February X, 2021

Hon. Joseph R. Biden

President of the United States

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We are a coalition of nonprofit organizations and interested individuals devoted to good governance, government transparency, accountability, ethics, and democracy. We welcome your public commitments to building back American democracy and global leadership upon a foundation of ethics, public trust, open government data[1], and scientific integrity. Recommitting to the "highest standards of transparency"[2] in revitalizing the national security and foreign policy institutions of the United States is a necessary but insufficient step in rebuilding public trust in a government of, by, and for the people.

We are eager to hear more about the Biden administration's plans for restoring transparency and accountability in the United States government and reclaiming global leadership on democracy and human rights during these first 100 days. Resetting the default to openness and good governance is critical and sets both the bar for officials and the tone from the top for the four years ahead.

We hope you will respond to our questions publicly, as soon as possible, informing both the American people and the world about how you will be approaching rebuilding public trust in our federal government, including its statements, statistics, and the scientific rigor underpinning its policies. Your vocal commitment to "truth and transparency"[3] are welcome, but it would be useful to learn more about specific, concrete commitments in policy, programs, and personnel.

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[1] "Executive Order: Ensuring a data-driven response to COVID-19 and future high consequence public health threats"
https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/21/executive-order-ensuring-a-data-driven-response-to-covid-19-and-future-high-consequence-public-health-threats/
[2] "Memorandum on Revitalizing America's Foreign Policy and National Security Workforce, Institutions, and Partnerships"
https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/memorandum-revitalizing-americas-foreign-policy-and-national-security-workforce-institutions-and-partnerships/
[3] Press briefing by press secretary Jen Psaki, January 20, 2021
https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/01/20/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-january-20-2021/

If Americans and the rest of the globe see you begin to build back better — in the open — upon the foundations for evidence-based policymaking[4] and open source governance[5] established during the Obama administration, our economy and society will recover faster from the pandemic and associated economic, social, and civic emergencies that characterized American life in 2020. Historic lows in public trust in government combined with "truth decay"[6] has raised the stakes for the Biden administration moving swiftly to take bold actions on good governance, now.

We believe that public answers to the following questions would form a necessary but insufficient set of commitments that would begin to build the good faith between our organizations and staff that was so grievously broken during the failed public consultations on open government over the past four years. Ideally, these answers will be narrated on a rebooted White House blog running on the WordPress installation built during the transition and shared through social media and discussed in public press briefings and town halls.

White House transparency

1. Will you bring back whitehouse.gov/open, with a blog, links to national actions plans, Challenge.gov, open data sets, petitions, and more? (Many /open pages across the US government still link to it, as you can see at FCC.gov/open, but it's a 404.)

2. When and how will this White House begin posting visitor logs again? Will you post them as open data at open.whitehouse.gov, as before? Will you post lists of the people entering the White House virtually for meetings with officials on Zoom, Meet, Teams, & other platforms, including agendas?

3. Will the administration post all executive branch ethics waivers, authorizations, approvals, certifications, pledges, and other legally operative ethics documents (excluding individual advice) in a centralized database on the Office of Government Ethics' website, and redirect Ethics.gov to it?

4. Will the White House support bills that codify visitor log disclosure online for the administration in Congress? What about for federal agencies?

5. Will you post press pool reports[7] and daily guidance that goes to the press on WhiteHouse.gov for public consumption, including schedules?

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[4] President Obama's executive order on open data, *Slate*, https://slate.com/technology/2013/05/open-data-executive-order-is-the-best-thing-obamas-done-this-month.html
[5] "The People's Code," WhiteHouse.gov, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/08/08/peoples-code
[6] President Obama, 60 Minutes, November 2020, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/barack-obama-60-minutes-interview-trump/
[7] White House public pool reports, https://www.whitehousepool.report

6. [Accessibility](#) was part of WhiteHouse.gov[8] at launch. Will the White House annotate all images on social media and always link to plaintext versions of statements, orders, or other official documents from its updates on Twitter, Facebook, or other platforms?

7. Will you revisit a [rulemaking on how the Americans with Disabilities Act applies to websites](#)[9] and social media run by state and local governments, or by public accommodations?

8. Will you bring back and build upon White House e-petitions, a [flagship commitment to the Open Government Partnership](#)[10] initiated by President Obama?

9. Will you and/or other officials host a weekly online Q&A with the public on social media using synchronous video platforms like YouTube, Facebook Live, Periscope, Meet, Teams, or Zoom? Will you choose platforms that allow Americans to vote up the questions they'd like to have answered, as President Obama once did with Google Moderator and YouTube, or Reddit – and commit to answer the most popular questions? Would you consider adding a [public chair in press briefings](#)[11]?

10. Will the White House host another [National Day of Civic Hacking](#)[12]? What about an annual science fair?

United States government transparency

11. Who will lead the open government portfolio for the Biden administration? Will there be a White House ethics, transparency, or accountability "czar" in the Office of Management and Budget or the Cabinet? Will a senior White House official have open government as their primary portfolio?

