

# URISA Members' take on FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan

## *Response Summary*

URISA conducted an online survey of its members from August 8, 2013 to August 15, 2013 and received 49 responses. Of the 49 respondents, ninety percent had heard of the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) and ninety-two percent had heard of the the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI); but only half had reviewed the Strategic Plan at the time of the survey. Most of the respondents believe URISA should respond to the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan.

When asked if they disagreed with anything in the Strategic Plan, the overwhelming response (97%) was no. Many respondents believe the plan is very high level, is too vague and verbose, and lacks objectives for implementation.

When asked if anything was left out of the Strategic Plan, the majority response was also no. But as mentioned in the previous response, the need for implementation details was repeatedly stressed along with identifying funding sources (requirements to comply with regulations) and methods for collaborating with local, state and other federal organizations.

Overall, when asked what URISA's response should be, the majority indicated that URISA should support the plan (63%).

Many respondents are concerned with the lack of implementation strategies (details) and funding sources present in the Strategic Plan. Many want answers on how the NSDI will interface with regional, state, and local governmental agencies as well as open source platforms. Addressing these issues will likely lead to greater support for the Strategic Plan from URISA members.

In the next section, key questions from the survey are presented with response summaries, key themes (noted in all caps), and each verbatim response.

**QUESTION 4: Do you disagree with the wording of anything in the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan?**

Blank/NA: 29

No: 9

Additional Responses: 11

SUMMARY: Most respondents said that the document describes important goals well and they did not disagree with wording. Several respondents raised concern that the plan does not describe how the goals will be achieved and is written too broadly for it to be useful. Many asked for implementation details and specific strategies for achieving goals and objectives. Additional concerns included a focus on serving needs of the federal government rather than state and local levels, proprietary data, and privacy.

*Answer 1:* NO, FEDERAL EMPHASIS

“The Strategic Plan does a great job at describing cost savings across the NSDI community. However, it does seem to describe a system where the partners are doing the heavy lifting, by providing the high quality data from the local and regional level. The Strategic Plan also describes a system that is developed to mainly serve the needs of the Federal Government, therefore, creating a platform that is beyond the resources of small, local and regional government geospatial partners.”

*Answer 2:* NO

“In general I think this covers the key/important topics and trends and defines an important role for the FGDC in this context.”

*Answer 3:* NO, IMPLEMENTATION

“The goals of the plan are well stated and certainly desirable. However, the implementation has what has always been lacking.”

*Answer 4:* NO, IMPLEMENTATION, VERBOSE, HIGH LEVEL

“Not really. The plan is so high level and the details are generally left out so it is difficult to find anything wrong with it.

One thing that reinforces this view, there is a lot written in there about goals and objectives but very little about the actual implementation which is really the difficult part.”

*Answer 5:* NO, IMPLEMENTATION, COMMUNICATION, COORDINATION

“I agree with the concept of the plan but plans such as these have been, through a great deal of effort, been created in the past and upon their completion they were placed in a draw and forgotten. I truly do hope that we will see this plan implemented. That being said it is easy to identify goals in this plan that were goals in previous plans but were found to be impossible to implement. An example of this is the reduction of duplication of effort or the need for multiagency

acquisition vehicles. Reduction in duplication was nearly impossible because one agency didn't trust the accuracy or timeliness of the data developed by another agency so they recreated the data at great cost to each agency. If this is to work there must be a process control procedures in place that each agency agrees to thus ensure that each agency feels comfortable in using data created by the other. We all know the adage "Create once, use many times". Also, multiagency acquisition vehicles are a great concept but federal rules and regulations, especially interagency rules and regulations, make this vehicle creation difficult. Only very high level executive buy-in to the creation of these vehicle will allow this to occur. Additionally, the need for continuous communications about projects and requirements would be needed to coordinate these purchases. In that there would be a need to coordinate like projects to ensure buy-in at specific times as each agency has its own priorities at any given moment and tight budgets mean that money will only go toward projects that are a priority for each agency.

I agree with this plan far more then I disagree but it lack teeth as many of these federal plans do. No motivation, no action."

*Answer 6:* NO, VERBOSE

"That is a ton of words to describe a basic need for spatially accurate and currently maintained GIS layers and data.

How about a much simpler summary upfront like "When was the last time you used your GPS mapping application on your smart phone or tablet?" Well if you want to get to where you want then we need to follow the following steps detailed in the plan."

