

GEAR Center Virtual Conference Q+A

The questions and answers below summarize the “Q&A” portion of the Government Effectiveness Advanced Research (GEAR) Center virtual stakeholder conference held August 23, 2018 as well as additional questions received on the GEAR Center. These written answers serve as a complement to the full conference recording available at www.performance.gov/GEARcenter.

Questions are grouped into the sections below:

- A. GEAR Center Vision and Purpose (page 1)
- B. Operationalizing the GEAR Center (page 2)
- C. GEAR Center Funding (page 4)
- D. GEAR Center Focus Areas (page 5)
- E. Request for Information (RFI) Process and Next Steps (page 5)

Some questions have been combined, condensed, or paraphrased for clarity. Questions outside the scope of the GEAR Center RFI have been excluded.

Section A: GEAR Center Vision and Purpose

Question 1: Where did the idea for the GEAR Center first come from?

Answer 1: The Administration first outlined the GEAR Center as a proposal on June 21, 2018 as part of [*Delivering Government Solutions for the 21st Century: Reform Plan and Reorganization Recommendations*](#).

Question 2: What is the vision for the GEAR Center?

Answer 2: Our vision for the GEAR Center is to create an enterprise-wide capability that works with researchers, academics, non-profits, private industry, and interested State and local governments to look at the long-term strategic and enterprise-wide needs of the Government. It would “test and learn” how to apply innovative approaches to meeting current-day mission needs, service norms, and stewardship demands. The Federal Government currently lacks an effective, enterprise capability to apply theory and research to real agency operations in a low-risk environment and, based on findings, create “on ramps” to scale effective practices and initiatives across Government. The GEAR Center would connect Government needs and mission with the best research and thinking to effectively serve the public and operate in a modern context. This means that the GEAR Center would elevate research to the attention of decision makers to inform their decisions, including budget, policy, and execution of resources.

Question: 3 Why is the GEAR Center needed?

Answer 3: When it comes to operating and serving the public in the 21st century, Government has fallen behind the curve. Many Federal entities and programs were designed decades ago, and many still run according to the mission needs of the 20th or even the 19th century and no longer align to the needs, norms, and technologies of today. Moreover, a reliance on outdated technology means that the Federal workforce is often not equipped to transition to more modern ways of doing business. To address these

disconnects, applied research or technology research and development must be better connected to the practical realm of government operations.

Question 4: How are you thinking about the Center in terms of longer-term success and measuring outcomes?

Answer 4: Outcomes could be evident on multiple levels. Long term, GEAR must make concrete contributions to mission delivery, service, and stewardship for the American people and lead to tangible change in agencies. Nearer term, the degree to which parties—Government, private-sector, and research institutions—participate over time may reflect who finds the Center useful in connecting research with practice, helping agencies transition from outdated work modes to a modern context, and creating appropriate market-driven incentives.

Question 5: How do the three key drivers of modernization in the President’s Management Agenda – IT, data and analytics, and workforce—align to the GEAR Center?

Answer 5: The Administration released the President’s Management Agenda (PMA) in March 2018 as a vision for modernizing government in the 21st century. The GEAR Center would support the goals of the PMA, including by addressing the areas of technology, data, and workforce through applied research pilots. For example, the potential focus areas of workforce reskilling and data commercialization cited in the RFI have a clear connection to the PMA. Importantly, the PMA is not meant to create siloed lanes of work. Instead, real transformation is expected where these areas come together.

Question 6: How would the GEAR Center add value instead of duplicating other things that already exist? For example, existing government research and development functions and think tanks already inform government management practices.

Answer 6: The Executive Branch as a whole lacks an enterprise-wide capability to work with researchers, academics, non-profits, and private industry to assess long-term strategic needs and to “test and learn” from innovative approaches. Because it is important to avoid duplicating efforts, the RFI seeks public input both on where such capabilities exist already and also how they might be replicated, scaled, connected, or more systematically leveraged.

Section B: Operationalizing the GEAR Center

Question 1: Will the GEAR Center be treated as governmental entity, a contractor, a grantee, or some other form of relationship in the envisioned “public-private partnership?”

Answer 1: The Administration envisions the GEAR Center as a public-private arrangement or agreement. Because Federal partnerships with private sector and other non-Federal entities can take several different forms, we are seeking input through the RFI on existing examples and potential models, including existing, innovative collaborations. We anticipate that the GEAR Center would be located, administered, staffed, and managed outside of the Federal Government. To remain in synch with Government needs and priorities, we envision the Government having a role in governance at the outset—for example to select or communicate desired focus areas and communicate and maintain the intended mission. Mirroring this lighter-touch role in operations and management, our goal is to provide

initial, seed funding to help stand up the Center. Following stand-up, a fully market-driven model would sustain facilities, operations, and the agenda going forward.

