



5 tips for deploying insightful reports in the federal government

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Your budget is shrinking. Your spending is scrutinized. But the problems you are solving are more complex and urgent than ever before. Is there any relief in sight?

“Get Me Answers – Now”

From Cabinet secretaries and five-star generals to division chiefs and experts in the field, the expectation for insight to make real-time decisions is increasingly the norm, not an exception. This demand goes beyond the four walls of your agency. Joe Citizen, now more than any time in history, also has a pressing desire for information about his Government.

This hunger for actionable insight only increases the pressure to provide useful analytics fast. Can you offer this speed?

Data, Data Everywhere

The good news: there’s more information than ever before to drive decisions.

The bad news: there’s more information than ever before to drive decisions.

The vast amount of data created every day that government agencies take into account is mind boggling. Effectively analyzing this data requires the ability to connect into myriad sources of data, mix and match the pieces that relate to the question at hand and pull out relevant insight.

Absorbing all this data is daunting, but imperative. Can you consider it all?

Penny Pinching

Every federal agency has been touched by the recession. There is significant pressure to find lean ways to accomplish big goals. But just because your spending is under a magnifying glass doesn’t mean the world slows down or the need to answer critical questions diminishes. In fact, urgency to get to the heart of a problem and come up with insightful answers accelerates as more challenges emerge.

Investing in a new solution would have to be affordable. Can you find a cost-effective approach?

The answer to all of these questions is “Yes.”

Welcome to next-generation business intelligence

Corporate America has faced many similar challenges. To answer them they’ve turned to a new way of thinking about business intelligence and analytics that is changing what is possible for their organizations.

Fast time to insight, ease of use and visual analytics are core tenets of next-generation business intelligence. The ability to query every data source and work with huge volumes of data in a scalable, secure manner are mandatory. Visualizing data and collaborating with dashboards in real time can fundamentally alter how decisions are made.

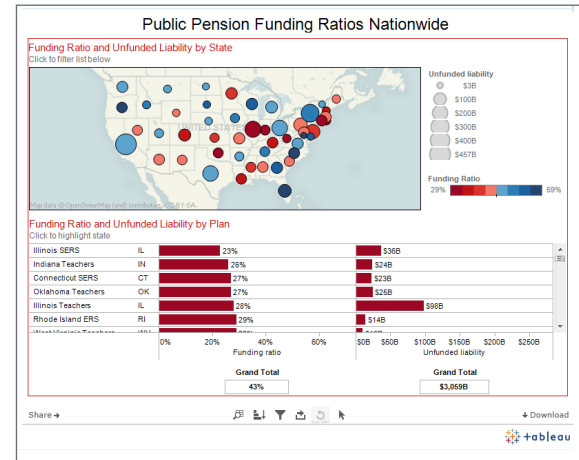


Figure 1: Interactive dashboards

Financial repercussions are often at the heart of strategic decisions. This dashboard provides a way to let individuals see and explore the impact of a potential strategic scenario. Click on different states to dig into one that matters to you.

The value to individuals and organizations is tremendous. Comments like, “I’ve learned more about my business in five minutes than I have in five years,” “I’ve produced in two hours what a team couldn’t create in the last year,” and “we’ve been able to re-deploy three full-time equivalents because of the time we’ve saved with this new approach” are becoming routine from corporate adopters of next-generation business intelligence.

Government agencies can benefit in these ways too. Your corporate counterparts have five tips to help you get the same level of impact from your data by taking a next-generation approach.

1 See it to believe it

Visualizing data is one of the biggest expectations you must have from your reports. Seeing your data makes trends, outliers and insights pop in ways that static reports and out-of-date dashboards can't address. Whether you visualize your data on a map, a chart or a dashboard combining all of these things, the result is a fundamentally better level of insight about why's, what's and how's. This is even more important in an environment where the amount of data is increasing every day.

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Figure 2: Powerful visual cues

A human's sense of sight accounts for 70% of sense receptors which makes visualizing data especially impactful. How easy is it to count the number of "9"s in the top diagram? On the bottom, this task is greatly simplified by showing the same "9"s in red.

One impact of seeing your data in a meaningful way is the ability to ask follow-up questions about what you see, resulting in a cycle of analysis that yields results pre-canned reports never can. Traditionally, the experience of digging deeper is characterized by requests back to an analyst or IT team that drives a lengthy response process, often resulting in yet another wave of inquiries. Next-generation business intelligence and analytics changes all that and leads us to tip number two.

2 Get your hands dirty

Insist on interacting directly with your data. Not only will this give you answers to your probing questions immediately, it will lead to better answers. This ability to interact with information is a core piece of next-generation business intelligence. It transforms decision makers at all levels from relying on "years of experience" and "gut instinct" to making fact-based decisions.

The effects of interacting directly with data are already being felt in many corners of federal agencies. Experts working in the field who used to sift through half-inch thick documents to size-up a situation now engage directly with a dashboard. With a few clicks, what used to be a daunting prospect now becomes a fast, easy set of definitive answers.

