



THE CHANGING FEDERAL DATA LANDSCAPE:

OPEN DATA, CDOS, + ALTERYX

“Open data is not really a new idea,” says Nick Sinai, former United States Deputy Chief Technology Officer. We are seated in a buzzing café in the heart of Washington D.C., just minutes away from the White House. Throughout the interview, Nick nods and smiles as colleagues from his tenure pass by.

“INFORMATION IS A VALUABLE NATIONAL ASSET THAT ONLY INCREASES IN VALUE AS IT IS SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC. OPEN DATA DRIVES INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH AND INCREASES GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY.”

Take the data generated by the U.S. Air Force-operated Global Positioning System (GPS) for example. At one point, this data was restricted to military use. The government decision to make GPS data freely available in the 1980s and 1990s made advances like navigation systems and location-based apps possible and gave rise to a multibillion-dollar sector of the American economy.

During his time at the White House, Nick helped draft President Obama’s 2013 Open Data executive order, which requires that non-sensitive data generated by the government be made available to the public in machine-readable formats. In layman’s terms, the order requires federal agencies to publish their non-confidential data in formats computers can easily process, such as JSON. On January 14, 2019, when President Trump signed the OPEN Government Data Act, Obama’s policy became law. OPEN stands for Open, Public, Electronic and Necessary.



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“A lot of ideas the government is beginning to adopt, like human-centered design, open source code, and application programming interfaces (APIs) are accepted best practices in the private sector. We desperately need to modernize government services and bring them up to speed. Now that need is an imperative,” Nick explains.

In addition to requiring agencies to publish data and metadata online, OPEN also mandates that all federal agencies appoint a Chief Data Officer (CDO) to help make the new directive a reality. Within the next three years, the Government Accountability Office will conduct a study to assess whether agencies have complied with these new requirements. Under the Foundations for Evidence Based-Policymaking Act that OPEN is part of, agencies will also be legally responsible for presenting evidence to support new policies, underscoring the need for reliable data for analysts and decision-makers to consult.



“Historically, government agencies have relied too heavily on people performing manual tasks rather than on technology and automation. As agencies shift towards a culture of open data, there is tremendous opportunity to automate and to leverage data to make better decisions.

“While the primary intent of the OPEN Government Data Act is making data available to the public, it will have a tremendous benefit within government agencies as well. As data is cataloged and published under the direction of CDOs, government staff inside and across agencies will have a much easier time acquiring and using the data they need. This is where I see Alteryx fitting in.

“Over the next three years, troves of data are going to be systematized and released, with the expectation that agencies will better use this data to make more informed decisions. Too many of the systems in place today essentially trap data by making it cumbersome to analyze and share. Alteryx, on the other hand, is a modern analytics platform that empowers employees outside of IT to discover and understand their data, allowing them to blend and combine information across silos to quickly derive answers.

“ALTERYX ALSO HELPS TO CLOSE THE TECHNICAL SKILLS GAP WE SEE INSIDE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES. WHILE ALTERYX ACCOMODATES DATA SCIENTISTS WHO USE R AND PYTHON, ITS EAY-TO-USE, DRAG-AND-DROP INTERFACE DEMOCRATIZES DATA LITERACY, MAKING ANALYTICS AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE.”

“As I think about where we are headed, I am hopeful. The government hasn’t fully exploited the benefits of modern technology yet. Initiatives like the OPEN Government Data Act are a giant step in the right direction,” Nick says brightly.

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NICK SINAI

As U.S. Deputy Chief Technology Officer, Nick Sinai led President Obama’s Open Data Initiatives to liberate data to fuel innovation and economic growth. Nick is a Senior Advisor at Insight Venture Partners and adjunct faculty at the Harvard Kennedy School. Alteryx is a portfolio company of Insight Venture Partners.