



NGAC Comments on FY 2023 FGDC Summary of GDA Annual Reports

A Report of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee
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Table of Contents

1.0 Overview 1

2.0 Positive Elements / Improvements from Last Year 2

3.0 Areas Needing Improvement 2

4.0 Recommendations for Future Reports 3

5.0 Other Comments 4

6.0 Conclusion 5

Acknowledgments: 5

1.0 Overview

The Geospatial Data Act of 2018 (GDA) outlines annual reporting responsibilities for Federal agencies, including a summary and evaluation of the achievements of covered agencies and lead covered agencies. “Covered agencies” are defined in the GDA as having specific geospatial management responsibilities, and “lead covered agencies” are defined as ones that also have lead responsibility for coordination and management of National Geospatial Data Asset (NGDA) data themes. Specifically, the covered agencies and lead covered agencies are required to report on whether they:

- Meet expectations;
- Have made progress toward expectations; or
- Fail to meet expectations.

The covered agencies report on thirteen (13) agency responsibilities found in GDA section 2808(a), while the lead covered agencies report on the status of each NGDA data theme as defined in GDA section 2805(b)(3).

The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) developed a summary of these annual reports detailing the status of each covered agency and each NGDA data theme for fiscal year (FY) 2023. As required under GDA Section 2802(c)(11)(A), the FGDC provided this summary report to the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) for review and comment. The NGAC commends that all covered agencies and lead covered agencies complied with the reporting requirements.

For the Covered Agencies, the trend of improvement has continued in that the number of “Fail to meet expectations” entries decreased from three to two entries for 2023. The Department of Labor improved to “made progress towards expectations” where previously they failed to meet expectations for Requirement 5 – allocate resources for geospatial data management responsibilities. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Energy (DOE) continue to fail to meet expectations for Requirement 10 – declassified data but the reasons are not conveyed in the summary report. When a department fails to make progress, additional support requirements may need to be developed to help these departments succeed.

This paper provides the NGAC’s comments on the FY 2023 FGDC summary report. We have organized the comments in four categories. The first reflects positive elements or improvements from last year. Several improvements to the report itself follow recommendations from the NGAC that were successfully incorporated by FGDC in their guidance to the various agencies and that have improved the value of the summary report. The second category addresses areas needing improvement. In the third category, we have provided recommendations for future reports. The final category covers other feedback like formatting and rewording changes as well as general content questions to the authors for consideration.

The NGAC established a GDA Reporting Subcommittee to review the FGDC annual reports and compile the comments and recommendations included in this paper. In 2022, the NGAC also established a GDA Implementation Subcommittee to review the overall implementation of the GDA since 2018, assess progress toward the aspirational outcomes of the GDA, and develop recommendations for improvement. The GDA Subcommittee will work to review the GDA Implementation Subcommittee report and make recommendations in the future. The report developed by the GDA Implementation Subcommittee is available at (<https://www.fgdc.gov/ngac>).

2.0 Positive Elements / Improvements from Last Year

We received only one comment related to positive elements / improvements from last year. This could be due to changes in committee membership and/or that the summary report is at a state of refinement over requiring more sweeping improvements.

4.1 Overview

- Appreciate approach and use of common reporting templates. Makes it easier to compare activities between agencies.

3.0 Areas Needing Improvement

The NGAC reviewers noted additional points that would further improve future versions of this summary report.

1. Executive Summary

- The table at the bottom of page 2 does not have a table number or proper reference in the narrative. Please add a paragraph discussing what is contained in the table and what is important about the data. The language after the table is a redisplay of the tabular data in narrative form. Can keep one or the other but don't need both. Swap with language that tells the story of improvement over time, market the success and benefits of the improvements. Maybe highlight one or two key examples of moving from Made Progress to Meets Expectations that were especially impactful.
- The language in the second paragraph is not clear. There is a mention of 34 reports in one sentence with the following sentence stating 35 reports. 34 is equal to the number of covered agency and lead covered agency reports. Is 35 a reference to the summary report or simply a typo? If 35 is the correct reference, consider rewording to some like "The 34 reports, plus the summary report,...will be combined..."
- The second paragraph of the executive summary is a bit challenging to read as written. Consider looking at it again and thinking how to reword for clarity when discussing the various reporting requirements and reports.

3.2 Summary of Results – Covered Agency Annual Reports

- There is a missed opportunity with the presentation of information in Table 2. The narrative could talk about key changes from last year to this year, why that was the

case, and the impacts of the changes. Use this as an opportunity to highlight a couple of successes. Or could talk about the two Fails to Meets and what is going to be done to improve those.