*Answer 7:* NO

"No heartburn, other than to cease using "critical" as a qualifier (as there are 'critical' data, think HSIP vs data that are critical to government operations). Some suggested comments (see mark-ups emailed to below address)." [NOTE: No e-mail was received and participant did not provide their e-mail for further contact.]

*Answer 8:* NO, HIGH LEVEL

"No, seems to be a standard, very broad, high level document."

*Answer 9:*

"Well, it's not so much the wording of what's included as what is not said."

*Answer 10:*

"I don't think we should endorse anything that will make it any easier for the federal government to spy on American citizens."

*Answer 11:*

"Some data funded and collected by the private sector (LiDAR for instance) has specific proprietary value to the collector and should not be assumed to be available to the public."

## **QUESTION 5: Does the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan leave anything out?**

Blank / NA: 29

No: 8 ["I think it covers its scope" / "Nothing pertaining to me." / "Nothing comes to mind." / "not sure"]

Additional Responses: 12

SUMMARY: Responses overwhelmingly focused on concerns about securing funding and engaging the state and local communities to participate. Many responses noted that more details in implementation are needed to provide a path for different levels of government to work together in a coordinated and efficient fashion. Mechanisms for greater accountability were also noted as missing, along with incentives to participate and consequences for not meeting the plan objectives. One comment expressed a concern about the implications of open data policies.

*Answer 1:* EXISTING STANDARDS (state, local, existing federal), COMPLEXITY, COLLABORATION

"What about State and Local government standards? I have found that the data structure for Federal geospatial data is overly complicated and sometimes difficult to locate. Will the FGDC/NSDI address this? All government entities should be on the same page."

*Answer 2:* IMPLEMENTATION, FUNDING, FEDERAL ROLE, REQUIREMENTS, COLLABORATION

"Funding mechanisms. While the cost-sharing approach seems to help minimize the cost for acquisition and implementation of geospatial systems, it does not address the real challenge of fund sources that remain an impediment to the development of high quality and standardized data.

The Strategic Plan does not examine the role of the Federal Government as a facilitator of the development of geospatial programs within the several states. The NSDI should propose mechanisms of funding and federal requirements that will promote and encourage the participation in the larger NSDI."

*Answer 3:* NO

"On page for the phrase "recently reported" appears. Consider changing to an actual date because if it is designed for years of implementation, "recent" won't always actually be recent."

*Answer 4:* NO, IMPLEMENTATION, VERBOSE, HIGH LEVEL

"See above note." [ABOVE NOTE: "Not really. The plan is so high level and the details are generally left out so it is difficult to find anything wrong with it. One thing that reinforces this view, there is a lot written in there about goals and objectives but very little about the actual implementation which is really the difficult part."]

*Answer 5:* IMPLEMENTATION, COLLABORATION

"Yes, it needs implementation steps to help with the challenges of enforcing standards, like focusing first on emergency response data, then expanding to local government data (big cities),

then regional and state government data. Business and consumer based data is overkill....”

*Answer 6:* FUNDING, COLLABORATION

“Local gov’t will be the best source so fund them and provide things like access to cloud based GIS and live aerial imagery to use as reference when maintaining the data the nation will use.”

*Answer 7:* IMPLEMENTATION, FUNDING

“Funding sources and/or means to enact their plans.”

*Answer 8:* IMPLEMENTATION, MOTIVATION, ACCOUNTABILITY

“I support the goals of the plan but there seem to be a shortage of measurable goals. Also other than reporting that goals have or have not been met there doesn't seem to be a consequence for not meeting these goals. In the end what motivation is there for achieving these goals. The only motivation that I can see is that nobody wants to go through creating another plan if this one isn't achieved. ”

*Answer 9:* DATA SECURITY/SHARING RESTRICTIONS

“I think the NSDI Strategic Plan could be strengthened with some basic security restrictions added to the Open Data Policy. For instance it might be wise to restrict certain data access to US Citizens under the same guidelines as votong.”

*Answer 10:* VERBOSE, COLLABORATION

“This document is long on pretty general statements and short on specifics. I recognize that to some extent that is necessary in a document of this sort from the federal government where they are trying to be all things to a lot of large agencies with very different needs. However, given that the best available data needed for the NSDI increasingly are found in state and county/municipal level SDI efforts, something more concrete on how the NSDI is going to collaborate with state-level GIS offices would be welcome. Working with state GIS offices to establishing standards for NSDI data layers would in turn provide these state offices direction they can use in coordinating data development with county/municipal government. The result will be more detailed better quality data finding its way to the national level.”

