were able to receive this healthcare and learn about other available services through targeted outreach via email and social media. This example demonstrates what is possible when agencies collect, share, analyze and apply relevant data about their employees and programs.

Moving Toward Human-Centered Design

Now that the VA has institutionalized its focus on customer experience, the department has turned its attention to delivering excellent customer experience through human-centered design practices.

Human-centered design ensures that programs and services are created with the end user in mind and that ease of use is prioritized, an approach that requires a strong foundation of quantitative and qualitative user data and insights. The VA acknowledges that human-centered design encourages empathy and understanding, which helps create an excellent customer experience and in turn increases trust between the user and the agency. The department is currently focused on scaling up and institutionalizing this practice.

"We need to be able to empower our employees in VA to know how to be design thinkers and human-centered in their orientation in terms of problem framing and problem solving," Morton said.

To improve human-centered design, the Veterans Experience Office uses a process known as journey mapping, a best practice in customer experience initiatives. Journey mapping begins with observation and qualitative research through interviews to ensure the perspectives of both customers and VA staff members are captured—insights that are often collected in many forums in federal agencies but not always applied and used in a comprehensive way. The VA notes, "a veterans journey map examines veterans' situations, needs, behaviors and dreams. It marks a shift in the VA viewpoint from system-centered to user-centered, allowing VA to put the veteran at the center of policy, program and process decisions."[4]

The VA has created dozens of journey maps analyzing different interactions a veteran may have with the department. For example, the department developed a patient experience journey map to focus on what the VA calls "the moments that matter." This allowed the Veterans Health Administration to launch different innovative patient experience improvements such as the Red Coat Ambassador program, through which volunteers and employees are given recognizable red coats or vests to greet and assist veterans and their caregivers when they enter medical centers.

To encourage the use of journey mapping and other human-centered design best practices, the department is standing up its first-ever Customer Experience Institute. The department is also implementing a pilot program for current employees to become certified in human-centered design. In addition, the department is considering establishing a fellowship program so those who work outside of customer experience can learn more about the practice.

These practices at the VA can serve as a guiding example for other agencies across government that are looking to improve their own customer experience outcomes.

Takeaways
Collection: Customer experience data collection is cyclical. By collecting detailed demographic information on customers, agencies can use data to provide relevant services. An agency can then collect user data on the service experience and continue improving iteratively.   **Process:** The process of using data effectively involves multiple steps. Agencies must collect, share, analyze and apply relevant data about their employees and programs to see lasting outcomes.   **Empathy:** By thinking about the customer through a journey mapping process, human-centered design can strengthen empathy and lead to better user experiences.

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[4] https://news.va.gov/72161/journey-maps-plotting-moments-matter-veterans-families/
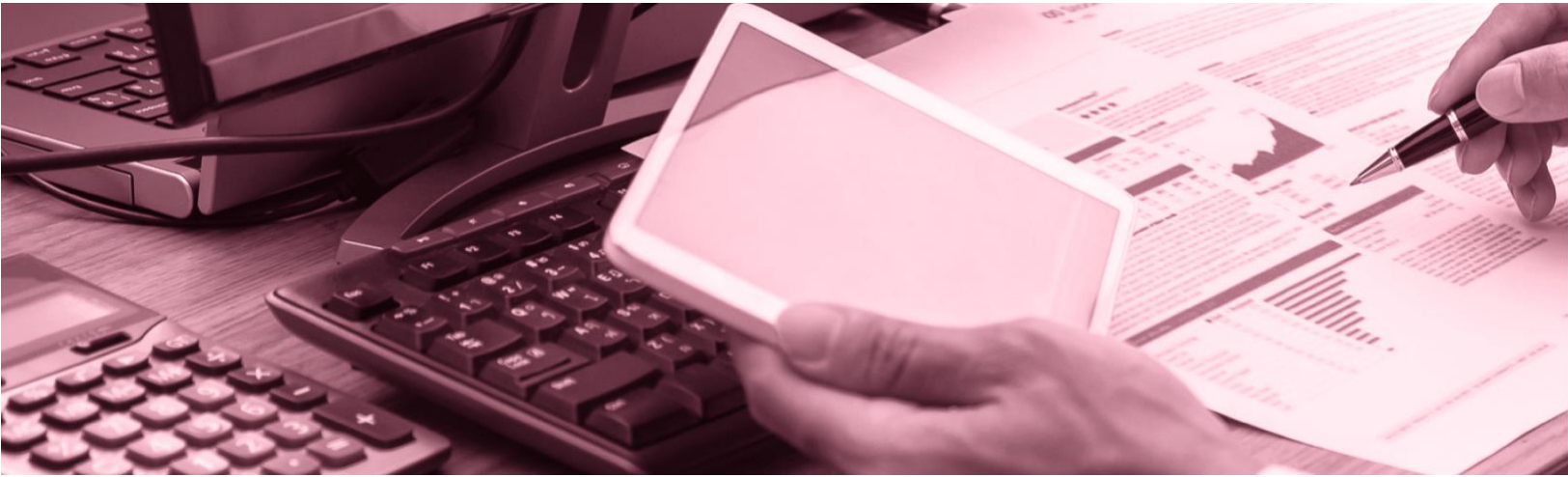
Using Data to "Manage the Business of Government" at the Bureau of the Fiscal Service

