

February 05, 2018

The Honorable Trey Gowdy, Chairman  
The Honorable Elijah Cummings, Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gowdy and Ranking Member Cummings:

We, the undersigned organizations, believe that federal spending data should be open and accessible to taxpayers and the public, free of charge or licensing restrictions. We are pleased to see that the *Grant Efficiency and Agreements Transparency Act (GREAT) Act* (H.R. 4887), as introduced, requires the federal government to adopt a nonproprietary identification code for all recipients of federal grants and other awards.

The government currently uses a proprietary identification code for grantees and contractors. As a result, the one vendor which owns this proprietary identifier holds a monopoly over federal grant spending data. This hampers public access to public information: taxpayers cannot download a complete copy of all federal grant spending data without paying royalties. The GREAT Act, as introduced, would open up such data and make it freely-available to taxpayers and the public. This would be a long-overdue change that will serve the public interest and help the United States to regain leadership in democratic disclosures.

For years, members of the open government transparency community and tech industry groups, [such as ACT-IAC](#), have highlighted how adopting nonproprietary identifiers removes "the barriers of entry for data consumers, regardless of their type (e.g., government, commercial, non-profit, citizen, etc.) to access, analyze, collaborate, reuse, or redistribute data as needed."

For instance, with a truly open and license-free identifier, the public will be able to download federal spending datasets from [USAspending.gov](#) in bulk to conduct analysis with other publicly available datasets. Through such analysis, members of the public, press, Congress, and watchdogs will be able to better address persistent issues.

More transparency will lead to many stakeholders being able stop improper payments and more readily identify fraud and abuse in federal programs. Ultimately, an open identifier for these entities will enable our government to measure program performance better and make smarter decisions about funding allocations and improved oversight using taxpayer dollars.

We urge the members of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee to oppose any amendment to the GREAT Act which would remove or weaken the bill's mandate for the government to adopt a new, nonproprietary method of identifying grantees. Such an

amendment would work against the interests of transparency, fair competition, and enhanced public access to public information.

Sincerely yours,

American Library Association (ALA)  
Campaign for Liberty  
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)  
Coalition to Reduce Spending  
Data Coalition  
DownsizeDC.org  
Demand Progress Action  
Essential Information  
Government Information Watch  
Project on Government Oversight  
Open the Government  
R Street Institute  
Senior Executives Association (SEA)  
Sunlight Foundation