*Answer 11:* IMPLEMENTATION, COLLABORATION, INTEGRATION, EXISTING STANDARDS (state, local, existing federal)

“It seems to miss the same thing we've been missing since inception: more focus on HOW we are going to get vertical integration from municipality up through County, State, Federal. Action 1.2.1 talks about establishing agreements, but there's a lot of agencies and they're dramatically diverse in their abilities, technologies, etc.

If we get action on it, that'll be great. But I had the feeling as I read the plan that we hadn't really learned from the past as an industry and that this was more lip service than a commitment to getting the ETL in place to effectively merge and manage all this data.

I kind of feel that the cloud computing objectives were a bit hand-wavy, too. Perhaps that's because it's too new, but it sounded like "We need cloud computing, and cloud computing cloud computing, so someone should tell us how to cloud computing." Though I guess it has been largely unaddressed until now, and everyone starts somewhere. ”

*Answer 12:* IMPLEMENTATION, INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

“To me, it leaves in question how this will all be brought about. I still see a lack of coordination and cooperation just among Federal Agencies. I sense no comprehensive approach to cooperation with state and local governments either. FHWA seems to operate outside of this as well. I have yet to see any reference of the FGDC or NSDI in any FHWA plans or communications. As long as USGS is underfunded and understaffed, I don't see how this plan can be achieved.”

**QUESTION 7: What do you think should be URISA's response to the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan?**

Blank: 24

Supportive: 10

“supportive”

“URISA supports the efforts of NSDI and its partners to establish and maintain systems that promote the sharing and increased availability of geospatial knowledge.”

“We support the plan.”

“URISA, International should support the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan and offer help in any way possible or needed.”

“Support plan as a whole, encourage more teeth in enforcing standards.”

“Good support for the plan. Nice work! ”

“Support/endorsement of the draft plan.”

“Support”

“Support revision to plan.”

“positive and supportive”

Neutral/Nondescript: 4

“NA”

“I don't know. I have not had time to dig into it.”

“Better communication with the GIS community since this is the first time I have ever heard about it.”

“I think URISA should comment based on the members responses. ”

Additional Responses: 11

**SUMMARY:** URISA Members are supportive of the plan with the caveats that implementation and funding details need to be expounded along with methodology behind enforcing the plan itself. Strategies for partnering with state and local communities were again noted as needing attention. Two respondents emphasized the importance of data quality and one further described a need to better recognize the value of timely, authoritative national data derived from local sources. It was also noted that attention should be paid to complementing and integrating with

the activities in the private sector and to continuing to build with modern, agile approaches to work.

*Answer 1:*

“This plan seems to be aiming at a shelf somewhere. Most of it just covers a lot of motherhood issues. We all believe in this concept of sharing and cooperation, great metadata, and shared services across all levels. However, the real challenge is in working out the details and this report has nothing about implementation and even less about involving the other levels of government as real partners. We should call them out and say as much. ”

*Answer 2: UNSUPPORTIVE*

“In light of recent revelations of NSA and other federal agency malfeasance, URISA does not endorse the possible misuse of geographic data.”

*Answer 3: SUPPORTIVE*

“Talk to ESRI to see what can be done to provide access to cloud based software, systems and training.”

*Answer 4:*

“In two areas of increasing concern with wider and deeper access to local government data, the concept of timely, and especially AUTHORITATIVE data can't be over-emphasized. Page 3, Item two under Guiding Principles mentions this item certainly, but I'd like to see more emphasis placed somehow on managing what that means in real terms. Certification of local data isn't done daily with any audit/compliance mechanics, only at specific times. Property information is a notable example. Having multiple sources of local data accumulated/aggregated to states is happening, but distant from the real activity. Informing the end-point user as to the adequacy and timeliness of easily accessed data thru mobile/internet channels at a Federal level is also an important objective. Not sure where it fits, but more emphasis perhaps needed. Horwood's Laws “..bad data drives out good!” are still pertinent.”

*Answer 5:*

“Not necessary, since URISA members have a seat on NGAC and NGAC advises FGDC. However, those members don't always wear/bring their URISA hat to the NGAC discussions. Therefore, I think it would behoove URISA to have a voice in this .. that we support the Objectives layed out in the NSDI Strategic Plan; however, we're still unclear how the NSDI will be more effective than it has been to-date (it is still immature after 21-years). Shared Services are modern and needed, yet any service and/or application is only as good as the data that drives it and we're still lacking parcels for the nation + many of the other framework layers (as interoperable, national datasets).”