The final priority featured in the PMA is managing the business of government. The administration asks federal agencies not just to provide services, but to think of the way they provide those services as an opportunity to improve our country. "The goods and services we buy and the financial assistance and resources we provide and oversee [can] create and sustain good quality union jobs, address the persistent racial and wealth gaps, and address other challenges our nation faces." reads the PMA vision. "Federal agencies will look across existing administration initiatives to ensure that system-wide, continuous improvement in federal acquisition and financial management systems occurs."

Success around this priority is measured through two metrics.

Foster lasting improvements in the federal acquisition system to strengthen the U.S. domestic manufacturing base, support American workers, lead by example toward sustainable climate solutions and create opportunities for underserved communities.

Build capacity in federal financial management, including through federal financial assistance, to catalyze American industrial strategy, address climate-related risks and deliver equitable results.

The use of data and evidence is critical to this priority. Without federal data systems to track where and how money is flowing in and out of the federal government, there is no way to know how well agencies are managing the business of government. There is no better example of an agency tasked with collecting and tracking financial data than the Bureau of the Fiscal Service at the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Current data collection and management efforts at Fiscal Service show how important customer-friendly data transparency is for fiscal management. In addition, the bureau demonstrates how an agency can create internal data systems and an evidence-based culture to meet agency goals.

Customer-Friendly Data Transparency for Fiscal Management and Analysis

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"The biggest challenge we have in the federal government is that we produce volumes of data, but we don't necessarily do a good job of telling the consumer of that data what the known limitations might be."

—Fiscal Service Commissioner Tim Gribben. Fiscal Service's recent work to publish data with accompanying data dictionaries helps solve this problem.

Federal agencies could not manage the business of government without the Bureau of the Fiscal Service. "Any revenue that the government collects comes through us, and almost all payments that are made by federal agencies come through us," explained Justin Marsico, Fiscal Service's chief data officer and deputy assistant commissioner. "All federal agencies submit detailed information about their accounting on a regular basis to Treasury and it's validated."

The data then becomes available for the public and other federal agencies to access, facilitating better fiscal management. For example, the bureau manages USAspending.gov, a website where users can see how all money flows from the federal government. This may seem like a simple data repository, but it is a monumental effort of principled commitment to data transparency.

Some of the most common users of USAspending.gov are federal workers who need their own agency's data but cannot easily access their internal databases. The utility of this online reporting system for federal agencies was highlighted during the pandemic when many agencies faced new reporting requirements from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to show how federal funds were being spent. Fiscal Service was able to leverage the work it had already done to make USAspending.gov data more user-friendly to help agencies meet these requirements. It worked closely with the Office of Management and Budget to design a reporting framework where agencies could meet the guidelines by simply tagging data they already reported to the bureau, which would in turn publish the data online.

By leveraging this existing system, the bureau was able to reduce additional burden on agencies and provide a consistent way for users inside and outside government to see how pandemic recovery money was being spent.

The bureau also manages fiscaldata.treasury.gov, a website that shows the national debt, deficit and other critical federal financial information. Fiscal data found on this site was previously provided in reports, which made conducting any time-series analysis to understand how national finances have changed over time extremely cumbersome.

The bureau focused on the customer experience of reporters, researchers and the public at large, and decided to present the data in a machine-readable format. Now, over 80 tables from 32 datasets— including information on the national debt, interest rates and federal spending—are available for

download, along with a data dictionary and metadata. The data dictionary and metadata help users understand the sources and limitations of the data, including how the data should and should not be used to answer questions. This also makes it easier for users to access data as soon as the agency publishes it instead of waiting for reports to be released.

This example of prioritizing both data transparency and the customer experience in using data for analysis should be a beacon for other agencies as they strive to manage the business of government better.

Cultivating Data Culture and Investing in Internal Systems to Use Data

While improving data accessibility to the public is key, Fiscal Service also recognizes the importance of creating internal systems around data—and a complementary culture—to achieve its mission. A strong data culture exists when all employees understand the value of data-driven decision-making. Such a culture also encourages nontechnical practitioners to familiarize themselves with the use of data for policies and programs that they work on and manage instead of relying solely on data specialists.

Employees at Fiscal Service highlighted some internal initiatives that have helped create a culture of data across the bureau. Overall, the bureau is taking an organic approach to building enthusiasm, access and skills from within. For example, it hosts a series of "data challenges" where all employees are given the opportunity to use datasets to solve a problem relevant to the agency, whether or not they have a background in data analysis.

