



**United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Open Data Customer Engagement/Feedback Plan**

Version 1.4

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Revision Log

Version	Date	Author	Description	Organization
1.0	05/14/2014	P. Rhee and L. Burnette	Initial Draft: Leverage material from previous documentation on ODP subject; OC input; and ODP Communications Plan – J. Bebris. Transitional paragraphs and information.	OCIO
1.1	05/28/2014	P. Rhee	Review, edits and additions.	OC
1.2	05/29/2014	B. Jones	Reformatted Document , Remove Draft Updated Revision Log	
1.3	09/17/2014	B. Jones	- Updated the date - Change Cover page to read “Customer Engagement/Feedback Plan” - Updated Header Information - Inserted url for ODP Communications Plan	OCIO
1.4	10/21/2014	L. Burnette	Global changes from September 2014 review to include Policy and Directives and Privacy Office comments/suggestions. - Formatting - Improve transition flow - Spacing and font	OCIO

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Executive Summary

United States Department of Agriculture has been on the frontline of innovated technologies, transparency, and growth while strengthening the American agricultural economy. As President Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department", we are committed to ensuring our information resources are widely accessible in support and compliance of “the trifecta” – Big Data, Open Government, and Open Data.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released memorandum [M-13-13](#), *Open Data Policy - Managing Information as an Asset* in May 2013. The policy capitalized on information as a valuable national resource and integral to Federal government in managing this asset. Reference [USDA Open Data Policy \(ODP\) Communications Plan](#) for additional information.

Purpose

The purpose of the ODP Customer Feedback Plan is to improve customer perception of USDA and strengthen our relationships while managing information as an asset. This plan will highlight our initiatives, identify weakness, refine processes, increase collaborative efforts within the agency, and engage our customers; resulting in a more transparent USDA that listens and responds.

Goals

The goals of this document are to:

- Be responsive.
- Understand our customers’ needs and challenges.
- Provide viable means for customer interaction.
- Establish customer service standards and service baselines.
- Continuous monitoring and improvement of services.
- Establish best practices and share lessons learned.

Open Data Policy Team

The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) and the Office of Communication (OC) are leading the ODP implementation and is guided through the Department’s [Digital Strategy Governance](#) model and utilizes existing organizations, teams and newly developed councils, and working groups. These entities play a critical part in policy implementation.

The OCIO and the OC are leading the ODP implementation. Agencies and staff offices also play key roles in the process. There are four primary groups: the USDA ODP leadership, the Open Data Council (ODC), the Open Data Working Group (ODWG) and USDA existing groups and teams. The existing groups work closely with the USDA leadership, the ODC and the ODWG to provide recommendations and feedback for the data publishing process.

Implementation Plan and Services

USDA strength lies in understanding and knowing that our customers strive to ensure satisfaction in delivering services and products. Several viable options are being implemented and developed.

a. Web sites

USDA's Digital Strategy can be found at <http://www.usda.gov/digitalstrategy>.

USDA.gov uses best practices and usability standards, and has established internal web standards in addition to the Federal-wide standards set by OMB and General Services Administration (GSA). USDA.gov's last redesign addressed user-experience issues by taking a task-centric approach to its information architecture and navigation.

USDA takes a task-centric approach to define our information architecture and improve the user experience. USDA.gov uses analytics tools such as Google Analytics and SiteImprove to identify our top tasks, combining those with metrics from all USDA Agencies and identifying trends. These trends are analyzed and incorporated into the user interface/user experience of the web site.

USDA blogs are consistently one of the top performers on USDA's Web site. To provide better and quicker access to the blogs, USDA has strategically incorporated ease-of-access to the blogs by focusing USDA.gov's homepage on blog content and blog access. The USDA.gov homepage photo rotator highlights top blogs weekly. USDA.gov's persistent top navigation has a permanent placement for the USDA Blog. USDA also incorporated a streaming blog feed into the homepage, which is featured even more prominently than our latest releases and news.

