



FEDERAL DATA MEETING:

Summary Report



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
NTIS
National Technical Information Service



SUMMARY

Using Data as a Catalyst for Innovation and Operational Excellence

“The potential economic value of Federal Government data is significant...When Commerce data is connected with other Federal data, it can strengthen our economy and create better policy. This knowledge can help maximize the potential of the Internet, expand broadband capacity, enhance cybersecurity, and deliver improved public services.” – U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross

The National Technical Information Service (NTIS) hosted its first Federal Data Meeting on April 4, 2017 at the Department of Commerce. Over 200 data professionals from federal agencies and Joint Venture Partners gathered to discuss strategies for delivering operational excellence via innovative private-sector collaboration. This day-long event revealed that federal data leaders often face common challenges involving aging IT infrastructure, communication barriers, trained talent issues, and risk averse organizational cultures.

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross Jr., Secretary of Commerce provided the keynote address and highlighted private-sector collaborative opportunities that will help the government “serve the American public more effectively.” Following the Secretary’s remarks, four federal executives showcased data science work that directly supported their respective mission goals. The agencies represented included the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Department of Commerce. In addition, the FDA and HHS have collaborated with NTIS and their Joint Venture Partners (JVPs) to derive data-driven organizational intelligence. JVPs showcased their technical services and data expertise while exhibiting in the Department of Commerce’s main atrium.

During the afternoon breakout sessions, NTIS, along with the Commerce Data Service, led discussions among JVP private-sector experts and federal employees that focused on **“Achieving Operational Excellence through Data-Driven Decisions.”** NTIS facilitated discussions, highlighted use cases, and helped participants examine how data driven goals might contribute to broader organizational or business outcomes. The following key takeaways were informed from breakout session participant responses and feedback:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Participants expressed

that agencies were often missing a champion – someone who would promote data-driven decisions within their organization. Alternatively, agencies identified a champion, but the champion struggled to connect across all organizational levels. In addition, some agency participants expressed success through a “top-down” authority, primarily driven by their organization’s mission. In contrast, other agencies worked from the bottom levels upwards and struggled to find well-positioned colleagues and decision-makers who could help drive successful outcomes.

A shared vision leads

to progress, whereas cultural distrust involving data sharing may become an impediment to success. Innovation arises from those who balance risk, embrace change, and focus on enhancing the future instead of maintaining the status quo.

Data strategists and

communicators expressed that communication is only an asset when used in conjunction with strong leadership.

“The technical and intellectual answers are there. It’s really a matter of being able to communicate and understand what each person is saying and relay that back to one another so that we’re speaking the same language and working within the same vision.”

Data stewards, who

are members of policy or non-technical teams, often lack access to technologists that can innovate with the data itself. Data Stewards must be able to speak with designers, developers, and data scientists to understand what can be done with the data. Data management should be a cross cutting organizational priority; however, strategic business outcomes are frequently hindered by organizational structures that stifle communication and collaboration.

Finding, hiring, and

retaining the right data talent is a challenge that every organization strives to balance. Success has been found in establishing multi-disciplinary data teams or finding the right talent to complement existing subject matter experts.

SO WHAT'S NEXT?

The Federal Data Meeting and afternoon workshops revealed an array of commonalities amongst agency participants. Based on participants’ interest in continuing the conversation, NTIS will host follow-up workshops to examine specific topics, compelling use cases, and problem statements derived from NTIS’s initial meeting.

