

Maturing Data Processes at a Decentralized Federal Organization



The Challenge

A large government agency sought EK's help in addressing significant data management challenges they were facing. The agency had a decentralized organizational structure and a complex technical ecosystem, which created unique challenges for remote employees in finding, accessing, and sharing critical data at the time of need. These challenges resulted in the agency experiencing difficulty in addressing critical operational needs, such as:

- Quickly collecting data points and information requested by legislators and appropriators in Congress;
- Providing data-backed evidence to support budget justifications for agency programs, generating insight for executives to enable data-driven decisions;
- Demonstrating operational compliance with various regulations; and
- Collaborating with other agencies at the state and local levels in complementary initiatives.

The agency enlisted EK to develop a data management strategy with the goal of standardizing data practices, increasing data accessibility, fostering cross-team collaboration, and making valuable information accessible for reuse across the organization. The goal at the organization was to have a fully implemented set of prioritized data management initiatives, anchored in a comprehensive Data Management Maturity and Modernization Strategy and Roadmap, which would lay the foundations to build advanced cloud data analytics programs in the future.



The Solution

EK worked with the agency's data office to develop a strategy to collect, connect, and distribute data. Focused on helping the agency improve data capture, quality, usage, and lineage, EK collaborated with over 15 executives and engaged with stakeholders such as project coordinators, system owners, and everyday users to collect feedback and align data management strategies with specific use cases and the agency's strategic initiatives.

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Key activities that informed our resulting recommendations included:

- Providing a strategic and measurable assessment of the agency's current data processes, using EK's Data Maturity Benchmark to establish a baseline for improvement.
- Reviewing a sampling of over 100 organizational memos, policies, and manuals to ensure solutions were in accordance with industry standards and regulatory mandates.
- Executing and designing a collaborative, custom-built Organizational Data Needs Assessment Survey informed by stakeholder and organizational objectives; and achieving target demographic participation through the development and implementation of a strategic Communications Plan.
- Conducting 8+ comprehensive software system capability assessments evaluating the organization's data and metadata landscape to identify strengths, challenges, and gaps within existing metadata management practices and tools.
- Performing a gap analysis to identify areas of alignment between existing tools and business needs.
- Developing a reusable Tool Evaluation Matrix to evaluate data tools against the agency's specific functional, operational, and business needs.
- Engaging over 70 people across 23 interviews and focus groups with diverse business units to gather crucial perspectives to inform long-term recommendations, goals, and objectives.
- Facilitating townhalls and workshops to garner executive and organizational buy-in.
- Hosting working group meetings to foster collaboration and alignment across different business areas, regions, and staff offices.



The EK Difference

EK developed a comprehensive understanding of the agency's needs through a mix of customized discovery activities and stakeholder engagement. By leveraging EK's proprietary Data Maturity Benchmark, deep knowledge of industry best practices, and a collaborative approach with key agency stakeholders, EK delivered a tailored solution that provided the agency with a clear understanding of existing system capabilities, a list of similar tools and their features that could be procured in the future, and actionable recommendations to optimize its tool investment strategy. These efforts ultimately enable the agency to make strategic, informed decisions to enhance efficiency, data accessibility, and long-term operational success.

EK's extensive experience in developing data management strategies and solutions resulted in recommendations that were both data-driven and aligned with the agency's existing processes and available resources. With EK's support, the agency now has practical, scalable approaches to enhance and modernize their data management practices through improved access and visibility across resources.

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The Results

EK ultimately provided this federal agency with actionable recommendations, ranging from people-oriented incentives to technical investments, to improve their data management processes. EK helped the organization develop quantifiable metrics to enhance data accessibility, quality assurance, and utilization. Where employees previously faced challenges related to a decentralized organization, such as navigating multiple data catalogs, EK enabled the organization to create a more cohesive and user-friendly data environment by establishing standardized metrics for completeness, quality control, and data management. This reduced frustration and inefficiencies in finding and reusing critical datasets across the organization.

EK's adaptable Tool Evaluation Matrix allows the agency to effectively analyze future investment considerations in metadata management, data catalog, and data repository systems. Additionally, EK's efforts have provided the organization with action-oriented approaches to address critical gaps to advance their data management initiatives. These foundations will accelerate the agency's ability to scale their data management processes and explore advanced data solutions, such as metric dashboarding, implementation of an enterprise-wide inventory or data catalog, and advanced architecture and discoverability capabilities. Consequently, the improvements made based on these foundations will empower personnel to efficiently locate, share, and utilize existing data, reducing duplication and fostering a more collaborative and data-driven culture. All of these improvements will assist the agency in building foundational elements of a cloud data analytics program.

Enterprise Knowledge (EK) is a services firm that integrates Knowledge Management, Information Management, Information Technology, and Agile Approaches to deliver comprehensive solutions. Our mission is to form true partnerships with our clients, listening and collaborating to create tailored, practical, and results-oriented solutions that enable them to thrive and adapt to changing needs.

Our core services include strategy, design, and development of Knowledge and Information Management systems, with proven approaches for Data and Information Management, Knowledge Graph Implementation in support of NLP, ML, and AI initiatives, Taxonomy Design, Project Strategy and Road Mapping, Brand and Content Strategy, Change Management and Communication, and Agile Transformation and Facilitation. At the heart of these services, we always focus on working alongside our clients to understand their needs, ensuring we can provide practical and achievable solutions on an iterative, ongoing basis.