USDA regularly reviews our information architecture and strategies to provide the best user experience for our users. USDA.gov's Web site is dynamic in that we update our content and navigation based on identified top tasks and priority initiatives.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 15, USDA.gov plans to reevaluate its entire Web site and implement a redesign of the look and feel. USDA.gov is also migrating its portal environment to an open source solution that will open up silos within our Department and allow for more content and resource sharing.

The desired outcomes in FY 2016 are to have an established framework for an Enterprise open source content management solution where USDA agency websites can openly collaborate and share content and resources.

b. Public Notice

USDA.gov provides the majority of its public meetings on USDA.gov/live and our Department YouTube channel, youtube.com/usda. An archive of our live streams is available and includes symposiums, town hall meetings, Google Hangouts, and other live events. USDA leverages a wide variety of digital broadcast tools and new technologies such as Google + Hangouts, and we house our own Television (TV) and Radio studios. USDA.gov/newsroom has links to resources such as our radio and TV programming, and Streaming Media Archives. The Secretary's public schedule is also available on USDA.gov. USDA also uses the IdeaJam platform for public ideation sessions and feedback.

USDA.gov plans to utilize our existing broadcast services through our Creative Media and Broadcast Center to share public events through TV and Radio programming. USDA.gov/live is the center of all of our streaming events including Google + Hangouts and national symposiums.

Participation

In collaboration with the USDA ODWG USDA is actively pursuing technologies to support the implementation of robust feedback mechanisms through USDA.gov. Currently, USDA supports feedback through various methods including commenting and feedback through our USDA Blog Wordpress platform, social media networks, ideation tools, feedback through our AskTheExpert knowledgebase, and through our Contact Us page which houses an Information Hotline and organization directories. Many USDA agency Web sites leverage the ForeSee platform as well.

Throughout FY 2015 and FY 2016, USDA plans to evaluate and implement new feedback mechanisms through our ODWG

The public can currently engage in existing participatory processes of USDA by using the following methods:

- USDA Blog – comments can be submitted and reviewed for posting through a Wordpress platform. Blogs.usda.gov
- AsktheExpert – A Knowledgebase and Customer Relationship Management tool that allows for users to provide feedback so that we can augment and improve the knowledgebase over time. Usda.gov/expert
- IdeaJam – An ideation platform used to gather feedback and perform ranking on ideas on certain initiatives. Usda.gov/open
- GitHub - Developers can provide feedback to USDA using the Issue Tracker to ask questions or make suggestions for improvement. When comments are submitted, USDA distributes the query to the relevant agency or program for response or action. [Issue Tracker](#)
- [USDA and agency Twitter accounts](#) often share digital and open data related content, which remains an open platform to monitor and solicit customer feedback. Other social media channels are available for outreach, conversation, and feedback, including [Google+](#), [Facebook](#), and [Storify](#).

In FY 2015 and FY 2016, USDA intends to evaluate new technologies for public feedback and idea sharing. GSA offers an Ideation tool called IdeaScale that could replace our current IdeaJam platform. We are also looking at social engagement through emerging technologies that allow for twitter engagement and ideation.

Many of our public meetings are broadcast through USDA.gov/live and we plan to continue using streaming media to broadcast public events, host industry and government Open Data Roundtable discussions, and conduct internal Open Data Seminars.

Collaboration

USDA is actively strategizing ways to engage with Federal and non-Federal partners, the public, and non-profit and private entities in alignment with the visions of our core mission. USDA is working to develop, implement, and institutionalize a OneUSDA Digital Strategy that will continuously assess the improvement of digital services and systems that are information- and customer-centric. To ensure open data, content and web Application Program Interface (API) are the new default, we will collaborate among the data, platform, and presentation layers to

coordinate Digital Strategy activities across agency and functional lines, including Information Technology (IT), Web and communication subject matter experts. As such, the Office of Communications Web Communication Division, Office of the Chief Information Officer, as well as agency and staff office Web, communication and program offices make up the Departments digital strategy ecosystem.

Changes to internal management and administrative policies happen at many levels. USDA, through the ODWG is looking at ways to improve collaboration and the technologies that can be leveraged to assist.

