



Obama team launches its interactive 'openness' policy with online access

Updated 12/7/2009 11:13 PM

By [Dan Vergano](#), USA TODAY

Open government? There's an app for that.

Or so the Obama administration proposes, rolling out a "transparency, participation and collaboration" directive for all federal departments and agencies at 11 a.m. ET today.

"We are fundamentally committed to changing the way government works," says Aneesh Chopra, the federal government's chief technology officer. Further "open government" initiatives will follow, showcasing federal data already public and seeking comment starting Thursday on whether all federally funded research, other than what's classified, should be free.

The effort means that, for the first time, the public will soon have immediate access to information such as hospital report cards, dangerous workplaces, airport delays, wildfires and even calories in foods. Bush administration secrecy, agency rules and old technology had hindered its release until now, says Gary Bass of OMB Watch, a government-watchdog group. "I couldn't have written it better," Bass says.

On his first full day in office, Jan. 21, Obama asked the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue new rules easing public access to government data, meetings and decisions.

In today's directive, OMB Director [Peter Orszag](#) orders all federal agencies to "create and institutionalize a culture of open government." Orders include reporting how well agencies make data available on a White House site, www.whitehouse.gov/open, within 60 days, releasing three "high-value" databases within 45 days and allowing public comment on data and openness efforts on department websites.

"It's an ambitious attempt to open up the government and to change the way that agencies do business," says Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists in Washington. However, Francesca Grifo of the Union of Concerned Scientists called the order "short on specifics" in its reliance on departments or agencies to craft their own plans and report progress, while not adding money for the effort. "It's just not enough," she says.

Openness efforts underway include:

- MyPyramid.gov. Nutrition data for more than 1,000 foods, part of a planned national contest to create games to help kids eat better meals.
- Promoting National Assets. On Data.gov, it will list federal partnership opportunities for large and small businesses across all agencies and labs.
- Virtual USA. A Homeland Security collaboration with fire, police and rescue personnel in eight states.

Both contests and data releases play key parts in the initiative.

"We're pleased to see technology and the Internet playing a leading role," says John Wonderlich of the Sunlight Foundation, a political-watchdog group in Washington. "This will make a difference in people's lives."