

IMPROVING AID DATA:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSOLIDATE FOREIGN AID DASHBOARDS

Transparency is an important part of aid effectiveness. It allows taxpayers, decision makers, journalists, and civil society to know how the United States is planning and implementing its foreign assistance, including what it is funding and where. The U.S. government currently hosts two databases – or “dashboards” – that provide similar aid data: ForeignAssistance.gov (FA.gov), hosted by the Department of State, and Foreign Aid Explorer (FAE), hosted by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Created to meet distinct needs¹, today the two dashboards are duplicative, contradictory, and incomplete to varying degrees. In the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016², Congress requested that the State Department and USAID consolidate the data collection process and the two websites by October 1, 2018.

This consolidation should be based on a clear-eyed assessment of the strengths and gaps of each tool currently, as well as additional functionalities needed to advance aid transparency and data utilization. The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN) and Publish What You Fund (PWYF) recommend³ a consolidated dashboard with the ten critical features listed below. Overall, FAE’s strengths are in nine of the ten criteria, providing better verified and complete data. FA.gov’s strengths are in two of the ten criteria, providing timelier appropriations data.⁴

Ultimately, the administration should present a plan to consolidate these databases, including timelines, benchmarks, and resources needed, to Congress as part of the President’s Fiscal Year 2020 budget request. This plan should endorse a data solution that builds upon FAE’s existing data and well-established data collection processes, incorporates missing functionalities and identifies incomplete data. Doing so would provide U.S. aid information that is timely, comprehensive, and of high quality.

RECOMMENDED FUNCTION	FOREIGNASSISTANCE.GOV	FOREIGN AID EXPLORER
<p>1. Publish complete, high quality financial data from all aid agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ President’s budget request ▶ Appropriations (final 653(a) allocations) ▶ Actual appropriations ▶ Obligations (verified, quarterly, includes project level data) ▶ Disbursements (verified, quarterly, includes project level data) <p>In addition, clearly identify where data are incomplete.</p>	<p>Provides substantially complete, good quality budget request and appropriations data (called “planned”).</p>	<p>Does not provide budget request or appropriations data.</p>
	<p>Clearly identifies budget and appropriations data on data downloads but data are intermingled on map function.</p> <p>Provides obligation and disbursement data (by fiscal years, total, country, agency, and sectors) from 17 agencies, but data is not verified and is extremely incomplete.</p> <p>Provides project titles and transactions, but other information is incomplete.</p> <p>Partial data is not clearly flagged as incomplete.</p>	<p>Provides verified, complete, and good quality obligation and disbursement data (by fiscal years, total, country, agency, and sectors) from 17 agencies</p> <p>Provides project titles, transactions, some documentation and other information, but is incomplete.</p> <p>Partial data is clearly flagged as incomplete.</p>
<p>2. Provide timely data</p> <p>Provide complete budget request data and appropriations as available. Provide verified quarterly updates for obligations and disbursements and ensure complete data sets for every fiscal year.</p>	<p>Publishes budget request and appropriations data as available.</p> <p>Aims to publish unverified obligations and disbursement quarterly.</p> <p>See also box #1 and #3.</p>	<p>Does not provide budget request or appropriations data.</p> <p>Aims to publish verified obligations and disbursement quarterly.</p> <p>See also box #1 and 3</p>

Strong functionalities are highlighted in green

RECOMMENDED FUNCTION

FOREIGNASSISTANCE.GOV

FOREIGN AID EXPLORER

<p>3. Maximize historical data Publish complete financial data for as many years as feasible.</p>	<p>There are no complete data sets for any fiscal year.</p> <p>Provides substantially complete budget/appropriations data from 2013-2018; 2019 request data is partially complete.</p> <p>Obligation and disbursement data from 2013-2018 is partially complete, but data prior to 2013 is extremely incomplete.</p>	<p>Provides complete obligations and disbursements datasets from 1946-2016; 2017 is substantially complete; 2018 is partially complete.</p>
<p>4. Include comparable dollar amounts Provide financial data in both “constant” and “current” US Dollars (USD).</p>	<p>Provides financial data in “current” USD only.</p>	<p>Provides financial data in “constant” and “current” USD.</p>
<p>5. Include comparable development sector codes Provide financial data in both US and OECD development sector codes, ideally visualized in both.</p>	<p>Users can download the data using the OECD-DAC sectors and 44 US sector codes. Visualizes data using the 44 US specific codes.</p>	<p>Users can download data using the OECD-DAC sectors and 44 US specific codes. Visualizes data using the OECD-DAC sectors.</p>
<p>6. Link transaction level data to specific projects All transaction expenditures should be linked to specific projects.</p>	<p>Users can download granular transactions linked to projects, but these are bulk-downloads that require significant manipulation.</p>	<p>The transactions have been rolled up into “activities” and are linked to projects which is more user friendly, but granularity is marginally reduced.</p>
<p>7. Provide results data, where possible Where possible, provide quantitative and qualitative project-level results.</p>	<p>Provides minimal and incomplete quantitative results which are not linked to a project.</p>	<p>Does not provide any quantitative results.</p>
<p>8. Include documentation Documents (e.g., contracts, evaluations, progress reports, grant agreements) should be linked to projects.</p>	<p>Does not link activities to program documentation.</p>	<p>Links some activities to program documentation.</p>
<p>9. Clarify process & methods Publish both a clear methodology and a timeline for publication.</p>	<p>FA.gov does not publish a methodology for data collection or a timeline for publication.</p>	<p>F AE provides a comprehensive methodology for data publication but does not provide a timeline for publication.</p>
<p>10. Define key terms All key terms should be defined and used consistently. Financial terms should be those used in the USG budget/appropriations process.</p>	<p>FA.gov provides a glossary of terms but some prominent terms, such as “planned” and “actual” are not defined. Further, note that “planned” is not a term used in the USG budget/appropriations process.</p>	<p>F AE provides a comprehensive glossary of terms used in the USG budget and appropriations process.</p>

¹ FA.gov was established to publicly post aid data in a user-friendly manner; FAE was established for OECD DAC reporting.

² See Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016 (FATAA), section 4(d).

³ See Principles for An Effective Dashboard on US Foreign Assistance.

⁴ MFAN and PWYF assessed that of the 10 recommended functions, FA.gov is strongest with functions #1 and #5; FAE is strongest with functions #1 – 6 and #8 – 10.