Question 2: Does OMB have a preference for placing the GEAR Center at a single entity or a preference for placing the GEAR Center within a consortium/partnership of several entities?

Answer 2: To help make this determination, the RFI asks about how to operationalize the Center. One aspect of this is whether it be structured as a physical place, a network, a consortium, or something else. We anticipate that there may be advantages to a network or consortium model in order to best leverage diverse expertise, resources, and geographical locations.

Question 3: Does OMB have a preference for the geographical location of the GEAR Center, such as having a physical location or core management personnel located in the Washington, DC area, versus reaching “outside the Beltway” for this role?

Answer 3: The GEAR Center would need to be well positioned to best leverage diverse expertise, resources, and geographical locations. As a result, we anticipate that the Center would likely benefit from having a presence both in, around, or easily accessible to Washington, DC as well as having diverse geographical reach.

Question 4: Does the Government anticipate that the GEAR Center would need to be housed within a specific type of organization, such as a not-for-profit versus for-profit institution?

Answer 4: OMB’s initial vision is that the GEAR Center would be established at a university, think tank, or other prominent research institution, many of which are not-for-profit entities. We welcome public input on potential models for the GEAR Center, including examples of roles that different sectors could play as well as appropriate, effective governance structures needed to support potential models.

Question 5: What are the incentives for other sectors to participate in the Center? For example, would contributors to GEAR Center research and products get credit, how would intellectual property work, and whether industry partners that build a prototype for the Center be considered for follow-on work. How does the RFI address incentive questions that could impact who participates in the Center and how?

Answer 5: We recognize that appropriate incentives could be important to effective and appropriate functioning of the GEAR Center. For non-Federal partners, examples of incentives may include opportunities for funding or non-monetary awards (e.g., public-private partnership, challenges, and prizes) or receiving attribution for ideas or work products among other possibilities. The RFI states that the Center should have a market-driven model to sustain its facilities, operations, and also agenda over time. OMB also seeks public input on what market incentives would be desirable for a model to be successful.

Question 6: Will the GEAR Center be open to states and localities?

Answer 6: The GEAR Center could be relevant to State, local, and tribal governments as well as Federal. We anticipate that other interested levels of government could opt to participate. We welcome insights on state, local, and tribal ideas and experiences with similar initiatives in RFI responses.

Question 7: Will participation by international entities (e.g., universities; think tanks; or organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, World Bank, InterAmerican Development Bank, or the United Nations) be considered, including research, data, and/or funding?

Answer 7: We do not anticipate that international organizations would be involved in the establishment or governance of the GEAR Center. For potential focus areas and pilots, some participation by international organizations could potentially be considered in order to effectively leverage existing research and best practices.

Question 8: In setting priorities for research, will the Government be the sole source of research priorities or will other partners have a say?

Answer 8: The GEAR Center is meant to focus on applied research that improves mission delivery, citizen services, and stewardship of public resources. Therefore, it is important that the Center address areas relevant to the Government while also creating appropriate incentives for other sectors to participate. As a result, the RFI seeks input on how to identify and prioritize research areas on an ongoing basis as well as how the Center could maintain mission focus without Government being responsible for administration, staffing, and management.

Question 9: Why is the proposed GEAR Center function different from what has happened in the past, or how have other existing approaches missed the mark? For example, the prior administration's Social & Behavioral Sciences Team (SBST) applied research to a range of societal issues, including improving retirement security, improving college access and affordability, advancing economic opportunity and ensuring the cost-effectiveness of government operations.

Answer 9: While the challenges that the GEAR Center would address are not new, the Center would be distinguished as an enterprise-wide capability that brings a real-time, operator lens to crosscutting management challenges previously addressed from legal, policy, and budget lenses.

Question 10: How and who would resolve questions of data security and security clearances that might arise from GEAR Center projects? What level of data sensitivity does OMB anticipate from projects likely to be housed at the GEAR center?

Answer 10: We anticipate that data security will need to be addressed in the context of specific applied research pilots in order to meet pilot needs appropriately.

Section C: GEAR Center Funding

Question 1: The RFI says government will provide seed funding. Do you have a rough estimate what that upfront investment might be?

Answer 1: We anticipate that seed funding, if available, would support the initial agenda and stand-up, which could include early staffing and research projects. At most, seed funding may be a few million dollars. However, we encourage RFI respondents to take a start-up mentality to promote leanness and efficiency rather than working to a pre-set budget. Importantly, long-term funding should rely on market incentives, not dedicated Federal dollars.