4.2 Summary of Results – Lead Covered Agency Annual NGDA Data Theme Reports

- There is a missed opportunity with the presentation of information in Table 3. The narrative could talk about key changes from last year to this year, why that was the case, and the impacts of the changes. Use this as an opportunity to highlight a couple of successes, make a case for additional resources, etc.

5.1 Key Observations

- Regarding the sixth bullet, take the opportunity to expand. Currently it says "may impact" which could benefit from additional explanation and discussion of mitigation strategies or remedies depending on the nature of the impact.

4.0 Recommendations for Future Reports

NGAC's confidence in the FGDC's intent to improve the Summary Report based on changes implemented this year encouraged us to make recommendations for the future reports.

1. Executive Summary

- The summary report should be written with the understanding of who the primary recipient will be and the intent of what we want them to take away. The report should be evaluated based on the value it provides and enhanced to be more informative, as appropriate.
- The summary describes the reporting process. These are details that should come later. The summary should begin with statements about where the U.S. is in relation to its National Geospatial readiness, outcomes, and challenges. Brief explanations with an example or two of what led to increases and decreases from past reports should be specified in the summary to draw interest in the report.

3.1 Overview

- In the section "Common Reporting Process" reference was made to "Four agencies highlighted achievements within their covered agency report, they are the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Transportation." Those achievements should be mentioned/highlighted in this report. Just to learn that there were achievements only begs the question "what were they" which is now left with the reader to search for that information which is not a helpful reader experience.

General Comments

- Following up on the response to prior NGAC Comments related to "understanding how and why ratings increased or decreased", please add a short description of the process reporting agencies use to determine their self-assessment ratings.

5.0 Other Comments

1. Executive Summary

- Each lead covered agency provided a self-evaluation rating for each of the 4 categories of GDA requirements. An evaluation of the percentage of total responses, across the 18 NGDA themes, shows the following results:
 - Meets Expectations: 17% (12 of 72 requirements)
 - Made Progress Toward Expectations: 83% (60 of 72 requirements)
 - Fails to Meet Expectations: 0% (0 of 72 requirements)
 - What was the 4th category?
- Looking at ways to consolidate language for readability.
 - ~~The 34 required agency annual reports also highlight the requirements of the GDA in the context of the goals and objectives of the NSDI.~~ This report summarizes the covered agencies progress and lead covered agency's NGDA Theme progress, **as detailed in the agency annual reports**, in meeting geospatial responsibilities, GDA requirements and the goals of the NSDI.

3.2 Summary of Results – Covered Agency Annual Reports

- Links are missing for DHS and DOL annual reports.

4.2 Summary of Results – Lead Covered Agency Annual Reports

- Understanding the need to streamline reporting in some areas, this area should be an exception as it provides an opportunity to describe what has been accomplished and the related realized benefits. P = Progress is merely qualitative with no actual measurement of GDA Requirements.

5.1 Key Observations

- Per the third bullet, resources necessary to coordinate, develop and meet reporting requirements should be provided to agencies and the FGDC is going to need to tell that story in order to successfully obtain needed agency resources.

5.2. Challenges and Observations

- Consider how to reduce the reporting burden while maximizing the efficacy of the reporting that is being conducted.

6. Selected References

- Don't forget to add links to first and fourth references.

General Comments

- Consider deeper levels of collaboration with industry and non-federal partners when developing new standards impacting data sharing and findability.
- Regarding the overall structure of the document, review the sequence of the content for how it can be streamlined. Reduce wording that doesn't add value and then provide additional tables, figures on the results that tell a story to the reader. Results could be summarized more in depth than the report provides and would provide transparency.

6.0 Conclusion

The NGAC acknowledges the complex and daunting coordinating effort that goes into producing both each year's agency reports, the FGDC summary report, and responding to the biennial audit. There is continued appreciation for implementation and refinement of the standard reporting process. There is significant advantage to a consistent reporting mechanism, as it resulted in organized covered agency and lead covered agency (NGDA Theme) reports.

The NGAC would like to thank the FGDC for the opportunity to review and comment on the summary report and it continues to applaud the thoroughness and completeness of the GDA reporting. The results of these individual reports will inform NGAC, Congress, and the broader geospatial community on the future of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). The NGAC plans to spend additional effort in the future to review the individual agency reports and NGDA reports in more depth and to identify additional recommendations for enhancement.

Acknowledgments:

This paper was developed by an NGAC subcommittee consisting of Chad Baker (Chair), Mark Meade (Vice Chair), Maggie Cawley, Gary Thompson, Leslie Jones, and Phil Thiel.