*Answer 6: SUPPORTIVE*

“See the comments in questions 4 and 5.”

[4: “I agree with the concept of the plan but plans such as these have been, through a great deal

of effort, been created in the past and upon their completion they were placed in a draw and forgotten. I truly do hope that we will see this plan implemented. That being said it is easy to identify goals in this plan that were goals in previous plans but were found to be impossible to implement. An example of this is the reduction of duplication of effort or the need for multiagency acquisition vehicles. Reduction in duplication was nearly impossible because one agency didn't trust the accuracy or timeliness of the data developed by another agency so they recreated the data at great cost to each agency. If this is to work there must be a process control procedures in place that each agency agrees to thus ensure that each agency feels comfortable in using data created by the other. We all know the adage "Create once, use many times". Also, multiagency acquisition vehicles are a great concept but federal rules and regulations, especially interagency rules and regulations, make this vehicle creation difficult. Only very high level executive buy-in to the creation of these vehicle will allow this to occur. Additionally, the need for continuous communications about projects and requirements would be needed to coordinate these purchases. In that there would be a need to coordinate like projects to ensure buy-in at specific times as each agency has its own priorities at any given moment and tight budgets mean that money will only go toward projects that are a priority for each agency.

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5: “I support the goals of the plan but there seem to be a shortage of measurable goals. Also other then reporting that goals have or have not been meet there doesn't seem to be a consequence for not meeting these goals. In the end what motivation is there for achieving these goals. The only motivation that I can see is that nobody wants to go through creating another plan if this one isn't achieved. ”]

*Answer 7:*

“The plan should be the topic of a panel presentation and discussion at the GIS-Pro conference.

With a little searching I find a statement that the review process was lengthy and inclusive (<http://geodatapolicy.wordpress.com/2013/08/06/draft-strategic-plan-for-the-national-spatial-data-inastructure/>). But I am unaware of discussion that might have taken place within URISA. Was the topic a subject of a presentation at last year's conference? To what extent has URISA been part of the process?

This questionnaire should have provided that information as background.”

*Answer 8:*

“see response to #5.”

[5: “This document is long on pretty general statements and short on specifics. I recognize that to some extent that is necessary in a document of this sort from the federal government where they are trying to be all things to a lot of large agencies with very different needs. However, given that the best available data needed for the NSDI increasingly are found in state and county/municipal level SDI efforts, something more concrete on how the NSDI is going to



collaborate with state-level GIS offices would be welcome. Working with state GIS offices to establishing standards for NSDI data layers would in turn provide these state offices direction they can use in coordinating data development with county/municipal government. The result will be more detailed better quality data finding its way to the national level.”]

*Answer 9:*

“I haven't had time to read the entire plan, but I've skimmed it. From a consumer standpoint the private sector has already built the "NSDI"...they just call it Google Maps, Google Earth, BING maps, Apple Maps. How does all of this fit in? How is the NSDI distinct and different? I think the plan addresses this based on a quick skim, but this issue needs to be dealt with head on. How to built a complementary geo-ecosystem that allows private and public geospatial assets to complement each other.”

*Answer 10: SUPPORTIVE*

“That it is a good step forward, recognizing the trends and the need to move to an agile process. In fact, it's several years late so really it's about time. And the move to using web collaboration is also...well, finally! Robust, accessible tools are a must for an agile environment.

One of many examples that just came up on my radar is the OGC GeoPackage specification (<http://cholmes.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/githubbing-the-geopackage-specification/>). The spec is on GitHub for comments. Anyone can submit suggestions and comments through a "pull request", which can be merged with the doc, revised or cancelled. The service does all the fancy work of managing documents and text, it's basically thumbs up/thumbs down for the maintainers. This provides a much larger bandwidth for changes to the people responsible, which is critical for efficient, agile processes.

We're all doing more with less (as recognized in the Strategic Plan) which means less time for these efforts. Streamlining processes is a must. Conference calls and faxing printouts of scanned printouts of Word documents must go. The commitment to web meetings and agile processes (Action 3.1.3) should be applauded. We should all be using collaborative tools for documents, data management, meetings, project management, etc. We're doing it wrong, it takes a lot of time to do things as a result and we're getting less done with more bloat.”

*Answer 11:*

“The Strategic Plan should be much more specific in its language concerning how these goals are to be acheived. Essentially, FGDC has no teeth to acheive the objectives of the plan. Without the mechanism to enforce tthe plan, it is an empty document.”