12. Will the Biden administration restart agency open government action plans again, as mandated under the Open Government Directive, and [refresh agency.gov/open](#)

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[8] [WhiteHouse.gov/accessibility](#)

[9] "Withdrawal of rulemakings on ADA by Department of Justice," Federal Register, December 2017 https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/12/26/2017-27510/nondiscrimination-on-the-basis-of-disability-notice-of-withdrawal-of-four-previously-announced

[10] USA.gov open government, USA.gov, https://open.usa.gov

[11] "We the People need a Public Chair to ask the White House public questions and poes petitions," *E Pluribus Unum,* https://e-pluribusunum.org/2021/01/26/in-2021-we-the-people-need-a-public-chair-to-ask-the-white-house-public-questions-and-pose-petitions/

[12] "Open Data and Innovation: National Day of Civic Hacking" WhiteHouse.gov, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/06/03/open-data-and-innovation-national-day-civic-hacking-2016

pages[13]?

13. Will the monthly interagency open government meetings start up again? Will the White House restore the public Google Group[14] for discussion?

14. How will this administration approach using technology for transparency, accountability, and ethics to rebuild public trust in government and public health information?

15. Who will be the fifth U.S. Chief Technology Officer and the next U.S. Chief Information Officer? Will there be a U.S. Chief Data Officer or Chief Data Scientist again?

16. In January 2009, President Obama issued a memorandum on transparency on Day 1. Can we expect a new government transparency memorandum, especially on the Freedom of Information, in the near future? Will there be a memorandum on proactive disclosure? Will there be a refreshed executive order on open government?

17. How will President Biden, the office of the U.S. Attorney General, and the Office of Information Policy harmonize the Open Government Data Act[15] with FOIA administration and proactive disclosure?

18. How will the Biden administration build upon the federal open source software policy and Code.gov[16]?

19. How will the Biden approach algorithmic transparency, accountability, and auditability for federal digital services to address potential bias or inequities in service delivery or outcomes?

20. Will the United States publish an inventory of public sector algorithms used by federal agencies to make public policy decisions? Will it publish the source code of these algorithms? Will it audit public sector algorithms for biases, and publish impact statements regarding existing or new algorithms before they are deployed?

21. Will the administration support a federal shield law for acts of journalism?

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[13] "How federal agencies can make better /open government webpages," *E Pluribus Unum*, https://e-pluribusunum.org/2019/08/26/how-federal-agencies-can-make-better-open-government-webpages/

[14] Dead link: https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/us-open-government

[15] Title II of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, Public Law 115-435, https://www.data.gov/open-gov/

[16] "Open Source Government Endures," *Sunlight Foundation*, https://sunlightfoundation.com/2017/06/05/open-source-government-endures/

22. Will the Biden administration commit to never prosecute journalists using the Espionage Act?

23. Will the Biden administration fill all of the [open inspectors general positions](#)[17] at agencies by the end of 2021? How will it work to ensure they are free from political control?

24. How will the Biden administration approach reclaiming American leadership in open government and democracy globally?

25. What specific steps will the Biden administration take to support and defend whistleblowers and whistleblowing?

Leaders from the undersigned organizations would be happy to meet with you to discuss your administration's strategy for restoring good governance and using civic technologies to strengthen our democracy and that of other nations.

As you wrote in your February 4 [memorandum](#)[18], "in a democracy, the public deserves as much transparency as possible regarding the work of our national security institutions." We are eager to hear more about your proposal for a "Summit for Democracy"[19] and welcome the opportunity to co-create an event and a series of associated public commitments and actions to restore open government and democracy at home and abroad.

The recommendations to restore accountable government[20] that many of us collaborated upon may be a useful set of concrete policy initiatives and programs that your administration could draw upon as it rebuilds good governance in agencies.

Thank you for your continued service, attention to these issues, and dedication to strengthening the state of our union.

Best regards,

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Association of Research Libraries

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[17] IG Vacancies, Oversight.gov, https://www.oversight.gov/ig-vacancies
[18] "Memorandum: Revitalizing America's foreign policy and national security workforce institutions and partnerships,"
https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/memorandum-revitalizing-americas-foreign-policy-and-national-security-workforce-institutions-and-partnerships/
[19]"Why American Must Lead Again," Joe Biden, *Foreign Affairs*
https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again
[20]Accountability 2021, https://www.accountability2021.org

Campaign Legal Center
Center for Open Data Enterprise
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Demand Progress
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
GovTrack.us
Open The Government
National Security Archive
National Security Counselors
The National Freedom of Information Coalition (NFOIC)
Project On Government Oversight (POGO)
Public Citizen
Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)
TechFreedom

Walter M. Shaub, Jr., former director, U.S. Office of Government Ethics

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Hon. Kamala Harris, Vice President of the United States
White House Chief of Staff Ronald Klain
White House Communications Director Katherine Bedingfield
White House Press Secretary Jennifer Psaki