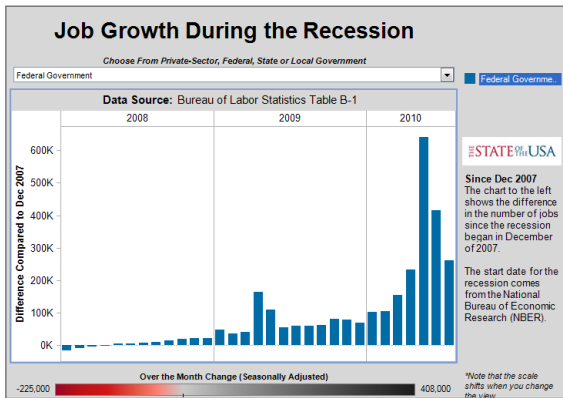
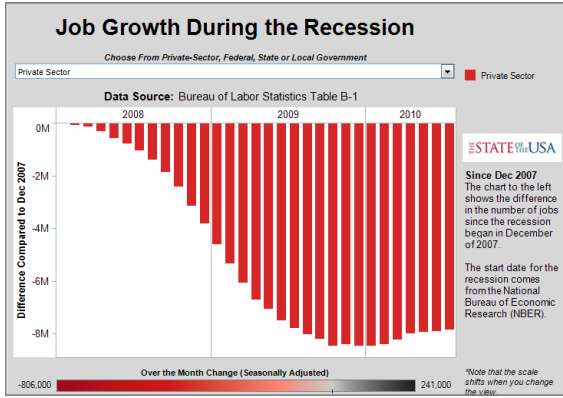


Figure 3: Impactful views of data

The ability to consider multiple views of data provide a comprehensive picture. Compare these two views of the same dashboard showing job growth trends for Private Sector (red) and Federal Government (blue). Explore other segments like State and Local governments as well.

3 Share with others

It's one thing to be able to see and interact with data on your desktop. But the potential impact is tremendous when you can share your analysis – securely, easily and consistently – with authorized stakeholders. Whether a coworker, supervisor or someone in another department or agency, providing access to others to interact with the same dashboard is changing the way teams evaluate options and drive decisions.

Security concerns when sharing data is top of mind in corporate America as well as within federal government agencies. The ability to provide controlled access on a

user and data level is critical. Using an approach that respects your existing data security permissions and makes the security and sharing easy and secure significantly extends the value of dashboards. With this confidence comes the ability to leverage the power of your analysis quickly and efficiently across the need-to-know constituents of a given data set.

3a When appropriate, share with Joe Citizen too

On the other end of the spectrum, emphasis on transparency of information to citizens is growing in a similar way to shareholders' expectations from corporations. Constituents are hungry to know how tax dollars are spent and the benefits they receive. Providing public-facing information in easy-to-use, interactive tools offers a valuable way for individual citizens to personalize their questions and find more meaningful, relevant insights than otherwise possible.

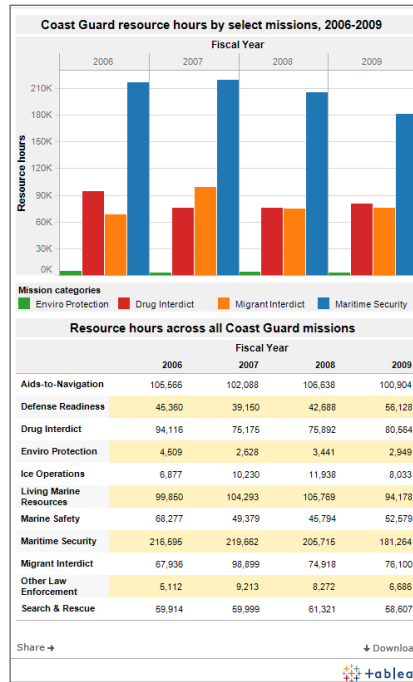


Figure 3: Drill into details

Drilling down into specific scenarios with data gives useful perspective. For example, in this visualization of how the U.S. Coast Guard utilizes its force the emphasis on security is clear. Explore more about how they deploy their resources.

4 Consider all relevant data

Don't limit yourself to data from a single source or look at one set of data at a time. The real world is not perfect which means that all the data you're looking to analyze is rarely in one place. Part of the power of next-generation business intelligence comes from the ability to consider diverse types of data, blend it together and manage large volumes as needed. The impact of tapping into this breadth is to identify patterns and insights that might not otherwise be detected.

Performance of your analytics, however, shouldn't suffer as a result of considering many sources or large volumes of data. The ability to analyze data stores where they reside instead of a requirement to bring data sources into a business intelligence system is one more dimension of next-generation business intelligence corporate America is coming to expect. This approach accelerates the ability to dig into data and find answers quickly as well as easily connecting for updated information over time.

5 Do this WITHOUT Congress

Realizing the value of next-generation business intelligence in the world of tight budgets is not a pipe dream. In fact, the design of next-generation business intelligence and analytics provides an inherently different approach that provides fast time to value. Ease of use minimizes training costs and increases adoption. Fast deployment nearly eliminates traditional implementation burdens. Proven technology used by thousands of companies increases reliability. Ability to share provides access to huge communities.

The secret is out

Next-generation business intelligence can't make budget pressures magically disappear or slow down pressure for immediate answers to challenging questions. The good news is, it doesn't have to. Instead, this approach to analytics will help you thrive in your

current environment, empowering analysts and decision makers at all levels to quickly derive insight to decisions in ways you've never thought possible.

About Tableau

Tableau Software helps people see and understand data. Ranked by Gartner in 2011 as the world's fastest growing business intelligence company, Tableau helps individuals quickly and easily analyze, visualize and share information. With more than 6,500 customers worldwide of all sizes and across industries, Tableau is used by individuals throughout an organization, in an office and on-the-go. See the impact Tableau can have on your data by downloading the free trial at www.tableausoftware.com/trial.

About the author

Malia creates content that showcases the value of Tableau. What she loves most is meeting customers who are excited to share the amazing ways they use Tableau and the impact it's had. Malia has over 15 years of marketing and strategy experience in the technology industry. At IBM, she led product marketing for the data integration, data quality, and master data management products as well as developed growth plans for emerging market countries. Prior to IBM, Malia worked in venture capital, consulting, and investment banking where she evaluated and developed business plans, marketing strategies, and financing scenarios. Malia earned her M.B.A. at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and her B.A. at Wellesley College. @maliahardin