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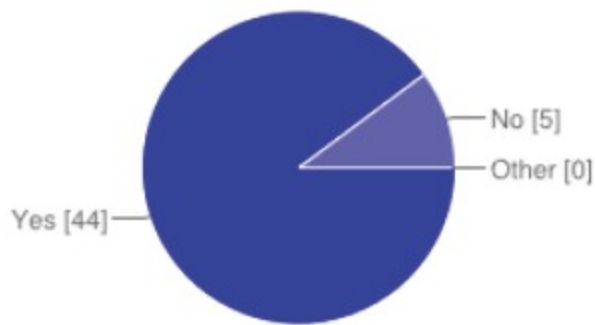
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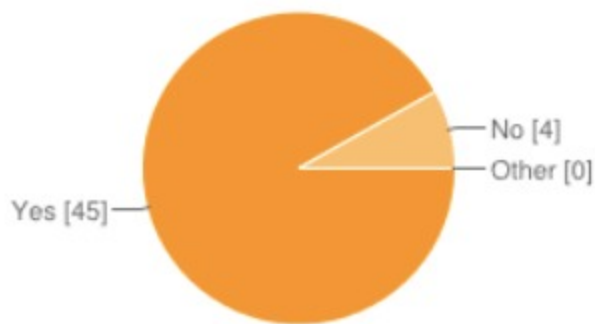
Graphics for 1, 2, 3, and 6:

### 1. Have you heard of the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC)?



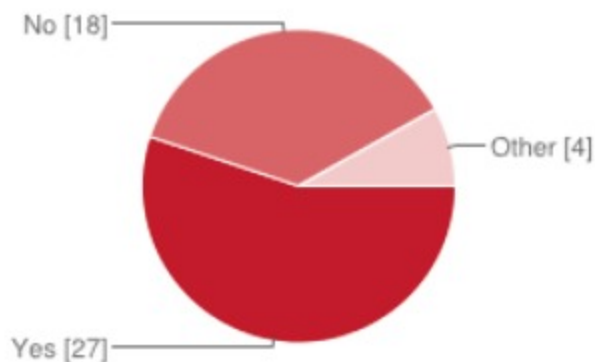
Yes	<b>44</b>	90%
No	<b>5</b>	10%
Other	<b>0</b>	0%

### 2. Have you heard of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI)?



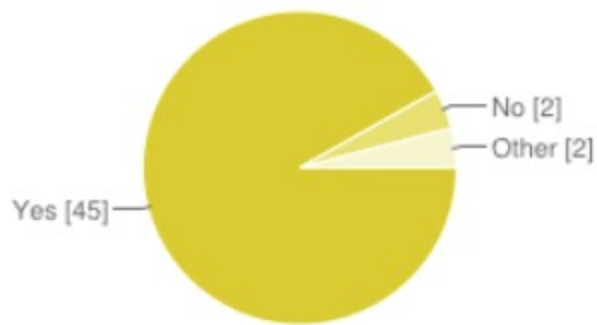
Yes	<b>45</b>	92%
No	<b>4</b>	8%
Other	<b>0</b>	0%

### 3. Have you reviewed the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan?



Yes	<b>27</b>	55%
No	<b>18</b>	37%
Other	<b>4</b>	8%

**6. Do you feel that URISA should comment on the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan?**



Yes	<b>45</b>	92%
No	<b>2</b>	4%
Other	<b>2</b>	4%

Survey itself:

## URISA's take on the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan

Please complete the survey by Thursday, August 15, 2013 in order for us to compile comments by the very near-term deadline of August 21, 2013. You can find the official FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan website here: <http://www.fgdc.gov/nsdi-plan/index.html>

\* Required

**1. Have you heard of the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC)? \***

Yes

No

Other:

**2. Have you heard of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI)? \***

Yes

No

Other:

**3. Have you reviewed the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan? \***

<http://www.fgdc.gov/nsdi-plan/draft-nsdi-strategic-plana8093public-comment-version-7-31-2013.pdf>

Yes

No

Other:

**4. Do you disagree with the wording of anything in the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan?**

**5. Does the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan leave anything out?**

**6. Do you feel that URISA should comment on the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan? \***

Yes

No

Other:

**7. What do you think should be URISA's response to the FGDC NSDI Strategic Plan?**

**8. Please provide your e-mail if you wish to discuss further.**

Please feel free to forward any mark-ups to the URISA GMI Advocacy Work Group lead, Ryan E. Bowe | [geospatialmetadata@gmail.com](mailto:geospatialmetadata@gmail.com)

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