

OPENTHEGOVERNMENT.ORG

Americans for Less Secrecy, More Democracy



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The mission of OpenTheGovernment.org is to make government more open to achieve accountability, security, and an equitable society. The partners in OpenTheGovernment.org believe that access to information, especially about our government and its activities, is part of our common heritage as Americans and is a human right. It is a right and heritage we believe can be expanded and strengthened in the coming years.

OpenTheGovernment.org (OTG) was formed in 2003 because government secrecy was on the rise and out of control and openness advocates were working in stovepipes and sometimes in contradiction. We needed to get our act together. And through the work of the coalition, we have done so. In the seven years since, while growing from 30 partner organizations to more than 70, OTG has served four essential functions for the openness movement:

- Information-sharing – through the network that the coalition provides, partners and others get early warning of bad news and of potential opportunities, metrics on the secrecy problem, learn what each of our members are doing on the openness front, share new ideas for change, and promote public education. The information sharing work of the coalition and its staff frees coalition members from devoting their organization's resources to tracking upcoming issues and opportunities.
- Convening – the coalition achieves results by putting advocates at the table with each other so they can (and do) work together, and putting advocates at the table with policymakers so we have an impact.
- Consensus-building – we work by organizing the extended discussions and diversity of voices that are necessary to reach agreement on the policy changes we seek, and moving those discussions toward concrete action that each coalition member could take individually and in concert.
- Advocacy coordination – staffing the coalition communication and outreach is needed to take our consensus positions into policy forums, recruit participants in the sign-on letters and discussion lists, and navigate conflicting interests when necessary.

OTG has played an instrumental role, sometimes in the lead, most often backing up our coalition members, in every positive change of the past several years for government openness. From the Day One Obama declarations, to the January 2010 settlement of the White House e-mail case, we've achieved some real change. OTG promotes and

amplifies the change by serving as informal advisors to the White House and to several agencies on issues of concern to our community and the public (such as the Open Government Directive and the high-value data sets on Data.gov, the Executive Order on Classified National Security Information, the initiatives of the White House related to sensitive but unclassified information, implementation of the 2007 FOIA amendments and, in particular, the new Office of Government Information Services, and issues of electronic records management. and more).

The window of opportunity is short but still open. The White House is committed to do more and do better and we have their ear, reformers within the agencies are displaying more initiative than they've had in over a decade, and the Congress is largely still with the President. But bureaucratic inertia, internal ideological battles, and political half-steps still hinder the full sweep of change we seek. The members of OTG believe the coalition's four key roles are more essential than ever. In January 2010, OTG's leaders convened, reviewed the state of the openness struggle, and developed the following strategic priorities.

The first strategic priority will be our top priority for 2010.

1. Advance the right-to-know and pro-active openness, prevent and limit efforts to push back openness or promote secrecy at the federal level.

Promote and Sustain Openness and Transparency

- *Coordinate development of metrics/analytics to assess development of Open Government Plans*
- *Monitor open government plans and actions at key agencies*
- *Coordinate audits of milestones specified in the open government directive*
- *Connect organizations with knowledge on other agencies to the openness community*
- *Coordinate efforts to influence policies to be developed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)*

Ensure Electronic Records are Preserved and Managed to Protect Accountability and History

- *Build consensus on policy recommendations with the privacy and other communities*
- *Coordinate legislative efforts*
- *Assist, as needed, in the discussion on the viability of the Electronic Records Archive (ERA)*

Promote a Culture of Openness in Government

- *Connect organizations with knowledge on civil service system to the openness community*
- *Identify models that work to ensure/enforce implementation of openness initiatives*
- *Work with Administration to Improve incentive structure for openness*
- *Work with Administration to Improve education of federal employees on transparency*

Chart a New Course on Secrecy/ Secrecy Rules

- *Coordinate efforts to influence guidance to be developed by the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) on the classification guidelines review, and other topics*
- *Coordinate efforts to inform policy makers on critical issues related to over-classification and declassification*
- *Coordinate efforts to influence development of the Controlled Unclassified Information framework to ensure it facilitates information sharing and disclosure*
- *Coordinate efforts to increase funding for declassification activities*
- *Facilitate coordination of efforts to pass effective legislation to reform the state secrets privilege*

Embed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Reform

- *Monitor and evaluate implementation of Administration policies on FOIA*
- *Encourage increased pro-active disclosure*
- *Coordinate efforts to secure increased support and funding for the Office of Government Information Services*
- *Raise awareness of proposed FOIA (b)(3) exemptions and impact*

2. Strengthen coordination and engagement of organizations currently working on right to know and anti-secrecy issues.

- *Continue to engage groups with expertise on a specific area and expand the groups with whom we consult where there are gaps*
- *Where possible, work with members with issue area/agency expertise to praise (or offer a reality check on) openness initiatives at the agencies*
- *Use initiatives such as documenting the progress of agencies in implementing their /open pages and in developing their plans as an opportunity to engage our partners.*
- *Use our website to strengthen the coalition as an information and action network, and to amplify and magnify partners' work both as individual organizations and as part of a coalition*

3. Broaden the base of and support for national and state organizations active on right to know and anti-secrecy issues.

- *Use initiatives such as documenting the progress of agencies in implementing their /open pages and in developing their plans as an opportunity to engage with new groups at the state level.*
- *Continue our work with of the National Freedom of Information Coalition to broaden the base of awareness and engagement at the state and local levels.*
- *Continue to expand reach among non-traditional partners, and among right-leaning groups that work on openness and secrecy issues at the federal level.*
- *Hold funders briefings; on the West Coast and a follow-up on the October 2009 event in NYC. Investigate possible right-leaning funders and funders in non-traditional areas and issues*

4. Raise awareness of openness and secrecy efforts.

- *Put on annual Sunshine Week event and engage public interest organizations in promoting a national webcast teleconference for March 19, during Sunshine Week (an initiative by the news media to focus public attention on transparency in government and why it matters).*
- *Produce annual Secrecy Report Card*
- *Continue producing highly praised policy updates and issue-tracking compendia, the Policy & News Updates*