Question 2: How much does the ability of the GEAR center to move forward depend on funding from Congress? Does OMB plan on using any existing funding to get GEAR moving forward?

Answer 2: Our goal is to provide initial, seed funding to help stand up the Center. Following stand-up, a fully market-driven model would sustain facilities, operations, and the agenda going forward. Any seed funding would come from appropriated dollars and is not guaranteed. Specific funding sources also may depend on the approach to the GEAR Center determined to be most appropriate.

Section D: GEAR Center Focus Areas

Question 1: What role do you see data or data analytics playing in the GEAR Center?

Answer 1: Data and data analytics would play a role in the GEAR Center’s general operating model as well as specific pilot focus areas. Data and analytics are core to the GEAR Center’s purpose of “test and learn” and undergird the Center’s overall work to identify practical solutions to government challenges. In addition, specific focus areas could directly address data and data analytics issues, such as the anticipated focus on data commercialization.

Question 2: What might the GEAR Center look like in practice early on?

Answer 2: We have identified preliminary needs across several areas. We anticipate an early focus on reskilling Federal workers to help meet demand for up-to-date skillsets. We envision pilots that live-test innovative reskilling models and translate the latest knowledge and practice about adult learning into a real-time Federal environment. Pilots would help identify what strategies really work in a Federal environment and how they might best be scaled up across employees who could use those skills to better contribute to agency missions. A second focus area we anticipate is data commercialization. Already, the private sector uses Federal data such as weather and satellite information to meet consumer demands and drive economic growth. The real estate industry leverages Census to support their work and to help families make housing choices. Even within Government, the data on the millions of Federal employees can be better used to improve the internal operations. The GEAR Center could look at other areas where appropriate federal data might be made more accessible to similarly help contribute to our economic growth. The RFI asks for feedback on both of these anticipated focus areas, in addition to what else the Center could do.

Question 3: What specific issues and industry sectors do you feel will be addressed in years one through three of the GEAR Center being in place?

Answer 3: The framing offered by the Administration in the [President’s Management Agenda](#) (PMA), which is fundamentally aimed at modernizing Government for the 21st century, will guide the GEAR Center’s efforts over the coming years. Specifically, the PMA focuses on information technology (IT) modernization; data, accountability, and transparency; and the workforce as drivers of transformation. The GEAR Center’s work will be framed by these drivers, including where they intersect with one another and other key functions, such as procurement, finance, and accounting.

Section E: Request for Information (RFI) Process and Next Steps

Question 1: Can an organization respond to just a sub-set of RFI questions?

Answer 1: Yes. Organizations and individuals are welcome to respond to any or all of the questions in the RFI. For example, some respondents may wish to focus on questions most relevant to their particular expertise or experience.

Question 2: How does the RFI fit into the larger process, and what are the next steps?

Answer 2: The RFI is a first step in a multi-step process. It facilitates information gathering to learn what might be possible. Once responses are received by the September 14, 2018 deadline, the Government will conduct an analysis and may follow up with respondents to learn more. After analyzing responses, the Government will determine and announce a process going forward, which could include an open competition to solicit specific contract proposals to actually stand up the Center in practice.

Please remember:

- No determinations have been made about next steps, including any potential procurement, funding or any particular model to be used.
- The RFI and the conference should not be seen as a pre-solicitation summary or request for proposals or quotes.
- Responses to the RFI will be used for general informational purposes—not as specific requests for proposals or quotes.

Question 3: Can the Government provide additional context related to its vision for any eventual procurement related to the GEAR Center? For example, what would any procurement specifically request, and what should an organization do if they're interested in submitting a proposal or working as a sub on a proposal to actually stand up and manage the GEAR Center?

Answer 3: The Government is not currently undertaking a procurement and has not determined that we will pursue a competitive source selection. The RFI is a developmental step to gather information. Results of the RFI will inform next steps, which may include issuing a challenge, pursuing another type of open competition, or other arrangements.

Question 4: Are there any potential downstream conflicts of interest that GEAR Center participants should be aware of when responding to the RFI?

Answer 4: We do not anticipate any downstream conflicts of interest for organizations from participating in this market research. We are interested in broad participation during this information gathering phase to help shape next steps in establishing the GEAR Center and encourage feedback from different perspectives in response to the questions in the RFI.

Question 5: Is there a timeline for the project, such as a rough date when you'd like to begin establishing the center/have it completed?

Answer 5: The current information-gathering stage is important to develop a successful approach to establishing the GEAR Center, including understanding the most effective time frame for implementation. However, our aspiration is to begin standing up the Center in the coming 2019 fiscal year.