

# Federal Computer WEEK

Strategy and business management for government leaders

## *Federal spending data not yet machine readable*

Posted by Alice Lipowicz on Jan 03, 2012 at 1:35 PM

The federal government has a long way to go to develop and publish structured data on budgets and spending, according to a new report from the conservative Cato Institute.

“Structured data doesn’t really exist yet in the area of budgeting, appropriating, and spending,” Jim Harper, director of information policy studies at the think tank, wrote in a recent **blog entry**. “The one bright spot is the president’s annual budget submission, which includes some information in a workable structure, but there is much room for improvement even there.”

Harper considered machine-discoverability and machine-readability to be key elements in transparency through the use of structured data.

The data also has to be authoritative and released in a consistent manner.

“If you want the kind of breakthrough in transparency for government data that the Web was for communications, you want the data structured right,” Harper wrote.

Based on his indicators of machine-readability and other elements, Harper gave federal agencies, bureaus and programs an “incomplete” grade on transparency.

“Believe it or not, there is no federal government ‘organization chart’ that is published in a way amenable to computer processing,” Harper wrote.

He gave the White House a “B+” grade for transparency of its annual budget submission to Congress. The next highest grade was a “C+” for the federal government overall for transparency of obligations.