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CTG Commends United States on Release of Open Government Action Plan

As part of its commitment to the newly launched Open Government Partnership, the United States has released a *National Open Government Action Plan*, which firmly links the promise of innovation and new technologies to making government more open and accountable. As one of the many organizations invited to share their expertise in the development of this plan, CTG applauds the US Plan for recognizing the role technology and government information can play in making government work better and in creating public value for all stakeholders, at the same time placing the citizen at the center of the plan.

The U.S. Open Government Action Plan outlines 26 concrete steps in which the government can "harness new technologies" to enable transparency by helping people to find information that they "can readily find and use" and to "solicit public feedback to identify information of greatest use to the public."

"One of the key strengths of the US Open Government Action Plan is that it details specific initiatives within a range of open government areas including civic engagement, data creation and classification, community development, and performance measurement," said Theresa Pardo, director of CTG. "CTG looks forward to supporting the United States and its partners throughout the world as they work together to improve governance and overcome the challenges of implementing these important commitments."

CTG praises the OGP plan call to "modernize management of government records." At the core of this "reform initiative" is a need for agencies and the government as a whole to review policies, practices, and technologies related to the creation, collection, use, and dissemination of government information. CTG strongly recommends that this review focus on both internal government practices as well as how government interacts with key non-government stakeholders such as the private sector, non-profits, academia, and citizens. At the core of this review is the need to develop new and innovative information management and governance practices to ensure that the appropriate policies, practices, and technologies are in place to translate the OGP plan goals into

measurable benefits for both the US government and the citizen, businesses, and other stakeholders it serves.

The U.S. is also stepping up its commitment to initiatives like Data.gov through its new emphasis on smart disclosure. The focus on public information and providing data to the public will be greatly improved through smart disclosure strategies that focus less on the amount of data sets posted and more on the quality of data, the processes by which data is collected, the manner in which data is presented to the public, and value the public receives from specific data having been made available.

In particular CTG commends initiatives such as "We the People" petition platform and ExpertNet that provide innovative tools and processes to actively engage citizens and incorporate a collective voice in policy development. It is these types of initiatives that bear the promise of improving policy performance by creating shared understandings of current performance and generating pressure to improve, increasing the pool of applicable ideas, tapping into new sources of expertise, and building civic capacity. These types of initiatives may ultimately turn out to be the key to concrete improvements in policy outcomes and the quality of public services.

In addition, while the plan calls for supporting and improving agency specific open government efforts by "monitoring agency implementation of plans," CTG calls on the Obama Administration to provide better tools to help agencies link their collaboration, transparency, and participation efforts to their agency mission in ways that provide measurable value to their specific stakeholders. Agencies are working hard to ensure that their Open Government plans complement or enhance their existing strategies for meeting agency goals through greater openness. Therefore, it is critical agencies are supported in this effort and the plans are not treated as additional and separate mandates.

More on CTG's open government initiatives and work can be found at: www.ctg.albany.edu/projects/opengov.