The first data challenge at Fiscal Service was related to the climate footprint of the bureau, and both employees trained in data science and those who had barely worked with data before were excited to participate. The bureau also created an Analytics Community of Practice and a Fiscal Data University to help upskill employees who are not as well-versed in data analytics through a common curriculum. In addition, it has built libraries of analytical tools for staff to use, mitigating the need to reinvent the same analysis repeatedly. Rather than hiring data scientists to sit within each office, the bureau has learned that building skill sets of existing staff first helps meet most of their analytical needs.

"[Teams] build the skill set within their staff first and then see what gaps are remaining and how [to] resolve those gaps through either upskilling or through additional resources," said Tim Gribben, the Fiscal Service commissioner.

In addition to strengthening its data-driven culture, a focus has been on creating better internal data systems.

"One of our internal strategies is to first improve our data structure, our data standards and our architecture so we can better leverage the data we have and turn it into information," Gribben said. "We can combine our disparate data sources together so we can make informed decisions."

Office-based silos within the bureau previously resulted in multiple data repositories without standardization, which made it difficult for datasets to connect to each other and tell a complete story of the agency's work. Because of this, Fiscal Service decided to link its data and IT strategies.

Technology has evolved over the past decade in such a way that data can be stored and accessed in a more user-friendly manner when data and IT leads work together. For example, the transition away from on-premises data warehouses to a cloud-based "Fiscal Data Hub" helps different parts of Fiscal Service share data faster and more efficiently. It also allows employees to analyze data in a cloud-based

environment, which mitigates the need for advanced hardware across workstations, saves money, allows for better remote work and reduces redundancies.

This improved internal data sharing was put to the test during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bureau of the Fiscal Service was tasked with providing all pandemic relief payments to American households and businesses. The bureau's data hub made it possible for the Internal Revenue Service and VA to share account data for individuals to receive direct deposits, limiting the need for checks and reducing the likelihood of fraud. This approach improved payment integrity and allowed the agency to distribute payments to the American public faster.

| Takeaways |
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| **Transparency:** There is more to data transparency than simply publishing data. In order for data to be useful to stakeholders, it must be easy to find, easy to use, and include information about limitations and sources. **Infrastructure:** Existing data infrastructure can be leveraged to solve new problems instead of reinventing tools every time. **Culture:** Creating an evidence-based culture facilitates data-driven decision-making across every level of an agency. |

The Role of Data and Evidence in Advancing the President's Management Agenda

Conclusion

Nearly one year since the release of the Biden administration's PMA vision, the management agenda has become more detailed with clearer goals. Each priority now includes success metrics and strategies, and the administration has published a [PMA learning agenda](#).

The agencies highlighted in this report have shown that change and improvement can happen when emphasis is placed on data and evidence and ambitious goals are set. The PMA provides an opportunity for those within the federal government to think about how they can strengthen and empower the workforce; deliver excellent, equitable and secure services and a better customer experience; and enhance the management of internal business practices.

Our case studies demonstrate that investments in data systems and culture cannot be disentwined from other management goals. Leaders must understand the role that data and evidence play in their agencies to make informed decisions that will drive progress toward organizational goals.

Examples of questions leaders should ask about their data systems and culture include:
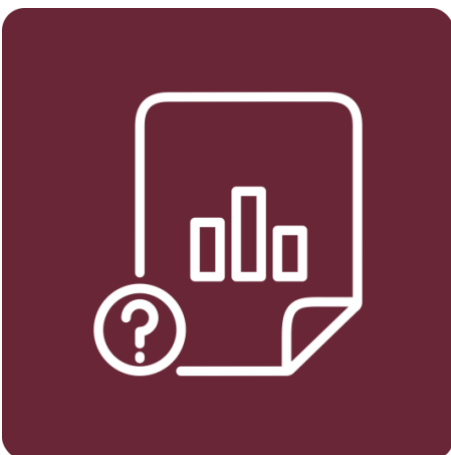
- What data do I need to make decisions? Where does that data currently live? Do we already collect that data?
- Can the data I need to solve these problems bring new insights?
- How can I use existing data and reporting structures to solve new problems?
- How can the data we have be used? What are the limitations?
- Does my staff understand the importance of data? Are only data professionals using data?

The strategies employed by the Air Force, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Bureau of the Fiscal Service can be adopted by agencies without new regulations or legislation. At the same time, support from the Biden administration and the Office of Management and Budget can help agencies take the first step down what can be a daunting path.

This effort can be supported by the administration's recent launch of the "Year of Evidence for Action," an effort designed to help agencies understand the value and benefit of enhancing the use of data and evidence to better inform government programs, policies and regulations. The Year of Evidence for Action will encourage agencies to share leading practices, strengthen and develop new strategies for evidence-based decision-making, and increase collaboration among decision-makers to achieve the goals set out in the PMA.

Our hope is that this report will inspire agency leaders to think differently about what is possible through the use of data and evidence to advance the PMA and ultimately improve delivery of services to the American public.

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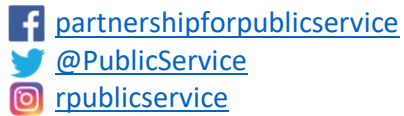**Max Stier**
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The Role of Data and Evidence in Advancing the President's Management Agenda

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