

White House launches open government initiative

May 21 2009, by Chris Lefkow



View of the White House in Washington, DC. The White House invited ordinary Americans on Thursday to contribute ideas on making government more open and unveiled a new website where raw federal data will be put online for public use.

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Valerie Jarrett, a senior advisor to President [Barack Obama](#), described the "Open [Government](#) Initiative" as an effort to increase the involvement of the average [citizen](#) in policymaking.

"On behalf of the president I would like to invite all of you to join us in our new process for public engagement in policymaking and contribute

your expertise and ideas for how we can create a more open government," she said.

"This is a chance to brainstorm ideas, discuss the most promising ones and collaborate with one another on next steps," she said in a video posted at a new blog located on the [White House](http://whitehouse.gov/open/blog) website at whitehouse.gov/open/blog.

"We promise to carefully consider your comments, suggestions and proposals drawing on the best ones in establishing our practices for the future," Jarrett said.

The White House, in a statement, described the initiative as a way to "supplement the expertise of government employees with the knowledge and know-how of the American people."

"The president believes that effective policy benefits from the best available information in society, and that the expertise from a diverse segment of Americans will strengthen government policies and approaches," it said.

The process includes a "brainstorming" session during which the public is encouraged to submit ideas, followed by a two-way dialogue and finally a drafting session for final recommendations using a collaborative wiki.

The White House simultaneously launched a new website called Data.gov, which provides unfiltered access to government data.

"Data.gov will open up the workings of government by making economic, health care, environmental, and other government information available on a single website, allowing the public to access raw data and transform it in innovative ways," said Peter Orszag,

director of the Office of Management and Budget.

"Data.gov is going to be a one-stop shop for free access to data generated across all federal agencies," Orszag said.

"As we develop Data.gov, it will allow the American people to find, use, and repackage data held and generated by the government, which we hope will result in citizen feedback and new ideas."

The information available on Data.gov on Thursday included data on earthquakes, the weather, migratory bird patterns and mineral resources.

The White House noted that federal data had previously been housed in disparate sites and formats, making it hard to use or access, while Data.gov provides searchable catalogs and tools for data mining and extraction.

"Moving forward, we want the default assumption to be that federal information is available at Data.gov," said Vivek Kundra, the government's Chief Information Officer.

In addition to Data.gov, the White House rolled out another website on Thursday, Regulations.gov, designed "for taking public input on the best ways to achieve public participation in Federal agency rulemaking."

And in another move, a US government channel launched on YouTube providing access from a single location to the dozens of US government departments and agencies which already have channels on the video-sharing site.

The portal provides links to the YouTube channels of the White House, NASA, State Department, FBI and others and is located at youtube.com/usgovernment.

Obama relied heavily on the Internet during his presidential campaign for organizing, fundraising and communicating and has created MySpace, Facebook and Flickr pages and a Twitter feed since entering the White House.

Besides revamping the White House website, WhiteHouse.gov, the Obama administration has also created several other websites including recovery.gov to track the economic stimulus bill and transparency.gov to monitor spending.

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Citation: White House launches open government initiative (2009, May 21) retrieved 22 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-05-white-house.html>

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