

# Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Open Government Plan 3.0 Outline with Candidate Flagship Project Description



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a rich legacy as an open organization, and the Administration's Open Government (OpenGov) initiative has been a catalyst to re-examine our open practices with the goal of bringing tangible benefits to the public. This document serves as an outline for the structure of the Agency's Open Government Plan 3.0, expected to be published later this summer, along with a description of a candidate being consider as a flagship project.

The public is encouraged to comment on the flagship project beginning on 4/10/14 : [OpenGov 3.0 blog](#)

## I. New and Expanded Initiatives

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This section will describe EPA's current progress and plans in supporting the following initiatives:

- A. Open Data
- B. Proactive Disclosures
- C. Privacy
- D. Whistleblower Protection
- E. Websites

## II. Ongoing Initiatives

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- A. Participation in Transparency Initiatives
- B. Public Notice
- C. Records Management
- D. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests
- E. Congressional Requests
- F. Declassification
- G. Participation
- H. Collaboration

## II. Candidate Flagship Initiative: Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO)

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- 1. Overview - An overview of the initiative, how it addresses one or more of the three openness principles, and how it aims to improve agency operations.**

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EPA's Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO) website, recognized as a model of transparency (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/18/presidential-memoranda-regulatory-compliance>), is being modernized and re-built to support greater transparency and participation. The data offered on <http://echo.epa.gov> are exposed as web services to allow data reuse, and the new platform allows for more frequent data updates and future public participation.

ECHO is a go-to resource for information about environmental inspections, violations, and enforcement actions for more than 800,000 EPA-regulated facilities. The original site launched in 2002 and use increased steadily, providing answers to 2 million queries per year regarding environmental regulatory compliance and enforcement data. The new site continues to provide public access to searchable data for Clean Air Act (CAA) stationary sources, Clean Water Act (CWA) direct dischargers, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) hazardous waste handlers, and Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) public water systems with pollutant release and Census data are integrated for context – but with far greater enhancement potential.

Web services support the new ECHO website and are publically available. The services allow developers to design custom applications utilizing a live feed of data from ECHO. Over the next year, EPA will provide a complete collection of documented "GET" or query-only web services, available through a simple URL http link and providing output in XML, JSON, or JSONP formats. Documentation for using each of the services will be posted on the site.

In addition to documented web services, goals of the ECHO modernization project include:

- Removing many of the limitations on the amount of data that can be downloaded and mapped
- Allowing the public to know when Clean Water Act violations happen 3-4 months sooner and allowing users to rank the highest dischargers in a watershed on a yearly basis
  - earlier release of CWA violation data
  - integration with and more frequent updating of the CWA DMR Pollutant Loading Tool
- Integrating environmental data with compliance and enforcement data
  - CWA receiving water data
  - CAA pollutant release data
- Expanding and improving ECHO data offerings on data.gov
- Integrating with EPA's GeoPlatform GIS initiative and enhanced mapping.

## **2. Outreach - An explanation of how your agency engages or plans to engage the public and maintain dialogue with interested stakeholders who could contribute innovative ideas to the initiative.**

Our primary contact with the public and stakeholders has been via our ECHO feedback form. We respond to all questions and comments received from the site, and we log all suggestions for

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consideration and implement many. Users can also register to receive information on website releases and alerts.

The modernization process gives EPA the opportunity to significantly expand citizen participation. EPA has offered a public webinar, which allows users to better understand the site and provide feedback, and plans to offer more.

Specific site goals include:

- Implementing user support software that provides users the ability to track their feedback online and see answers to common questions.
- Expanding log-in feature to all users (currently government only) and offering customization options, such as:
  - Sign up for email or text alerts when certain data changes at facilities in a chosen location
  - Save favorite searches.
- Implementing monitored peer-to-peer communication tool such as a community forum, blog, or wiki for open on-going dialogue.

While improvements are ongoing, we remain committed to responding to all user feedback received via ECHO's "Contact Us Form" and incorporating suggestions to the extent possible.

### **3. External Partners - If appropriate, identification of any external agency partners with whom you directly collaborate on the initiative.**

Data on ECHO come from EPA systems populated by in large part by state, local, and tribal environment agencies. EPA works closely with its regulatory partners in data receipt and release.

### **4. Measures - An account of how your agency plans to measure improved transparency, participation, and/or collaboration through this initiative.**

Improved transparency and participation features will be measured by:

- Number of high value data sets and tools published
- Site usage (EPA Google Analytics)
- Popularity of new participation features.

### **5. An explanation of the steps your agency is taking to make the initiative sustainable and allow for continued improvement.**

The modernization process has moved ECHO from a custom-coded mainframe system to a sustainable, scalable Oracle data mart and trimmed operation and maintenance costs. Building website reports

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from web services will help shift the focus from data presentation to emphasizing structured data and metadata--making these underlying data openly available for use within agencies, among agencies, in the private sector, and by citizens. Moving toward increased user participation will allow EPA to respond to customers' needs and make it easier for them to find and share information and accomplish tasks. ECHO modernization focuses on enhancing the quality and timeliness of data and informative content, simplifying transactions, and increasing accessibility, and timeliness as resources allow.