

# DATA Act

How are federal agencies working to make data on trillions of dollars in spending more accurate and transparent?

AN OVERVIEW FROM GAO-16-261

## Citizens want to see how federal money is spent.

USAspending.gov currently reports data on award obligations, including:

- grants
- contracts
- loans
- other financial assistance



## The Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014:

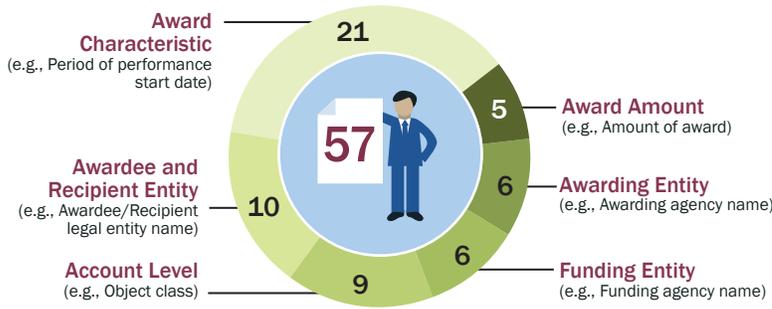
-  Covers additional federal budget and financial information, including
  - purchases of goods and services
  - personnel compensation
  - costs related to public-private partnerships
-  Requires more data on the federal spending lifecycle, such as
  - appropriations
  - outlays
-  Calls for improved data quality—for example, by requiring agency inspectors general to conduct audits of data, which GAO will review



In 2015, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Treasury issued standardized definitions for 57 data elements for reporting federal spending.

These 57 definitions describe what is included in each data element with the aim of ensuring that information will be consistent and comparable across the federal government.

### Number of standardized data elements, grouped by type

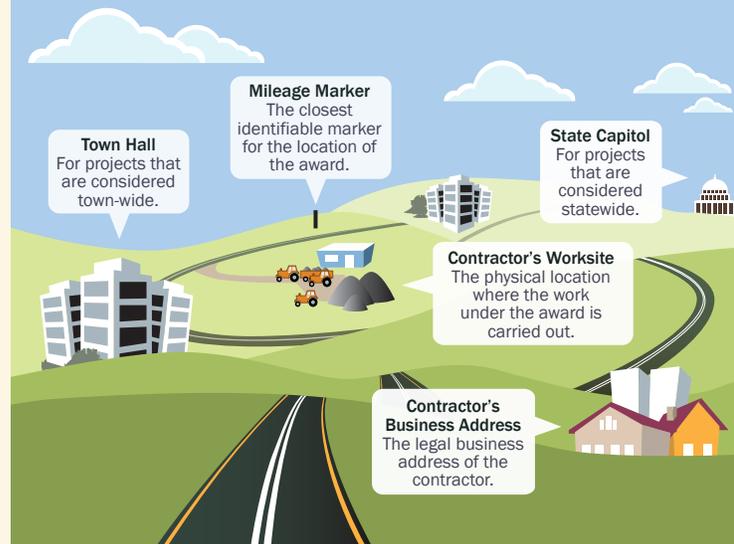


We assessed each definition against 13 leading practices of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and found:

- 12** 12 data element definitions met all 13 ISO leading practices.
- 45** 45 data element definitions met no fewer than 9 ISO leading practices.

However, GAO found several definitions that could lead to inconsistent reporting

For example: Primary place of performance definitions include the phrase *“where the predominant performance of the award will be accomplished”* which could be interpreted inconsistently and result in incomparable data for the location of federal road projects.



Also, GAO identified the need for OMB and Treasury to provide more timely technical guidance

Agencies need finalized technical guidance to prevent unnecessary implementation costs or delays in meeting key implementation milestones.



Despite these challenges, the three agencies GAO reviewed have begun addressing the requirements of the DATA Act, including assessing the changes to policies, processes, or technology that may be needed for successful implementation.

- The Corporation for National and Community Service
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Health and Human Services

To ensure effective and timely implementation:

### GAO recommends that OMB and Treasury



Provide agencies with clarifications to address potential quality issues with the definitions.



Take steps to align the release of finalized technical guidance to agency implementation timeframes.