THE BEYOND SERIES | ABSTRACT | SEPTEMBER 2026

Beyond Transparency

The Next Generation of Open Government in the Age of AI

A document dump is not transparency, and an AI summary is not accountability.

Government can publish every record associated with a major decision and still leave citizens unable to explain what is being decided, what evidence matters, who holds authority, which risks remain and whether promises were kept. The next generation of open government must make the decision itself inspectable.

FROM ACCESS TO INSPECTABILITY

When information is public but fragmented, technical or disconnected from the decision citizens are trying to understand, disclosure alone is insufficient. The public needs a traceable path from explanation to evidence and from promise to performance.

SIX CIVIC CAPABILITIES

KNOW	UNDERSTAND	TRACE	CHALLENGE	PARTICIPATE
Find the authoritative record and understand what decision is before the public.	Receive accurate explanations proportionate to the decision's complexity.	Connect claims, evidence, alternatives, authority and changes across the lifecycle.	Test assumptions and question explanations without losing connection to the record.	Enter the process at a point where public judgment can still matter.

THE OPEN GOVERNMENT ARCHITECTURE

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE LAYER
Connect records across institutions without replacing authoritative systems.

DECISION PAGE
Provide one public starting point with layered explanations and direct evidence links.

SHOW ME TEST
Require government to show cost, risk, authority, alternatives, uncertainty, commitments and performance.

EXECUTIVE IMPLICATION

AI OPPORTUNITY
Lower the cost of explanation and help citizens navigate complex evidence.

AI GUARDRAIL
Generated explanation must never become a synthetic substitute for records, accountable judgment or human authority.

BOUNDARY AND USE

This is a proposed framework with a deliberately narrow claim: AI may improve inspectability when explanations remain linked to evidence and responsibility remains human and visible.

THE GOVERNING IDEA

Open records expose information. Open government exposes the logic, authority and performance of the decision.

OFFICIAL MANUSCRIPT
David M. Smitherman, Beyond Transparency: The Next Generation of Open Government in the Age of AI. The Beyond Series, Bear Strategies, 2026.

CONTINUE THE WORK
Request the full manuscript or discuss commissioned white papers, opinion pieces, research and publishing collaborations, executive education, or speaking engagements: david@bearstratusa.com.