USDA has developed a comprehensive IT governance process that incorporates an Enterprise Integrated Governance (EITG) Framework and provides the executive teams with a process for reviewing investments and providing guidance to investment managers throughout a project's life cycle. Projects will be reviewed to ensure alignment with digital strategy guidelines.

To engage with internal and external customers, we will use our integrated communications platform to offer various opportunities for input and engagement. Given USDA's broad mission and diverse range of customers, agencies will maintain open lines of communication with stakeholders.

To improve collaboration among people within and outside, USDA utilizes International Business Machines (IBM) Connections and Microsoft's SharePoint platforms to promote internal collaboration. IBM Connections is an internal social platform that allows for workflow collaboration, file sharing and document revisions history, as well as a social communication tool. For the public, USDA seeks to engage ideation technologies and social engagement tools to bolster our public engagement effort.

With the upcoming USDA.gov Web content platform re-design effort in FY 2015, the Department will be positioned to leverage open source content management to promote collaboration not just within USDA.gov, but for Agencies under the Department of Agriculture. The Shared Enterprise Open Source Solution initiative was kicked off in early FY 2014 to support the growing base for using Open Source Content Management and will establish a framework for the Department of Agriculture to develop an open-source solution. This solution for all who onboard, will allow for better collaboration of content and sharing of agency and staff office ideas.

In addition, USDA leverages an IBM platform, USDA Connections, to allow for internal sharing and collaboration between multiple Agencies and Offices. This "social" platform borrows many positive aspects of Facebook and SharePoint in one Web-based environment. Users can share ideas, collaborate on projects, manage files and version control, and develop communities for specific groups or projects. USDA Connections is accessed through a USDA eAuthentication system that allow for secure access and privacy control.

On the public side, USDA has multiple tools at its' disposal. One of these tools is IdeaJam, which uses a web platform to post projects, datasets, initiatives, and questions, and allows for the public to comment on those "Ideas", up or downvote them to help rank priorities, and submit their own "Ideas" for voting. IdeaJam is currently being provided through [USDA.gov/open](https://www.usda.gov/open).

Another tool is a Federal-wide GSA offering, IdeaScale. Much like IdeaJam, this tool allows for similar functionality, while giving access on a larger scale and community of participants. USDA is actively working with GSA and IdeaScale to determine if a customized solution will serve the needs of our public ideation requirements. If implemented, USDA will begin using the platform in 2015.

USDA believes that Agency and Public ideas help drive us to develop better data, products, and programs. Through ideation and idea contribution platforms, we can better understand what the public believes are important to them, and give them a direct voice into the development of these priorities.

Currently, the public can learn about our existing collaboration efforts through our Open Government, Digital Strategy and our New Media pages:

- Open Government: [USDA.gov/open](https://www.usda.gov/open)
- Digital Strategy: [USDA.gov/digitalstrategy](https://www.usda.gov/digitalstrategy)
- New Media: [USDA.gov/newmedia](https://www.usda.gov/newmedia)

USDA uses Open innovation methods such as prize-based challenges using [Challenge.gov](https://www.challenge.gov) and collaboration platforms such as the developer community [GitHub](https://www.github.com). USDA was one of the first Federal entities to establish a prize competition with [Challenge.gov](https://www.challenge.gov), paving the way for the now Federal-wide [Challenge](https://www.challenge.gov) platform. Applications for Healthy Kids was a prize-based competition challenging the developer community to create apps using USDA's existing nutrition data. The competition was sponsored by the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and featured judging by renowned technical experts such as Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak and executives from Pepsi and Zynga. USDA continues to seek out new technologies and innovative techniques for involving the public in developing our outreach tools and campaigns.

Performance Metrics and Reports

The [USDA.gov](https://www.usda.gov) Web site utilizes Google Analytics and SiteImprove to measure site performance and usage. These tools allow us to report on our user analytics that help identify trends, priorities, and assist us with developing our site information architecture. We have also established Google Analytics on agency and staff office Web sites under USDA in order to see a

complete picture of how our digital presence performs, helps identify gap in performance, and allows us to analyze that performance for future development.